



In front, from left: G Makhawulu (President CRADORA), Di Bishop, M Goniwe (organizing secretary, CRADORA), S Mkanto, Molly Blackburn

On trial at Cradock

The rents and schools protests in Cradock, where the unrest continues and where 4 500 black schoolchildren are still out of school, were recorded in *Sash*, vol 27 no 2, August 1984.

Arising out of their work among the residents of the Cradock township, Ilingelihle, our members MOLLY BLACKBURN and DI BISHOP (both also PFP MPCs) were charged with illegally entering the township. They were found guilty, cautioned and discharged.

BRIAN BISHOP writes about the trial

Background

Security police activity in the Eastern Cape is notorious, so that events that might cool down elsewhere often develop into a cycle of anger.

Ilingelihle outside Cradock is a neglected township and, following the announcement of a rent increase, the Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA) was

formed in September 1983. It is now a UDF affiliate.

The Chairman of Cradock was Matthew Goniwe, acting principal of the local high school and an outstanding mathematics and science teacher. Security police warned him that involvement would 'have consequences.' In November 1983 he was told that he was transferred to Graaff Reinet; then in January 1984 he was fired when he refused to accept the transfer. When his application for

re-instatement was refused his pupils walked out of school and soon the boycott spread to all the Cradock schools. Molly and Di believe the police gravely exacerbated the situation and the township has been in turmoil ever since.

In March 1984 Matthew Goniwe, together with Mbulelo Goniwe, Fort Calata and Madoda Jacobs were detained under section 28 of the Internal Security Act and variously transferred to prisons in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The Goniwe cousins and Fort Calata spent three months in detention — Madoda Jacobs was charged with public violence and acquitted.

Section 28 detainees can be visited if a permit is granted and as public representatives Molly and Di visited Mr Goniwe at Pollsmoor Prison and also attended some of the trials arising out of the Cradock disturbances. They became more and more aware of the police harassment of the community.

Like many other political trials those concerning Cradock residents were held far away, often in Somerset East 104 km from Cradock. Molly and Di attended a trial there on November 19 and afterwards drove Mr Goniwe and two friends home to Ilingelihle.

In Somerset East, and when they stopped for petrol in Cookhouse, they realised that they were being followed by three security policemen. As they approached Cradock they followed the sign-posted road to Ilingelihle, with no signs denying entrance.

They dropped Mr Goniwe at his house and were promptly arrested by the security policemen they had seen in Somerset East.

When Molly and Di arrived in Cradock for their trial on the morning of December 19 they found the Court surrounded by about 20 members of the Riot Police (the so-called Reaction Unit). About six members of the Security Police sat in the white portion of the public gallery. There was no one in the black area and Gavin Blackburn, Andrew Savage MP, Molly's sister Judy Chalmers (a Black Sash member) and I sat there.

As the trial started, a journalist leaned across to tell me that black people were being denied admission. I went outside and, around the corner, saw a group of people wearing CRADORA T-shirts. I said that they were free to attend the trial and should accompany me.

As we approached the Court a SAP officer said that only I could enter. I replied that there were at least 20 seats inside and that if anyone was denied entry while there was an empty seat I would recommend that the accused apply for a mis-trial. After a while 20 people were allowed in.

Later we heard dogs and vehicles outside. I left the Court and found a large number of riot and ordinary police on the Court steps and about 200 Ilingelihle people across the road. In the hearing of a police officer, I told the crowd that there were still eight seats. The community chose eight people who accompanied me in without hindrance.

The proceedings became tense when the local 'Bantu Administrator' told the magistrate that he alone decided who entered the township — there was no appeal. After repeated questioning he admitted that he had instructed the Minister to refuse this permit.

Di brought a lighter moment to the trial when ques-

tioned about the report she submitted after her previous visit in which she recommended that a senior police officer be seconded to Cradock. When asked why she had recommended this she replied 'To control the local police.'

The Prosecutor in this case read my reply from a Press clipping (sent from the Attorney-General's office) in which I said: 'It is a contemptible law and deserves to be treated with contempt'.

At tea-time the Court conducted an in-loco inspection. When Court resumed the people who had been in the public gallery were waiting quietly in the street. As I entered I heard a Warrant Officer tell his Captain that 'the men are ready'. Outside I saw them all lined up for a charge, but everyone had entered the court by the time the full force of the law came racing around the corner. Nothing ruins a good riot so much as a complete absence of 'rioters'.

The police video crew on the verandah of a neighbouring building made it look even more like a B-grade movie. Four ladies had the misfortune to leave a neighbouring shop as the police rushed by. They were surrounded and when they displayed their purchases, were told to go home, 'but don't walk together'.

Revenge came at lunch-time. On our return we found that the people had been let in timeously and we were refused admission because 'the Court is full'. Two armed policemen stood in the doorway in case we defied the ruling, while the officer stood laughing in the background.

Andrew Savage MP sent a note to Defence Attorney Jan van Gend who interrupted proceedings to tell the magistrate of the refusal. At his request the people moved closer to one another and the proceedings were suspended until we were seated. At this point control was abandoned and even standing room filled up. It was a very colourful public gallery with a massed display of Cradock and UDF T-shirts. One young man even wore a RELEASE MANDELA T-shirt.

It was hard to realize that this was the trial of two white women, of two PFP public representatives. It made one realize that there is still hope of reconciliation in our country, despite the forces of violence and oppression.

The case ended at 6.30 pm when Di and Molly were found guilty, cautioned and discharged.

As the magistrate left the Court, the people formed a long crocodile and filed out shaking the hands of the accused, their attorney, their husbands and friends, and even the two reporters.

Di commented afterwards 'I was deeply moved by the fact that so many of this harassed community took the time and risked further harassment by supporting Molly and me at our trial'.

As we left Cradock I thought of the most famous name connected with the town, Olive Schreiner, who is buried on a local farm. I think Olive would have approved of Molly and Di. She had campaigned for women's rights, and for the rights of the black people and the boers in their own country.