

RUTH HAYMAN

by Alan Paton

General Smuts spoke immortal words at the graveside of Louis Botha. He said of Botha that he was the "greatest, cleanest, sweetest soul of all the land, of all my days". I myself would number the members of the Liberal Party of the 'fifties and the 'sixties amongst the greatest, cleanest, sweetest souls of all my days. And none more so than Ruth Hayman, who has now left us.

Ruth had a gift that is given to few of us, an inner vitality, an energy that seemed inexhaustible, a restless eagerness to be up and doing. Perhaps she sometimes just sat and reflected and meditated, but I never saw her do it, and I find it difficult to imagine. She went some time in the 'sixties to visit her mother Ethel in Israel, and Ethel wrote to me, "I am worn out by the visit of my wonderful daughter!"

What made Ruth wonderful was not just her eagerness and her vitality. What won for her the intense admiration of the members of the Party, was the fact that she devoted these extraordinary gifts to the cause of justice. She was the champion of the poor and the oppressed. I do not think that she ever refused a call for help in her life. She hated injustice and would fight against it with all the strength of her slight body. She would go into any police station, any court, in any place, even in the white rural countryside that was venomously hostile to all that she stood for and believed in. She would treat judges and magistrates with respect, but she was as much an officer of the court as they, and nothing would prevent her from carrying out her duties.

Was she fearless? Or just brave? I am sorry I never asked her whether she ever felt nervous when she took up some unpopular cause. It was said of Smuts that he was fearless. It was said also of Horatio Nelson. But they were both men of power, and Ruth had no power at all except the vitality of her personality and her passion for her cause. She was one of the bravest of us all, and there were many brave people amongst us. She didn't make much money, but luckily for her she came of a rich family. Much of her work must have been done for nothing.

The consequence of her activities was inevitable. In 1966 she was banned and confined to her home. In one thing she was lucky — she had married again and very happily. She married Mervyn Lazar, a slow and quiet man whose very quietness was the perfect complement to her restlessness. There is no doubt that this marriage helped to a great degree to make her restriction tolerable. But her law practice began to melt away. For one thing she was now no longer allowed to enter a court, unless of course it had been to stand in the dock.

Why was she banned? It is of course "not in the public interest" to give the reasons for a banning. She was banned for the same reasons that Peter Brown, Jean Hill, E.V. Mahomed, Elliot Mngadi, and many others were banned. She was banned because she hated Apartheid, and because she was tireless in helping those who suffered under it. She was banned for no other reason than that she was a militant opponent of everything that the Government, the National Party and the Broederbond stood for.

Mr. B. J. Vorster, Minister of Justice from 1961 to 1966, was always angered by accusations that he banned some



people merely because they opposed the Government. He was capable of deceiving himself to an inordinate degree. The fact is that he banned Ruth Hayman because of her tireless championship of the victims of Mr. Vorster's government. It would be true to say that while the Liberal Party of the 'sixties disliked Dr. Verwoerd intensely, the members had for Mr. Vorster an unqualified contempt. No Minister of Justice ever did greater damage to the rule of law, and therefore the cause of justice.

Mervyn and Ruth decided that life in South Africa had been made intolerable for them, and they decided to emigrate to England. They did not like exile, but they did not allow themselves to be obsessed by it. Mervyn found a place in the business world, and Ruth turned her energies in the direction of social and community work. She was active in the founding of English classes for immigrants. The number of classes grew rapidly, and one local council after another took over responsibility for them.

After Mervyn's death much of the joy went out of Ruth's life. She missed him greatly and did not like being alone. I had dinner with her in London in March of this year, and she did not pretend to be happy. She made it plain to me that the great days of her life were over. When I left her I did not expect to see her again, and I did not.

Well now she has gone, one of the bravest women that ever trod the soil of South Africa. She was a heroine that had no honour in her own country, except among those of us who believed in the same things that she believed in, and loved her for her courage. If South Africa has any honour to talk about, it comes from people like Ruth Hayman. □