Naomi Mitchison

A LIFE FOR AFRICA

the story of Bram Fischer

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To the Afrikaner Nation
I dedicate this book
On one of the noblest of her sons

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I

Afrikanerdom and the Africans

THERE WAS a great grass plain, scarcely broken by hills, but with little rocky outcrops randomly here and there, tufted with wild bushes. Here one might find small game, snakes and lizards and rock rabbits, or even a leopard waiting to spring on beast or man. Most of the lions which would pull down and eat a full-grown ox had been killed off, but you could never be sure. When the rains came the grass grew, waving and rippling. There was plenty of grazing, not only for the oxen, but for buck and zebra, the moving herds of hartebeeste and wildebeeste and dancing antelopes, all busily eating the farmers' grass, but good eating themselves. Most years, though, it was dry for months on end. Water came from deep wells; everything depended on having water. If the rains were good the Orange Free State prospered, the maize grew high, the mealie cobs swelled; everyone was in good spirits and praised the Lord for his mercies.

But in a bad year with little rain the maize plants died back; there was only millet and beans and a few water melons. The fat went off the oxen and their ribs showed. Calving was poor. And the kaffirs, too, looked thin and tired; there was no getting hard work out of them; they almost forgot to sing.

For every farm had a kraal of kaffirs on it, remains perhaps of the tribe which had lived there once before the

coming of the white men with the guns, or wanderers from other tribes, speaking a different language, though the men at least had learnt the command words in Afrikaans. The kaffirs lived in a cluster of thatched huts, but the farm itself, the white man's home, would crouch under the shade of a few trees, one storeyed, small windowed, in a straggle of garden. Lately, people had started planting the Australian gum-trees, which grew quickly and gave good, straight timber. All round the farm lay the great plain and on the edge of far horizons a few trees, or maybe a windmill, until you got near to Bloemfontein, and there would be the squat, simple roofs or sharp Calvinist spires of the Dutch Reformed Churches, pointing up into the hot merciless blue, high above the single storey houses and stores along the wide streets, where men might ride their horses at ease between the slow, eight-span ox wagons.

They were proud men, Afrikaners, descendants, some, of the first Dutch families to settle at the Cape, or of the voortrekkers who built up the independent Boer Republics and whose Transvaal neighbours, allied with the Orange Free Staters, had held the British army at bay through the grim war years at the beginning of the twentieth century, only fifteen thousand Boers against a quarter of a million English: matter for pride indeed! The fact that the British had won in the end and made a generous peace, partly because of pressure from their own Liberals, did not outweigh the deaths of Boer women and children in the concentration camps. Ah, that! Riding into Bloemfontein you could not but see the monument to those dead, faithful Afrikaners all, and hate of the British who had done such things to the family, woke in you again. Nor were the

farmers entirely happy about the discovery of gold and diamonds on the Reef; the first diamonds had been found in 1867 and the gold fields were opened up between 1884 and 1887. The British South Africa Company was founded in 1888 and Rhodes came to power with his enormous imperial dream which was not the dream of the Afrikaners, and in his wake not only British but other aliens, whose God was somewhat differently considered from their God.

Yet on the whole they had acquiesced in the immensely conciliatory legislative union of South Africa under the British Crown. There was much to be gained from it, including higher standards of living and education and wider possibilities for the coming generation. In many households English would be spoken as a second language and English books would be read. And yet—and yet——

The Fischer farm was large; there were thousands of acres of crops and pasture. A hundred years back that was the way of it; but now land, especially near Bloemfontein, was getting scarcer. The farm would have had sandstone and brick-built barns and stores and out-buildings. There would have been flowers in the garden, behind the fence of prickly pear, straggling roses perhaps, but also the charming bright annuals that come up with the rain, marigolds, zinnias, nasturtiums and the African daisies that open for the sun. The house would have none of the architectural beauty of the Cape houses; it would be an uncompromising stretch of plain rooms behind a wooden stoep for shade and shelter. But inside, although the furniture might be plain, there would be books, Dutch, English and perhaps a few in the new language, Afrikaans, which was beginning to develop a literature. There would be china and silver, the

means for music at home. There would be lamps in the evening and candles to go to bed by.

Here there were five children, first Abram—Bram, as he was always called—then Paul and then sister Ada, and two younger brothers, Gustav and Peter. Their father, J. P. Fischer, was a Judge President of the Orange Free State, following on from his own father Abram, after whom the eldest grandson was called. This grandfather, himself descended, far back, from an official of the Dutch East India Company, had been principal adviser to President M. T. Steyn, the last President of the Orange Free State. He had been the chief delegate of a three-member team which went to Europe during the Boer War to try and arouse interest in and sympathy for the Republic. He was leader of the Orange Union after the war, when Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony and of the Orange Free State in the four years before Union—1907 to 1910. Then for three years he was Minister of Lands and Irrigation, and Minister of the Interior until his death in 1913. The father, Judge President Fischer, looks, in his photograph, very like Bram, a gentle, determined man with an open gaze. The children's mother, Ella Fischer, had also come from a distinguished Afrikaner family; before her marriage she had secretly helped the Boers during the war. That was perhaps past history by the time the children were old enough to hear her stories, but the tradition of doing something which you considered right and just, however much it was forbidden, must have meant something powerful. Government officials might say no, but they were in their nature temporal, while one's conscience was in eternity.

In this atmosphere of public service and courageous devo-

tion, a young boy might have dreamed of one day being caught and arraigned by the forces of injustice and tyranny (but perhaps in the dream they would be English) and making a great speech in Court which would echo round the world. He would scarcely have dreamed that the end of this would be life imprisonment in Pretoria Jail, closely guarded, without news of the world he worked for, while most of that world slowly forgets the great speech and condones that particular injustice along with many others.

Or does the world wholly forget? Not quite. Not all of it. Not those who still recognize injustice and want to fight it. Not those who remember Bram.

So, what kind of world was it that he grew up into? He was born in 1908. Slowly the breach between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking Afrikaners was healing, through tactful and careful handling both by British politicians and, in South Africa, by men like Botha and Smuts and those who went with them. But the British, intent on recreating good relationships with their late adversaries, conveniently forgot the Africans—some of whom had helped them. And genuine friendships among the educated did little to stop the historic dislike and suspicion at a lower level. There were constant problems in the gold and diamond mines, problems of engineering and geology, but also social and economic. Bram would have been too young to know much about World War I and the rebellion, understandable enough, of the old Boer War Generals, De Wet, Beyers and Maritz, when Botha, defeating them, wept on the battlefield. Yet he did remember how, as a six year old, he had sat on his father's shoulder while a pro-British mob burnt and looted shops in Bloemfontein, including some with the

name Fischer. He saw his father leave with an ambulance unit to try and join De Wet, and he himself had a little wooden chameleon carved by one of the Afrikaner rebel prisoners.

But these are Dutch names, though the ancestors of those who held them had come from Europe two centuries or more ago. And the Fischer estate was in the heart of southern Africa. What about the Africans?

By now the Africans had been defeated by the European invaders in a series of wars. This did not happen at once. At first, when the Dutch trading station had been opened at the Cape as a break and place of rest and convalescence for shipfarers on their way to and from the rich Indonesian Empire, which had made little Holland a great power, they had met wandering African people, the Khoikhoi whom the Dutch called Hottentots and the San, the Bushmen. The Hottentots had herds of heavy-horned cattle, goats and fat-tailed sheep; the Bushmen hunted and dug roots and painted extraordinary pictures in mountain caves until they were chased out by enemies—that meant, any other men. For it is only lately, when they have been left nothing but a kind of half life in deserts that nobody else wanted, that the San have been thought of as people instead of simply being hunted and killed or at best enslaved.

But the good, easily cultivated lands in the Cape filled up; the whites lived comfortable lives, importing slaves from the Dutch Empire, mostly Malays, running plantations and fathering a large mixed population, the Coloureds, who thought themselves a cut above the Africans. Soon all the land was gone and the farmers moved out, not always even bothering to build houses, but living in their wagons as

trek-boers. It was not easy to settle, for the grass of the sourveld is good early on, but useless later. The African herders knew that and moved their cattle on; it was no land for a settled farmer and that was what the Boers wanted.

But further north there were Bantu nations, and some of them had begun to understand the menace of the whites to their own way of life and to all their moral and social values, though they could not have guessed that it could ever be as disastrous as, in the event, it was. But, for instance, no southern African ever thought of private ownership of land, which, clearly, should be free for all, as the air we breathe or the water we drink. If a man wanted to build a house or take a crop he would ask the Chief-in-Council who controlled the common use of that piece of land; if it was agreed he would go ahead; the house and the crop were his, but the land itself never. It was the land and the good rain, also perhaps controlled by the Chief who was partly a Rain-King, which had kindly given him grain for porridge, beans for stew and perhaps melons or vegetables for trimming. And after harvest everyone's cattle could come back onto it and pick up anything that was left.

But the Boer farmer thought otherwise. His ideal was a house from which you could not even see the smoke of the next house. As far as eye could gaze, all was his, the land, the water, God's gift to one of His chosen people. And if any kaffir's cattle strayed onto it he would take them and if necessary shoot their owner. As for the San—the Bushmen—they were vermin, to be hunted out systematically and shot or poisoned.

The first clash with the Nguni peoples, the organized

Bantu kingdoms, was at the Fish river in 1779. The ama-Xhosa met the Boers head-on. They were used to fighting of a rather cheerful kind when ruling families quarrelled or cattle were moved. Sometimes it was an affair of champions and tauntings, rather like medieval Europe, though of course you could also have a really devastating "red" war. But the young warriors who had blooded their spears were now men; they were admired as dancers and song-makers; marriages were arranged for them. This was how a man should be.

Yet the whites had guns that killed from far off; they had trained horses. Gradually they pushed back the Nguni kingdoms and established themselves on the lands they had taken. It was always the best land. All southern Africa was in disorder; it was the *mfecane*, the time of troubles. But this was also because the Zulu King, Shaka, and after him the warrior Mzilikazi, had attacked other, weaker peoples, who, if they did not submit, might be driven far off, scattered, losing their cattle and their women. Thus, pressure built up from both sides, slowly, with pauses of apparent peace.

But in the Maluti mountains, things were different. There Moshweshwe, the wise King, was gathering the dispossessed, the people from the broken tribes and kingdoms, who spoke more or less the same languages and had much the same customs—and he knew them all, since, as a young man, he had travelled far and wide and had gathered wives here and there. He made them into the Basuto, the people of Lesotho who, under the protection of the Mountain of the Night, would learn to ride horses and to master the use of fire-arms. He tried to rule justly to all and peaceably with

his neighbours, if they would let him. The Boer farmers tried either to take or to buy his land, but he explained that this, under African law and custom, was not possible. Nor would he take their bribes. He knew that, sooner or later, he would be unable to avoid war, and he tried his best to conciliate the British. Finally, he had a serious Boer opponent, Brand, who had organized his side effectively, and might have won, in which case the Boers would have taken all the good land in Lesotho, leaving only a few barren mountains which they could not use. But Mosheshwe had a new way out. He asked for the protection of the White Queen, his powerful sister in England. In this way he saved his nation, but lost so much of his best agricultural land that the Basotho have, ever since, been forced to go out and work for their old enemies.

Meanwhile, too, the Griquas, tough and intelligent, who had been living in the fertile Caledon valley, found themselves assaulted. They had come originally from the Cape, but now had to move again, into poorer country where for a time, until diamonds were found there, they were let alone. And thus the Orange Free State came into being.

These were wars of hatred and an attempted wiping out of the enemy; and when either side could tell the other by the colour of his skin, a bad situation was made worse. It went on during the whole of the nineteenth century. But the Boers had other enemies. They had started to leave the Cape during the eighteenth century, not only driven by land hunger, but because they could not stand the arrogance and casual oppression of the British who had taken over from the Dutch as political rulers and whose urban standards belittled the tough farmers. The British, too, interfered with

the obvious rights of the farmers to keep slaves and punish them. The Missions, especially those from Scotland, had started educating and protecting the kaffirs and had the insane idea that they might become so uplifted as to be useful trading partners! The Boers knew that it was laid down in the Bible that the children of Ham—the blacks—should be for ever hewers of wood and drawers of water, servants of the whites. You could not go against the truth.

By the mid-nineteenth century the voortrekkers were settling down, though some of them still lived in makeshift huts, with little furniture and no education for their children, other than the Bible, interpreted their way. Gradually they began to form small, rather classless states, focus of some kind of law and order. For a time they held Natal; then, in mid-century, the British pushed them out, replacing them by assisted British emigrants; here again was a solid grievance. The Boer republics were sparsely inhabited and poor; it was difficult for them to manage the basic machinery of government. If a man rode in to help legislate, he must leave his wife and family to look after the farm and the kaffirs might come and murder them, even though his wife or his ten-year-old could be as ready with a rifle as he was. Nor did the farmers want to pay taxes for the salaries of civil servants or judges, or to build offices or court houses. In fact they did not think in terms of peaceable parliaments backed by a civil service, but rather of armed laagers or rifle-carrying prayer meetings. The English, observing this, thought of them as savages, almost as bad as the blacks.

From the British point of view, the essential, over half a century, was to contain the Boers. During the war with the

Zulu King, Cetshwayo, there were those who had suggested that Zulu and Boer should be allowed, in the interests of peace and true civilization, to wipe one another out. This was not acceptable and there was some attempt to stop the Boer land raids on the ama-Zulu from the Transvaal; this too was resented. In 1878, Britain officially annexed the Transvaal, which meant, among other things, taking on financial responsibility for the creaking machinery of government.

Then came the war with the ama-Zulu, horribly murderous on both sides. Some of the Boers must have been in two minds when the British Army, incompetently led, was defeated at Isandhlwana, but they could not possibly have thought of themselves as being on the African side. In the end the British decisively conquered the ama-Zulu at the battle of Ulundi, captured King Cetshwayo, divided up Zululand and were probably somewhat relieved when their royal captive died. When Abram Fischer was born, the King's son, Dinizulu, was still serving a term of imprisonment; he had dared to raise his head against his masters.

All over the south, the Africans had been fighting one losing battle after another, through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were nine "Kaffir Wars", as they were called. In a final rebellion, as it was referred to, a man called Mohandas Gandhi, a young Indian lawyer, organized an ambulance service—for the British side. An odd bit of history. Much has been written about the "Kaffir Wars" from the white point of view; they were an ideal taking off point for boys' stories. But the African side was not considered, although the African heroes of these

wars have been talked about in tribal towns and villages or in the grim locations outside the white towns, and have found their way into songs and praise-poems made over the last hundred years. Their names and deeds are known, but not to the whites. And yet in time Abram Fischer was to know and understand them.

2

Growing up

As a child Bram played with two African boys of his own age. They hunted or pretended to hunt all over the great farm. They swam in the water holes. They had herds of sun-dried clay oxen, set them to fight one another, kraaled them at night. They had endless fun together. They all went barefoot until little Bram was given a pair of shoes by a senior statesman, President Marthenus Steyn whose daughter Anna was married to one of Bram's uncles.

But then it was time for him to be sent off to school, first to the local primary and then, of course, to Grey: going through the school and on to Grey College. It was not only the pride of Bloemfontein, where his father had been before him, but it went back well beyond that; the Abraham Fischer hostel for men at the University was named for his grandfather. It would have been unthinkable to go anywhere else. When he started there, the Principal was the rather distant scholar and disciplinarian, Lyle, who, however had a tough job, especially over the language question. Originally the intention had been to have both English and Dutch as the medium of instruction, but, as time went on, Dutch became almost a foreign language; there had to be a shift over to Afrikaans, especially in the lower school.

However, when Bram was in his teens, there was a change; the new Head, J. Murray Meiring, was a much

more modern-minded man; there were changes and these included several handsome buildings, some in a pleasing version of Cape Dutch. Above all Meiring saw the school as a place where there could be a union of races, both in language and thought. That was not easy; many of the Afrikaners still felt they had been unjustly treated; they were very prickly about anything which appeared to be making them less of a nation. Bram, feeling this passionate Afrikanerdom, refused to wear the school cadets' uniform; it was English. His father, just as much of an Afrikaner and completely bi-lingual himself, took things more philosophically.

One of the men who taught Bram and who remembers him well, was the historian Leo Marquard, an ex-Rhodes scholar whose view of history, even then, was not entirely that of the orthodox Afrikaner historian. Certainly it was at Grey, first the school and then the College, that he became a fluent English speaker.

Grey College, with its motto: *Stabilitas*, was as near an English public school as it could well be: this was the period when English public schools were admired all over the world, above all perhaps, Eton. And Grey College would have trained young Bram Fischer for leadership, as Eton did with her pupils. But leadership need not be merely in the traditional sense. One can be—as some old Etonians also have been—a leader of the future, which usually means being a rebel of the present.

Bram could not know what kind of leader he was going to be. It was being built into him; he was growing in confidence and courage; he expected to succeed, as no doubt his father, watching him, expected it. And at Grey, surely,

confidence was in the Afrikaner values. Some of these were the standard aristocratic values, courage and generosity and loyalty. But also he must have accepted baaskap—white domination—as the natural thing; at home no doubt he had seen it at its kindest and most praiseworthy. Farming neighbours who flogged their black labourers would not have been thought well of. The idea of apartheid was gradually coming into being, the separation of races, with the emphasis that the whites would always be on top. Perhaps he thought it out, agreeing that the Africans must develop in their own way at their own pace in their own home lands, which would be better for everyone and much fairer than the old system of making them into "apprentices" or slaves. Yes, let them have their Councils and their Chiefs, so long as the Chiefs understood that they were, first and foremost, servants of the white government, which could take away their salaries and privileges in a moment if they forgot their places.

So apartheid was beginning to be worked out though the word had not yet gained currency. But, if there are ten million Africans (of course there are many more today) and only three million whites, what was the fair way to divide up the land? Did the Fischer family, interested in justice, think of this? Did they realize that in the plans for racial segregation, or whatever it was called, Africans were to be crowded on to the worst land, where they could never make a decent living, but would have to come out and work for the whites? Or were the Fischers too deeply occupied in worrying about the ten per cent of the Afrikaner population who were poor whites, without more possessions than the poor African and less able to survive?

As many as possible of these poor whites must be carefully nursed into genuine Afrikanerdom, their children educated, the parents settled on good land and taught modern farming techniques. Then they would cease to be a shame and a blot on the Union of South Africa. But whatever was done for them, there always seemed to be a problem of poor whites who were difficult to help. Bram's elder sister, Ada, devoted herself to them. It must have been a thankless job, a heartbreak often. But someone had to do it; typically, it was a Fischer.

Nobody thought of doing the same thing for the Africans. No farm labourer could save enough out of his miserable wages to buy even a small piece of land and become a farmer. No, that could not be allowed to happen; it would threaten baaskap. Meanwhile the population on the reserves, these imaginary homelands, increased and so did the number of cattle. But there was no more free land and nowhere for Africans to move to; all that had once been theirs was gone. Still, that meant they had to go out and work and there were so many that wages could be kept satisfactorily down, so it was all right for the Afrikaners.

But meanwhile, in the industrial cities, there was race trouble, which was probably reported so one-sidedly that the boys at Grey's could only have felt that the blacks had been infected with bolshevism—that old-fashioned word. That being so, they must be taught a lesson; if a few of them were killed in the process that didn't matter. The boys would have heard of the African National Congress, but probably laughed at it. Perhaps they might have taken more seriously the fight between the white miners on the Rand, demonstrating for higher wages and a better

standard of living for themselves, and the mine owners anxious to bring in African workers to do skilled or semi-skilled jobs, but not for motives of helping the Africans, only so as to replace the comparatively expensive whites. The Rand strike of 1922, in which some 240 white workers were killed by the police and the army, controlled by Smuts, did the African workers no good. It is strange to think of devoted men, hanged, singing the Red Flag with their last breath, but in the cause of all-white brotherhood. But how much of it all would have meant anything to a boy of fourteen? Yet he came from a socially conscious family; it must have been talked over.

And so Bram grew up, blue-eyed, with the fair hair that would go grey early. He was a strong, stocky boy; fifty years on he would need all that strength and physical endurance. He played scrum-half and went on doing this later on whenever there was a game going; it was his kind of thing. He was always a swimmer. In 1925 he had the highest sporting award at Grey for his tennis; it was the same year in which he took Matriculation, with honours. No doubt he joined in family worship, but was never deeply involved. Nor were his parents among the fanatical church-goers; his grandfather in fact attended the Anglican church. His education must have been, at that time, mainly academic; he knew his classics. And he decided on a Law career. It was in the family, of course, and his father would have approved, but had Bram already a stronger feeling for justice?

He would, for instance, have looked at Thabuie, the white horse carved into the ridge of hill only three miles from Bloemfontein. This had been the horse of King

Lerotholi of Lesotho, the second after wise King Moshweshwe. The Orange Free State had fought and beaten him and got more land out of the Basotho for themselves. This memorial was their boast, but was it justice? If Bram thought that, it would clash with his pride in his State and its Afrikanerdom: which would prevail?

I can only guess that he thought of the law as a noble career, as a service, but probably most of the time he was far more interested in passing his exams. Mugging up Roman-Dutch law takes determination, but he would have been ashamed to fail. After all, he was a Fischer, and a brilliant Fischer at that. He duly got his Law degree from the University of South Africa, of which the Grey University College was a constituent part. After that he became Registrar to Sir Etienne de Villiers, who was then Judge President of the Orange Free State. This lasted for two years. Meanwhile his family had moved to town. Perhaps he never again saw the African friends of his childhood.

It is possible that by now he had a few educated African friends or acquaintances, but with a certain mixture of suspicion on both sides. He certainly might have made some during his year at Cape Town University, between school and College. In the older—or can I say more civilized?—parts of the Union, Africans and Coloureds had grasped at educational and job opportunities. They could, with difficulty, climb the ladder. *Imvo*, the first Bantu newspaper, very cautiously edited, had been started in 1884. Now there were others, some not so cautious. There were African political and trade union leaders in a modern sense. It had begun before World War I with the "Southern African Native Congress". Now the leaders of this—by now

it was the African National Congress, usually called the A.N.C.—and of the various other African organizations and trade unions, were asking quietly but persistently, for a few moderate reforms. Their aim was "to advance the general prosperity and progress of the country and its people". Harmless enough, but to some it seemed the thin edge of the wedge. All they wanted, really, was to be recognized as people and to achieve a small share of human dignity, freedom and happiness. But even that was too much to ask.

The trade unions, because they wanted solider and more tangible things and were less involved with liberal idealisms, went further. During the war African workers were being organized as near home as Bloemfontein, where they were asking for an increase in basic wages, which had been pegged at two shillings a day, in spite of the steep increase in the cost of living. This went on, getting more and more bitter. Bolshevik propaganda was blamed for "native unrest". In fact native unrest was due to thousands of workers being shoved below the poverty line and held there. What could anyone expect?

However, a real and active communist party was also being formed. The C.P.S.A. (Communist Party of South Africa) was small but deeply committed and willing to do anything to further the cause of the Africans, as interpreted by the Communist International, and particularly "Comrade Bill" Andrews. In the twenties there was occasional common action with some of the organized workers; it seemed to left wing trade unionists and politicians that capitalism was tottering. They were over-hopeful. All the time they had two enemies: capitalism as exemplified in

a government by now largely dominated by white industrialists and the major white trade unions. In ten years the white miners' wages had risen by more than fifty per cent, the African miners' by only nine. Again, what was to be expected?

The African socialist leaders were by now making friends across the world, including both Great Britain and Moscow. As in other countries, the left movements, split and quarrelled more bitterly than if they had been genuine enemies. Clement Kadalie was General Secretary of the I.C.U.—the big Industrial and Commercial General Union, which by now had a very large membership of semi-organized and not always paid-up workers. The official view was that it was "an organization known as the breeding-place of agitation among the natives". Kadalie tended to be the main figure in the non-communist section of the common front. He made a good impression on such bodies as the International Labour Office and the British T.U.C., but he was more effective politically than he was in achieving the workers' demands in specific industries; it is not easy to run a big union with entirely inadequate finances and erratic help. In the end he was definitely anti-Communist. The Indian trade unions on the whole kept aloof from the African ones. The communists perhaps saw further.

But did the young Fischer know any of them or were his friends at this period all moderates, believers, shall we say, in apartheid with kindness? It seemes likely enough. It was at a meeting of the Bloemfontein Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, largely philanthropic but in a segregationalist sense, that he had taken a black man's hand. He felt what he called later on, a strange revulsion, and began

to question the very bottom of his own feelings. Once one asks these questions, new ways open.

Yet the political scene was partly hopeful. In the twenties and early thirties the Cape Coloureds had the franchise within the Cape. As it rested on a property qualification, there were many more Coloured than pure African voters, but still, there were a few, even of these. To vote! That seemed like power and recognition. A step on from there and they might themselves be legislators. Already some of them mixed socially, not everywhere, but among friends. Some of the ladies were strikingly beautiful. They went shopping anywhere, though white customers might be served first. They had built themselves nice houses with pleasant gardens. They swam from the beautiful Cape beaches, and nobody bothered unless there happened to be someone very strict about, probably from the north. It looked as if, for them, everything would go smoothly and, following on, it would soon be the same for the Cape Africans. That meant a non-racial State. And this is the opposite of apartheid. But the idea of apartheid was growing, a black cloud waiting for its lightning to strike.

When the Union of South Africa under the British Crown was achieved, the Cape delegates had tried hard to get the same franchise, limited of course to men with all sorts of property qualifications, in other parts of the Union. But it could be a beginning. It was not allowed to happen.

Some were aware of the threatening cloud, among the Coloureds themselves and among white liberals, whether European, which usually meant British, or Afrikaners. They knew the build-up of pressure from those who felt their jobs or their way of life threatened, sooner or later. There

were the farmers who wanted cheap, unlimited unorganized labour, which they could discipline at their own sweet will. Any farmer had a sjambok or two on the premises. Successive pieces of legislation made things easier for them to use it. A little later, when ordinary farm workers were not quite so easy to come by, a paternal State allowed them to run their own little gaols, a few farmers getting together, co-operatively, to build them. The labour was then completely disciplined. Apart from that, however, farmers considered that they had complete rights over their squatters (whose tribal home their land might once have been) or labourers, including their wives and children, so that it was almost impossible for a child or young person to get away. A few "good" farmers ran a low-level school, so that children could learn a little reading, a little arithmetic, but probably not writing. And of course the Bible, the magic and powerful book of their God, backed by the fires of hell.

Perhaps the better farmers, reasoning that they had been whacked at school and the natives were "only children" lulled themselves that way. Or they did not really notice what their overseers did. Boer farmers were not noted for their kindness even towards their own women and children, as one can see by reading Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, although the idea of the family, obedient to a loving, but chastising, father was a strong image.

But the industrial pressure was worse, from the white miners and railway workers, many of whom had nice bungalows where their wives had servants to order around and grumble at, something which had stopped happening in England between the wars. In fact, some of the skilled and semi-skilled workers had come from conditions of un-

employment and uncertainty in England following the big slump of the early thirties, triggered off from America. They felt they had escaped; they were going to stick to what they'd got, and to hell with the blacks. They built up a so-called Labour Party, which was very muddling for Labour supporters in England who had always thought that Labour stood for equality and brotherhood. But the kind of brotherhood it stood for—and sometimes, as in the earlier Rand strikes, died for—was strictly white.

This white pressure also came down on other non-white groups such as the Chinese, who had been imported as cheap labour, but most of whom were being repatriated or making their way out. Above all it affected the Indians who in the Transvaal had established themselves mainly as small business men and shopkeepers, though also in the professions, for example as doctors and lawyers. But we must not forget that many were indentured workers on the Natal sugar plantations, as badly off as Africans. Their own communities were comparatively privileged, but they mixed little, either with whites or Africans; their ladies and girls mixed even less. But if for instance they travelled, they were only too likely to be insulted, sworn at as "coolies" and pushed around. This had happened to the young lawyer, Mohandas Gandhi, who reacted strongly but was already building up his political philosophy of non-violence, useful in India but not really, as we shall see, in Africa against Afrikaners. He, however, had left Africa, to go back to India, in 1914, having been too much occupied with the mounting injustice towards his own community to see clearly what was happening to the millions of other non-whites. But the time would come when first a few and then many more

leaders of Indian thought and action would stand by the Africans.

But there was one Afrikaner politician who was beginning, in his own way, to understand what was happening. Hofmeyr, the solemn, joyless man, immensely though narrowly erudite, at twenty-two appointed a Professor at Johannesburg, was now in the Government. He was an administrator of strict integrity and efficiency, the kind of man who worked all evening, wearing himself down, unless his mother, from whom he never parted, stopped it. He played cricket, but that can be a deathly serious game. And he was beginning to realize the basic injustice of the South African State. Yet he found it difficult to work with the Cape liberals, who were a gayer lot and had broken away from the narrow restrictions of Calvinism. He was scared even of receiving delegations of what might have been near-communists. The time was never ripe. And yet he was timidly beginning to believe in a common society including white, brown and "civilized" blacks. More surprisingly, in a way, Smuts too was occasionally thinking along the same lines which were, after all, the only sane lines for the long term peace and stability of his country. It was in 1930 that Smuts thought "it would be better to allow . . . urbanized natives" who "claim to be civilized and Europeanized" to "exercise their political rights along with the whites". That was scarcely revolutionary and little came of it in practice, yet no Afrikaner politician would dare to say it now. Smuts, however, was quite capable of expressing very different views, perhaps, more nearly his own, to a non-liberal audience.

All this must have been apparent to Bram Fischer in his

early twenties. The stirrings in the climate of opinion are sure to echo in the minds of the young and intelligent. Perhaps Bram was beginning to think of himself as one of the future leaders of the Afrikaners in a multi-racial or non-racial state. In 1929, he became the first Nationalist Prime Minister of a student parliament. He would no doubt have been thinking of the Afrikaner aristocracy, the people of principle who believed in complete justice, equality of opportunity, stepping up of education and training, freedom from old-fashioned prejudice and so on. Yet probably he was not yet really intimate with an African and might have found it awkward to be so, although he was already trying to overcome what he now knew was an irrational prejudice. No doubt too he would have condemned law-breakers, strikers and those who did not recognize authority. And by authority he probably meant, deep down, white authority. What else could there be?

He would also have a certain contempt for the uneducated Afrikaners, whose principles stopped with their own somewhat peculiar interpretation of the Bible and whose prejudices stuck out a mile. His contempt might have included the equally prejudiced small shopkeepers and business men. Even today, if one goes into their homes, one can easily find no printed matter except a large Bible in the best room and a few comics, no decoration except dusty plastic flowers and blown-up or even illuminated photographs of family marriages and grandparents, and a total disbelief, not only in brotherhood, but in such heretical doctrines as evolution. This is, on the whole, the kind of home from which South African police and prison warders come.

But, immediately, Bram wanted to continue and broaden

his own education. He applied for a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford and got it. This would be his first adventure outside South Africa into a different climate of thought. In January of 1932 after sitting his next law examination at Bloemfontein and doing extra Latin with a view to the needs of the English Jurisprudence course, he boarded the ship, well equipped no doubt, and bound for Europe and New College.

3

View from Oxford

NEW COLLEGE is very beautiful. It is all stone-built, Cotswold stone that weathers and crumbles on the surface, so that the faces of statues blur and you only see the centuries-old draperies. There are heavy Stonesfield slates on the roofs of the cloisters. You turn a corner between high walls, go in through the great gate, past the porter's lodge, into the first quad. Here is a huge green lawn of fine grass, the first thing perhaps, that young Fischer must have noticed. From here came the famous explanation by the gardener: "You rolls it and cuts it and rolls it and cuts it for about three hundred years and then it starts taking shape." To the left is the chapel with its magnificent organ and stained glass, as well as William of Wykeham's pastoral staff. The new Rhodes scholar might have noticed the memorial tablet to members of the College killed in World War I, including the German dead. He would have visited the cloisters, full of inscriptions, with more lawn and a great ilex tree. He would have climbed the tower, up which, when I was a girl, I often guided panting overseas visitors for the tremendous view out over Oxford.

Beyond the first quad, with Hall and library opening out of it, is the second, of which one side is the garden, splendidly gated, built in an angle of the ancient city walls with their embrasures and loop-holes. The wide herbaceous border, expertly tended, is a blaze of colour eight months of

the year. On the grass slopes down to the lawn there are always undergraduates lying around, one hopes with text books. In the centre is the tree planted Mound, which only Fellows are supposed to climb. I used to climb it often enough as a child, dodging the gardeners, and again after my brother had come back from India for my father's centenary and been given an honorary degree. At the top he said, "But we are only ghosts, you know". So I look back.

There are chestnuts and tulip trees and tall scented lime trees and spikes along the tops of the walls to prevent all but the brave from climbing in. The new buildings are along Holywell, and there is a cherry tree in the terraced quad with a street lamp which shines through a profusion of white blossom in May. There are lodgings outside the College too, some very attractive, all set among tulips and iris and lupins, flowering shrubs and trees. Bram Fischer had rooms in College. His tutor was Mr. Jenkins; at that time H. A. L. Fisher was the Warden; Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, anxious to encourage a young liberal, asked him to tea quite often. He was clearly much attached to the College for which he played tennis and rugby football; it was during a match that he hurt a knee cartilage and was in the Wingfield Hospital under Dr. Girdlestone. Yet clearly much of his love was for Rhodes House and the Warden, Mr. C. K. Allen. He became President of the Raleigh Club, a Commonwealth Society which met and still meets at Rhodes House, though now it must have a rather different ambience.

He had missed a term as well as having the accident to his knee, but he worked hard, including legal Latin, perhaps too hard, for he ended by getting a Third after a bad attack of exam nerves. A photograph of him at this period shows

an intense, tight-lipped, short-haired young man, clearly nervous, who might become extremely depressed at failure. The photograph is from *The Friend* and, oddly enough, next to one of Hitler, then coming to the fore. But the Nazis were deplored by Bram's parents, who were, later, to visit Oxford and after that to receive the Warden of Rhodes House and Mrs. Allen at their own home.

Bram seems to have become, understandably, fed up with law. He wanted to do Economics and at one point felt he should transfer to London School of Economics. His tutor tried to shepherd him into Philosophy, Politics and Economics, but he shied off and instead took a Diploma in Economics in his last year. All accounts show a delightful but not very intellectual young man, much liked, "a charming fellow", "one of the nicest men in College". No, he hadn't done as well as was expected, but he was getting educated in all sorts of other ways.

The Victoria League organized tea parties for the Rhodes scholars. Young Mr. Fischer brought his sister Ada one Sunday to tea with my father and mother, no doubt with the silver tea-set and the usual heaped plates of scones and cakes. There was conversation about South African conditions and Ada, trying to be helpful, said that a new method had been evolved to prevent pthisis in the gold mines. "Yes," said my father gently, "I suggested it." In fact, one of his pupils had gone out there to work on mine diseases. But I never met Bram myself; I was married and living in London, becoming increasingly involved in British politics, not to speak of the Spanish Civil War and the further threat we were beginning to reckon with.

That year Bram went for long walks and bicycle rides

through the Oxfordshire countryside, marvelling at the damp and greenness, so different from home. There were the great elm trees and the tall, straggling hedges, the wide verges of the roads full of flowers, cow parsley, buttercups, ox-eye daisies, vetch and foxglove, for these were the days before weedkillers and the butterflies floated over them. He came to an Oxford of winter days with snow and bare trees, or slush and puddles, but by the end of the Lent term the blackthorn would be in blossom again. And always, always, the ground was damp, Oxford clay sticky and mucky with cows sploshing back for milking, and the two rivers, Cherwell and Thames, breathing out mists and leaf smells.

He would have gone with friends to drink beer with the locals at the country pubs, watching the green, leaf-flecked river slide by, or, in the long northern dusk, hearing the nightingales. Was it from this country that the soldiers had come who had burnt the little Boer farms, savaged the crops, sent the women and children to misery and death in the camps? Should one try to forget or would one, doing that, become less of an Afrikaner?

He was bound to have become involved in left politics and debate and clubs, and might have got a new and disturbing perspective on his own country and what was going on there. In 1932 pressure from Boer farmers had resulted in the Native Service Contract Bill which legalized the whipping of young Africans under eighteen who tried to get away from their "masters", and the binding of young children to labour. He would hear about the brutal treatment of political prisoners, kicked and beaten by their white warders and left to die, the perpetual bullying of the pass laws and the beating up by the police, even before a charge

was laid. And yet he would also find people who remembered how Smuts had said at Oxford that South Africa's native policy was the best and should be imitated by settler governments in east and central Africa. And Smuts had charm.

He realized quickly that the Communist Party in Great Britain was quite respectable and refused to be put upon. In South Africa it was still having a tough time, constantly being reprimanded from Moscow which, not for the first or last time, failed to recognize that the correct line might be different in another country. Certainly it was the Comintern which first had the idea of a "black republic" with guaranteed minority rights—what we would call now majority rule. But was the timing right? Of course it further alienated the right wing trade unions. In the early thirties the A.N.C. had relapsed into mild protests and internal squabbles. But surely by now they must have known that none of their respectable approaches were going to move the Smuts-Hertzog coalition. Yet Liberals went on hoping.

Meanwhile increasing pressure was being put on by South Africa to incorporate the Protectorates, Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland. Luckily this was met with reasonable firmness by the Colonial Office. Was it possible that Bram was occasionally made to feel that because he was an Afrikaner and proud of it, he was inevitably a reactionary?

Yet he was developing friendships in the Labour Party or bodies like the new Socialist League. Between 1932 and 1934 there had been a hardening and taking up of positions in Great Britain. Mosley had brought the British Fascist party into being and with it a violence which had not been

known for long enough in England. In Europe the shape of things to come was appearing with horrible inevitability. In 1934 Bram went on a short tour to the U.S.S.R., as many of us did about then. With hindsight one realizes all that was going wrong but which none of us could really see, because the part which was going right was so dazzling and seemed, perhaps rightly, so much more important. Again, in August 1933, Bram went off to student conferences in Bavaria and Switzerland. The full Nazi development was yet to come, but it must have been in the minds and talk of all. Yet there were other interests. He thought for a time along the lines of Child Welfare work. That tied in with the economics of poverty.

So Bram went back to South Africa to find something of the same sort happening, especially among the younger Afrikaners a growing fascism, which put many of them into complete sympathy with the Nazis. This had its high spot in the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek. It was at Bloemfontein that the Ossewabrandwag (the ox-wagon sentinel) movement was founded; this took over, and still keeps, the Nazi ideology, the worship of the *volk* and hatred of foreigners. Anti-semitism was raging everywhere, partly because many Jewish families, aware of what awaited them in Hitler's Germany, were emigrating while there was still time, though a number of families had come a generation or two earlier, to escape pogroms in Russia and Lithuania. That was the picture. But was this what being an Afrikaner had come to?

Yet there was happiness. On September 18th, 1937, he married Mollie Krige, herself from a famous Afrikaner family, and a niece of Mrs. Smuts, wife of the Prime Minis-

ter. It is possible that her family were critical of his views, but was he not a brilliant, rising young advocate? She herself shared them utterly; she was a person whose honesty of thought and purpose shone out. For him there was no one else.

The picture on the South African political left was the usual disarray. A People's Front was formed, a wide spectrum from Communism to mild Liberalism, and the League of Nations Union, but it was the white left and after a good start it began to disintegrate. A lively radical weekly, the *Guardian*, was eagerly read by all progressives, doubtless including Bram. Dr. Eddie Roux, intelligent and brave enough to stand up to the Communist International when it totally failed to understand South African conditions and simply repeated inappropriate Leninist phraseology, had rejoined a discouraged and smaller Communist party, and moved with it to Cape Town. It included the strong and steadfast Moses Kotane. This was a more civilized place than the Witwatersrand, but also further from the storm centre of African working class miseries and oppressions and anger and the ugliness of their lives.

But Cape Town was not inactive. How could it be with a generation of highly intelligent and cultured Coloureds, including women like the brave and beautiful Cissie Gool, demanding complete equality before the law, over education, work and all the other obvious things that mean real freedom and democracy? what Pericles in Athens, more than two thousand years before, had called *isonomia*. Meanwhile the A.N.C. grew weaker and could think of little but pointless deputations and letters destined to go unread by white Ministers. Yet it and the Communist Party came

together in 1935 to meet a common enemy, the Bill to take the Cape Africans off the common roll of voters.

All the old slogans were trotted out by the sponsors of the Bill, especially that political equality was always followed by social equality and "mingling of blood". All Nazi-type politicians go crazy about blood, even to the extent that blood donors have to have their exactly similar products unscientifically race labelled. Sensible doctors no doubt use what is there, though in South Africa it is possible to find race prejudice so strong even among the highly educated, that they acquiesce in this kind of nonsense.

So the Cape Africans lost their votes on the common roll, though Hofmeyr mildly objected and so, more strongly, did Sir James Rose Innes, a former Chief Justice. But the liberals could do nothing. The same Act, putting male Africans onto a kind of indirect voting communal roll, created a Native Representative Council which was supposed to be there to give advice to the Government. But it was allowed to do so little that, ten years later, it was bitterly called "a toy telephone" by one of the Councillors. Meanwhile the status and influence of the Coloured voters gradually decreased. But they only lost the vote altogether in the fifties.

This was a step backwards, a new threat from what was clearly becoming a white police state. Everyone got together, including the respectable A.N.C. leaders and formed an African Convention. The Government was by now a coalition between the occasionally liberal Smuts and Hertzog who was a way-out white supremacist. Its next step was the Native Laws Amendment Act 1937. This was intended to stop the influx of hungry, job-seeking Africans to the big

towns and make them liable to be "endorsed out" (that is, sent back to wherever their ethnic "home-land" is supposed to be, however impossible it was to make a living there) by the white police and the bureaucrats who dealt with them in an utterly unsympathetic way. Meanwhile, of course, there had been a series of other Acts and amendments, all designed to keep the African in his place, not to allow him to acquire land outside the meagre "home lands", making him carry a pass, without which—supposing he changed his jacket, for instance, and forgot to pocket the pass—he could be thrown into a police pick-up van, probably with sufficient violence to break a tooth or be covered with bruises. A few nights in the cells from time to time, plus a police beating, was normal for most Africans, especially if they had any political or trade union connections. (No wonder a certain cynicism became the protective wear; it comes out in so many books and short stories.) In the last thirty years this has grown worse rather than better, and is being imitated in Rhodesia. How could a man like Bram Fischer, believing in justice, keep out of the struggle? Now he decided definitely to come in.

But the risks were frightening for the old members of the A.N.C. It did little for the next few years. In a desperate situation, a number of groups and parties formed, some definitely anti-white. Yet in practice things worked otherwise; for instance, A. H. Naidoo, an Indian, who was to do so much in the freedom movement, had discarded his ancestral Hinduism and married a white European fellow worker in the Communist Party.

And on the Rand? For thirty years African miners had their wages pegged at 1/8 a day for surface and two shillings

for underground work, out of which they must buy their own mining boots and pay train fares. There was no pay for the sick or disabled. They were knocked about underground by white miners and above ground by compound managers. This is not to say that all whites are bad, but these were conditions approaching slavery, and people who have absolute power over others almost always behave badly; they cannot realize that those in their power are genuinely human beings. But the white miners' Union did not dream of backing demands by the African mine workers' Union for better pay, following a steady rise in the cost of living, and somewhat better living conditions.

Hofmeyr, who was Minister of the Interior, occasionally helped the Africans; he was struggling with his narrow upbringing and his mother's influence, towards a mild liberalism. He managed to help over African child offenders against the laws, transferring the "Reformatories" from the Department of Prisons to the Department of Education, and gave Alan Paton his chance as an educator, though this was all undone later when the right-wing Afrikaners brought back a real old penal system. Meanwhile the Broederbond, the Afrikaner's secret society, grew in strength and is still powerful and difficult to trace. The young Hertzog, son of the Prime Minister, encouraged the Broederbond to rescue "poor young Afrikaners" from British imperialism and Communist (or Jewish) internationalism. Hertzog, too, had been a Rhodes scholar; my mother remembered her instant dislike of him to her dying day.

In this spirit the 1938 election was fought. The combined Afrikaans churches sent out their predikants to preach right-thinking voters into combining against foreigners, blacks,

liberals, Jews and the like. The Broederbond exerted its power. Baaskap and apartheid won; in the next coalition government Hofmeyr, inevitably, resigned. But when war was actually declared, Parliament decided to support Britain and the allies by eighty votes to sixty-seven. Hertzog resigned as Prime Minister; he and Malan led an "anti-war" party.

Smuts took in two new coalition members who were professedly anti-Nazi and pro-white Labour, though as racist as the rest. But the opposition were banking on a German victory and considerable pressure was being put on from outside parliament by the Ossewabrandwag which had gone the whole way towards Nazi-dom, and in this belief practised a lot of efficient sabotage on government buildings, power lines, etc. Hertzog believed in uniting all whites in a common bond of Baaskap, but Malan wanted only an Afrikaner republic. This went on, while they wrangled for power, during the early years of the war, but after Hitler's defeat, first in the Battle of Britain, then in the Battle of Stalingrad, they began to realize that after all, the Nazi victory on which they counted was not going to happen. Malan's party, after the General Election of 1943, came out as the only real opposition. The rest lost ground. But the doctrine of apartheid was growing its own philosophy as well as its own practice.

4

The Closed Door

THE WAR years went on. Bram had wanted to join up, but he was turned down rather unexpectedly and much to his annoyance, on health grounds; as he got older he had blood pressure trouble. For some time now his views had become more and more strongly against apartheid and all that the Government was doing. Apartheid as a word had not yet been invented, but as action it was already there. It was clear to him that in the long run it meant nothing but disaster for South Africa and perhaps the whole world. As a lawyer he could and did help in the fight for racial justice, although an outsider would have said that his big successes were in company law. He seemed to be headed straight for the top of his profession. The Hitler-Stalin pact, inevitable as it was considering the attitudes of England and France, worried him deeply, as it did many of us. Then, when the Soviet Union came in he felt immensely glad and justified. It seemed that the Communist Party was going to be the real, practical opposition. At the same time he was now more and more committed to the storm centre, Johannesburg; he had left rural Afrikanerdom totally behind.

Government attitudes did not change. After Pearl Harbour and the general scare of Japanese invasion, Smuts went as far as to say that in that event he would arm every African. But of course nothing came of it. A few of the lighter skinned coloureds joined up in the Cape, white for

the duration of their service. But most Coloureds and Africans went into unarmed battalions of the Coloured Corps, the Army Service Corps and so on. Chiefs were persuaded to bring in contingents; many must have been disappointed at not being allowed to fight and may have noted that the Senegalese troops of their French allies were very much in the armed front line. It was also curious that many race conscious Afrikaners began to be quite friendly with Africans when they were abroad, and something of the same spirit was left among some of the ex-service men. The Springbok Legion encouraged this in various practical ways.

There was talk of the freedom envisaged by the Atlantic Charter; encouraging remarks by Smuts were talked over optimistically in the townships. The A.N.C. had been pushed into new ways by Dr. Xuma, the lively and able young President General, newly back from America (with a Negro wife) and Europe. It was not without pain to some of the older members, for Dr. Xuma was intent on a complete reshaping, making the A.N.C. less of an institution and more of a political party. Bram helped him to draft the new constitution on more democratic lines; probably he was there, too, when a group of African intellectuals, including Z. K. Matthews, by now Reader in African law and language at Fort Hare, began work on a Bill of Rights based on the Atlantic Charter. Azikiwe was doing much the same in Nigeria, but he was on his way up towards power. Not so the Africans in South Africa.

For nothing really made any difference. There was considerable anti-white feeling in some of the African organizations. Most of the African urban workers were now living in conditions of intolerable poverty, while white prosperity

went up and up. The African Youth League had been founded in 1943. There were the young African professionals and intellectuals who were going to become so important later on—Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu—their names will come later in this book. They were stressing the African moral order working in with the necessities of a technological and industrial society, whether run by capitalism or in some form by the State. They also began to value the deep lessons of their own history; Nelson Mandela, the sophisticated young lawyer, had come from a royal family and had listened as a child to the stories of his own people, told round the fires on winter nights. They stayed with him.

Meanwhile, things were getting worse and worse on the mines. South Africa was an increasingly rich country. Afrikaner small farmers might be living much as they did a generation before, but in the cities there was increasing luxury, though not all the profits stayed in the country. Vast fortunes were being made out of gold and diamonds while the miners from peasant families could not even send back a few shillings out of their miserably inadequate wages to families starving on the reserves in a bad year. Things came to a head in 1942, when miners found they could get absolutely no redress from the management. They complained of beatings by mine police, inadequate food and overcharging at the company stores, bare concrete slabs to sleep on and up to 12 hours underground without food. Nobody cared. They set fire to the company's buildings. Although the grievances were acknowledged in Court to be genuine, thirty-five of the leaders were sentenced to longish terms of imprisonment.

Then came more strikes. In one, soldiers were called in; they fired. Fourteen Africans were killed, more than a hundred wounded. Smuts was, probably genuinely, much grieved and appointed a commission of inquiry. But any statements which appeared and which were slightly in favour of justice for the natives, were immediately attacked, as usual, by the white Unions. But there was more weight being thrown behind the strikes, boycotts and the struggle against the pass laws in 1944. There were loopholes in the laws which only a lawyer could see. There were ways of doing forcible things which did not conflict with the laws. Increasingly they came to Bram Fischer or he went to them. So far, probably very few people knew this part of his life, unless perhaps his immediate family.

From the other side the Afrikaner Nationalists became increasingly involved in trade union politics. They formed a Society for the Protection of White Workers. The predikants stressed the religious side of it. Dutch Reformed Church workers willing to fight for white civilization should join. They had a monthly paper where they preached the imaginary virtues of the early voortrekkers; the *Volk* must feel as one. Only Afrikaans should be spoken. Afrikaner capitalists subscribed to the doctrines but did nothing to alter the increasingly international tenets and practical workings of capitalism. But an ideology was being built and is there today, often expressed just as crudely, though to the outside world it may have a slightly different face.

Meanwhile, the Indian attitude hardened, as they, too, were more and more pushed around. There was more genuine co-operation with the Africans. This came at a time, just after the war, when Indian leaders, especially

Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs. Pandit, were being taken very seriously throughout a white world which was, perhaps, discouraged by the performance of its own leaders and looking for moral guidance and hope. We in Great Britain were happy that India was at last freeing herself; perhaps we put it down too much to the Labour Government which we had elected and too little to the inevitable march of history. Africa seemed much further away. But it was the Indian representatives at the United Nations who raised the whole question of racial segregation in South Africa over the treatment of Indians there. The pressure continues.

But all the time there was further repression of the Africans and a series of Acts designed to hold them down industrially and socially. In 1946 things came to a head. Workers in power stations struck. This was followed, again, by the miners whose conditions had improved hardly at all in the last four years, while the cost of living was going up. The Chamber of Mines refused to negotiate; by now they had a spy system in the compounds, though no doubt there was plenty of double crossing. The African miners' strike was almost complete and showed how much better their organization had become. Then the police went into action, killing and maiming hundreds. Some two thousand armed police were employed by the end, often going underground to hunt out the strikers.

In 1946 the Native Representative Council, the "toy telephone", adjourned in protest at the Government's total refusal to recognize African trade unions and the "wanton shooting by the police". It never reassembled. Hofmeyr had replied for the Government, rebuking them for their "exaggerations". And yet it had some effect on him. He

had always been interested in education and had been in fairly close touch with Z. K. Matthews, now Professor at Fort Hare. But also he had been thinking about the future. In 1946 he made a speech in which he said: "By way of illustration of what prejudice means in South Africa, I cannot do better than refer to the growing tendency to describe as a Communist—and therefore one who should be condemned by bell, book and candle—anyone who asks for fair play for all races, or who suggests that non-Europeans really should be treated as equals of Europeans before the law."

There was plenty of practical action to be taken. As in other countries, basic groceries were short and officially price-controlled. But plenty of shops were selling them at high prices under the counter to favoured customers. The Communist Party started food raids, organizing customers into marches and then going to shops which, they knew, were behaving dishonestly. They demanded rice, soap or whatever it might be, at the controlled price; when the shopkeeper said he had none they pointed to the marchers, took over, found his stores and started selling. Each one of the customers got his or her ration at the proper, controlled price.

So there was Bram in his blue city suit, one knee on a case of soap, opening it up with a claw hammer and doling out the cakes of soap to the queue of customers. He put the money in a bag and at the end gave it back to the shopkeeper, for the whole exercise was extremely respectable. Very probably he enjoyed doing this and for that matter enjoyed occasionally selling newspapers at the street corner, something unheard of for a white man, doubly unheard of

for an already distinguished advocate, exceedingly awkward for the police. My brother, J. B. S. Haldane, used to do the same kind of thing when he was in the Party. For that matter a great many of us did in the Labour Party. There may be a touch of self-punishment about it, but I don't think so. It was a nice down-to-earth change.

Meanwhile, the A.N.C. was beginning to move. Younger men had come in. Protests had become more vigorous, Kadalie and Selby Msimang were voted down when they tried to organize yet another petition. Instead they decided to boycott all elections to such things as advisory boards and municipal councils. Unless they were recognized as citizens they would have no part in the State.

But this was not enough for people like Bram. They knew it just would not come to anything. The only way was the all-out and carefully worked out opposition of the Communist Party. And in fact the boycott petered out, partly because existing African members, often fairly successful middle-class people, did not want to lose their positions, such as they were. The Communist Party, which was at the time perfectly legal, decided to put up candidates everywhere in the hope of defeating the Nationalist Party, which was becoming more fascist every month. The service men at least realized that the war might have been lost but for the tremendous fight put up by the Soviet Union.

During the 1946 miners' strike, detectives had raided the offices of the Party in Johannesburg and Capetown; they had found lists of names and charged forty-seven men and five women under the Riotous Assemblies Act as well as under a war measure, no repealed. Of the eleven whites who were charged, one was Bram Fischer. In fact, he had been

away on holiday during the strike and could have proved this, but he refused to leave the others. But the trial was fairly conducted. Moses Kotane, general secretary of the party, and five others were discharged. Others were fined, but not heavily.

However, a few days later, police officials came down on radicals in all the large towns of the Republic, both in offices and private homes, removing books, pamphlets and private letters. Among the bodies raided was the Springbok Legion, in which ex-service men had attempted to carry on some of their war-time comradeship. Two months later eight members of the central executive of the Communist Party were arrested, including Kotane and Betty Sacks who had been editor of the *Guardian* for many years. In January 1947 they were remanded for a preparatory examination, which opened with a series of propaganda charges by the public prosecutor, Dr. Percy Yutar. You will hear more of him later; he was and is entirely on the side of the police state.

Most of his charges were quickly pulled to pieces. The defendants made sensible speeches, speaking of their organization of the unskilled and down-trodden and how a good Communist must show the workers they could rely on his hard work and honesty. Witnesses for the defence included a Senator who explained how he had tried to persuade the Minister of Justice to set up an arbitration board which could have avoided the mine strikes by even a few small concessions, but that these were refused. He added that the miners would need four times what they were getting at present in order to have even a living wage.

However, this was not acceptable. A special court was

convened in Johannesburg. But the accused objected to irregularities and the court upheld the objections. Was this Bram's advice? Yutar, however, was not letting go and the accused were re-arrested in open court and the new trial, this time on charges of sedition, took place in Johannesburg on May 3rd, 1948, in the atmosphere of a coming general election. Yutar now went all-out against Communism as such, with the type of allegation which was common in the U.S.A. during the days of MacCarthy and is still believed by the stupider conservatives all over the world. The judges, however, quashed the indictment. There was still a fine legal tradition in South Africa.

Yet all this helped the Nationalist party in their electoral win, which was, all the same, attributed by the *Transvaler*, then under the editorship of Dr. Verwoerd, to Divine Providence "which has always watched over Afrikanerdom". This was of course the God of the Old Testament, the jealous tribal God. The New Testament fell less into line with Afrikanerdom.

The election result was a terrible blow to Smuts, who died two years later. Hofmeyr died, too, and with him the liberal possibilities of African education. Diepkloof, the open-gated reform school in which Alan Paton had managed to make his young delinquents into conscious citizens, now again became a penal institution. Paton, with plenty to write about, came away, to write and himself be penalized for writing, although not so fiercely as some. It is curious to consider what does and what does not annoy police or politician.

Bram was now on the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He wrote in 1948 to C. K. Allen, his old

Warden and friend at Rhodes House, telling him this and giving his reasons. It is a cheerful letter, in which he gaily suggests that he is probably the only old Rhodes scholar in this proud position. Allen, who certainly never voted anything but true blue Conservative, was deeply shocked at Bram's political position, but wrote an affectionate letter, begging him not to work too hard at law in case he wore himself out before his sixties.

The new South African Government meant hard-line apartheid, with people like Verwoerd, Schoeman (who had stopped the training of African ex-service men as building workers), Diederich and of course Hertzog and Malan, with Havenga's anti-British Afrikaner party. In a sense they represented a romantic Afrikanerdom, a *Volk*; but it was as lower middle-class as Hitler's Germany, no place for the aristocrats by birth and education and courage; no place for a Fischer.

So there was Malan riding the two horses of a black peril and a red peril. This government was going to deal with both. Yet he was to have a gadfly after him: Sam Kahn, solitary Communist, elected on a special roll as one of the African representatives. But the Suppression of Communism Act went through in 1950, one of the Government's early achievements, and he was unseated. So was his elected successor, Brian Bunting. So in turn was Ray Alexander; she was forcibly removed by the police even before she could enter the House and, though she recovered damages for the assault she could never take her seat.

Even white Labour was out of the 1948 coalition. But they kept their privileges by going thoroughly racist. Yet they, too, were in a difficult position. For a century Euro-

pean workers had struggled to build up and maintain their standards of living, largely through the Unions. Many had been through the slump in the early thirties. They, too, had been hungry and despairing. They had fought against dilution, including dilution by women workers, who could be paid less. One gap in solidarity and all might be lost. They understood well that the Chamber of Mines or the Railway Board would like to break their solidarity by training blacks to step into their shoes. And they were not going to have it. They were not going to let themselves be shoved back into the pit they had worked themselves out of. Inflation went on. The unskilled workers could barely live, but in 1949 the Government excluded rural Africans from school feeding schemes, which could never have been expensive. But "Africans should look after themselves". Or die. The liberals were immensely disturbed; bodies like the Torch Commando supported the rights of non-whites, but they were not really prepared to collaborate and be inter-racial. It was too late for their kind of protest.

Now banning orders on Communists in organizations such as trade unions began to come through. But anyone who held similar views—that is, who believed in racial equality and liberty—was almost equally at risk. Being "Liberalistic" was almost as bad as being Communist, and this meant that the genuine liberals among the various liberal movements, had to think hard and decide where they stood, what risks they felt able to take, and how they could best help.

General misery and insecurity and the loss of identity when men left the moral security of the tribe, unprogressive as it might be, made people behave badly. Gradually it came to the point where no African could trust another,

even in his immediate family, not to be a police informer. There were nasty racial riots, between Africans and Indians, often started by the undoubted fact that Indian businessmen did practice segregation against Africans, while making money out of them. Naturally it might be only a few in the community but they could spoil relations all round. There was also the point that Indians could buy and own urban land, while Africans could not, except in a few places like Sophiatown (but see Chapter 5). Some Indians were letting shacks on their land to Africans looking for work, at cruel rents. Yet many other Indians passionately disapproved. They formed themselves into the N.I.C. (Natal Indian Congress) which co-operated increasingly with the A.N.C. The Indian money-makers tended to break away and form the conservative Natal Indian Organization.

There were splits in the freedom movement, but the young leaders who were coming to the fore in the African Youth League were moving in the direction of a Black Power feeling, though their methods needed sorting out. Boycotts tended to turn on themselves and help the oppressors. The enemy was apartheid which by now had made itself a philosophy including revived tribalism under a Bantu authority, in practice somewhere to which dissidents could be banished.

One Act followed another, enforcing segregation, or, like the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Amendment Act, outlawing sex because of skin colour and causing untold misery in the break-up of existing marriages. The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified people on skin colour and the assertion of ancestry; this, too, caused great misery, especially as at least a million of the Afrikaner population

had a coloured ancestor a few generations back, perhaps even two centuries ago, whether the present ones knew it or not, and if the two genes met, colour was unexpectedly and devastatingly inherited by an innocent child. But the Suppression of Communism Act was the only one which was strictly political. Communism was to become a crime in itself without any other offence being committed; MacCarthy never went that far, nor would the American people really have allowed him and his like to do so. But the aim: to get rid of Communism, put the police onto its supporters and deprive them of civic rights, was the same. And the definition of "Communism" was so wide that it covered almost all political action aimed against the State. There was to be no legal appeal from the power of the Government.

The Central Committee of the Communist party, including Kotane, Andrews and Bunting, Kahn, Dadoo, La Guma and others, as well as Bram Fischer, met to try and decide what to do. The police had seized lists of names. Was it possible to change from legal to illegal work? They were not the kind of people who were used to that. They decided to dissolve the Party, although, as they said in their final declaration: "Communism cannot be destroyed as long as society is divided into two worlds: rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed."

Dr. Moroka, great-grandson of the Rolong Chief who had sheltered the voortrekker leader, Potgieter, in 1836, and now one of the A.N.C. leaders, called all Africans to join in a national day of protest and mourning on June 26th, for the murder of democracy. Later it was to become a day of resistance. Perhaps, for Africans, it matched December 16th, Dingaan's Day, when the whites went on, generation

after generation, boasting and commemorating their defeat of the Zulu armies which set them so splendidly on the road to baaskap. Yet, whatever is in the heart, resistance becomes more and more difficult.

Remember that any person convicted of breaking any law by way of protest could be sentenced to a fine of up to £300, three years' imprisonment and ten lashes, while, for leaders convicted of inciting them, the penalties were even heavier. This was under a law passed three years later; it still remains. But year after year brave men and women have been found ready to defy this law. While you read this someone is certainly suffering this punishment.

5

Fear

ALTHOUGH THE Communist Party was now illegal, that was not allowed to kill the spirit or even the organization. A man like Bram Fischer was not going to let himself be scared out of doing what he deeply felt was the right thing. Nor were his colleagues, black and white. Much later on, at his trial, Bram was to say: "My attraction to the Communist Party was a matter of personal observation." He had watched other parties waver, compromising with the whites in power, hoping that somehow things would turn out differently, which they never did. He went on: "The Communist Party had already for two decades stood avowedly and unconditionally for political rights for non-whites and its white members were, save for a handful of courageous individuals"—How like Bram to remember them as well!—"the only whites who showed complete disregard for the hatred which this attitude attracted from their fellow white South Africans. These . . . were whites who could have taken full advantage of all the privileges open to them because of their colour. . . . They were not prepared to flourish on the deprivations suffered by others."

But meanwhile, at the beginning of the fifties, there were constant and painful quarrels between the parties on the Left. The A.N.C. had decided on a programme of action. The Youth League leaders had been furious with the Communists; at first Sisulu and Mandela found it difficult to

co-operate with whites or trust them entirely. But Kotane was immensely patient and helpful. In view of the increasing police violence and total lack of sympathy from anybody in the Government, they decided that they must co-operate, bringing in the Indian Congress as well. At this point the much-respected Professor Z. K. Matthews was President of the Cape Congress. By now he had been in the A.N.C. for ten years, but was one of these awkward people who always try to be extremely truthful, which of course means "if" and "but"—things which don't always help immediate action. Yet it was this meticulous truthfulness which made him, later on, such a devastating witness at the Treason trial. His wife, Freda Bokwe, was with him all the time, his sons sometimes a step ahead. And he had a new friend, a quiet, solid man, a Chief, whose name was Lutuli. But it was not yet a name to echo round the world; he was a man who, like so many "uncivilized" Africans, hated violence, preferring to talk things out, and steadily helping the small Zulu group which had called him to the Chieftainship, for his community was one of those which usually elected their Chief. He, like many others, was a devout Christian, and must have been deeply disturbed by the Afrikaner image of the all-white God. Among those with a very different Christian image was Canon Calata, an Anglican priest, who happened to be black, an A.N.C. stalwart.

Another new name at this time was that of a farm worker, Gert Sibande, perhaps the same kind of slow-moving, quiet, but utterly forceful man as those who, a century and a half earlier, had been condemned to transportation for life in the Tolpuddle trials in southern England. What he laid bare was the condition of the farm labourers

of Bethal, a respectable Boer community which had got its blacks well and truly into a state of slavery. The floggings and chainings and deaths had been kept well hidden within the community until first the *Guardian* (whose revelations brought the promise, unfulfilled, of an examining Commission) and afterwards *Drum*, the African picture paper, then at its height, sent a reporter in. Other newspapers, genuinely horrified, followed up. Conditions were actually altered. During the whole of the following twenty years, some at least of the South African Press, especially the *Rand Daily Mail*, followed the best practices of free journalism, although in the last few years they have been increasingly harried and censored.

Now, in the early fifties, there was increasing organization of resistance. But there was little money and people like Mandela and Oliver Tambo, bright young lawyers, found the material conditions of this work constantly putting obstacles in their way. They could not travel comfortably or find hotels; telephones were not always accessible to non-whites. But protests went on all the time and now Chief Lutuli moved like a Chief, strongly into action, but always speaking in non-violent terms. They had meetings under the black, green and gold flag which meant Africa; they sang songs which went to the heart: *Nkosi sikelel'i Africa*, to a sad, powerful hymn tune: *Mayibuye* oddly to the tune of Clementine. And the whites in positions of power were too afraid to grant them any single thing.

They sent Matthews to America to put their case to the United Nations. At the meeting before he left he said: "Fighting for freedom . . . is a very painful process." For how many this was so! Many women were now taking part,

women like Lilian Ngoyi, who felt so deeply concerned about the plight of all African children, that she had to decide to leave her own sick daughter. But Modimo, the God of Lutuli and the others, decreed that her child should live. Many meetings began with prayer, as they did in Great Britain a hundred years ago and in Arkansas in 1934.

One blow came after another. Lutuli was told that he must either resign his Chieftainship or give up Congress. It is hard for a conscientious and able Chief, as he was, to give up all the help and leadership he can provide for his people. But for Lutuli there was no choice. He refused to do either, but was deprived of his Chieftainship by the Government, which of course did not care in the least that he had been democratically elected. The A.N.C. went ahead with their Defiance Campaign, a deliberate breaking of the apartheid laws; this included the ceremonial burning of passes. There was a joint Planning Council, including the African People's Organization (Coloured) and the Indian Congress with such representatives as Dr. Dadoo. They knew the Gandhian techniques of non-violence. But would they be effective here? Part of this well-organized resistance wave was the simple non-violence of going into "whites only" entrances of hotels or street cars or railway trains. This meant arrest, often violent, jail sentences and sometimes flogging. The police were always quite ready to shoot. In fact the Defiance Campaign was almost the last attempt at organized and dedicated non-violent action by still patient Africans. An immense amount of organization was put into it and, of course, great courage from the volunteers.

Next, some 500 people were named as Communists, although not all were or had been Party members; Mollie

Fischer was one of these. They were debarred from public life, but many of them still went on working. And more and more dedicated whites joined in: among them Patrick Duncan, lame but brave as fire on a hillside, son of the former Governor-General of South Africa. Romantic British Conservatives disapproved somewhat of the cause, but could only love and admire the rebel. Another most important ally, especially in the sense that he could influence the outside world, was Father Trevor Huddleston, and another Anglican, Hannah Stanton.

In early December the leaders of the A.N.C. defiers, including Dr. Moroka, Sisulu, Mandela and several of the Indian leaders, were on trial under the Suppression of Communism Act. Unhappily, Dr. Moroka did not like the panel of lawyers engaged by the others, which included former Communist Party members, and engaged another counsel. He insisted on declaring that he was totally against Communism: not that it helped him, as all the defendants were sentenced to nine months' imprisonment, although the Judge, Mr. Justice Rumpff, said that the charge had "nothing to do with Communism as it is commonly known". This meant choosing a new President for the A.N.C. Undoubtedly it would be, and was, the Chief—Lutuli.

Meanwhile, Bram and Mollie had three children, Ruth, Ilse and Paul, who was born with an incurable illness. They always hoped that some new cure might appear, but no. Mollie fought for his health; perhaps she was more realistic than Bram, who always half hoped that, somehow, he and his son would live and work together. Bram, who had by now taken Silk, was becoming an increasingly sought after counsel. He was an expert on company and mining law;

he wrote in learned journals. Insurance companies, newspapers and big business all wanted him. One of his most interesting cases, around 1960, was an Arbitration under Schreiner. It was a claim from an insurance company following from the Kariba flooding; they had engaged counsel from England. Bram appeared for the Rhodesian Power Board, and won the arbitration. His earnings went partly to the needs of his political comrades and partly for his household in Oaklands, the pleasantest part of Johannesburg, with the beautiful rooms and garden and swimming pool, where people of all colours knew that at last they were at home. There was a covered-in pergola where people stayed to supper and ate in an atmosphere of calm and gracious hospitality. Mollie managed to grow all sorts of rare and lovely plants and shrubs; it was one of her talents. And, because he and Mollie were so totally devoted, so utterly honest, people who had compromised, as so many well-meaning whites have done in South Africa, found that Bram was their conscience. Bram and his family.

One repressive measure after another followed. Under the Public Safety Act the Government could declare a state of emergency. Then the police and army could take over. In the 1953 elections, and again in those of 1958 and 1961, the Nationalists increased their votes and their seats, at the expense of the mainly English United Party, which, however, had hived off a Progressive wing, a liberal party which tried to fight against a host of injustices, and had just one M.P., the admirable Helen Suzman, the only genuine opposition member. In the Nationalist leadership, Malan, the unswerving, respectable Calvinist, who had been holding power until after his eightieth birthday, was succeeded by

Strijdom, who was much more of a Nazi type, aggressive and uncultured. These are the kind of leaders who are thrown up by a nation which is afraid.

For the Afrikaners were afraid, and deeply afraid, for their own identity. The Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act which had both been widened to exclude Coloureds, however light-skinned, were breaking up happy marriages. These and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act were the signs of a frightened people. Let us also remember that it was probably South African pressure on the United Kingdom which led to the banishment of Seretse Khama and his English wife, who, not so very much later, were to be President and First Lady of an independent country, Botswana.

Yet none of this could be effective in keeping an active and intelligent people permanently down. The A.N.C. and other organizations were perpetually protesting, perpetually being arrested and questioned, and this questioning was getting increasingly nasty, even for the whites. Some of them were frightened and yet managed to go on, but some felt desperate enough to try anything. The Liberal whites had most to lose and a few risked it all, though others were afraid to go too far. It is very difficult not to compromise or to persuade oneself that one's work is, in the long run, more important and may do more good than joining in a protest; this may indeed be correct. Yet Bram Fischer had everything to lose: home and a young family, a career which took him on to being a Q.C. and which would surely, in time, take him on to being—say—a Judge of the Supreme Court: that is if the South African Supreme Court could stay uncorrupted by politics. Yes, he could look at his future and put it into the balance. And he was not afraid.

No doubt this was partly long-sightedness. He knew that, if he and others, many of them ex-Communist Party members, did not act in the right way, things would be that much worse in the end, not only for the Africans but also for the Afrikaners. By continuing with racialism and repression, they were sealing their own doom as a people; indeed this may be, by now, what has actually happened. None of us want to see a civil war, and yet it may be becoming inevitable, though one always hopes that something—anything—may happen to avert it. Bram, just because he was an Afrikaner, desperately wanted it not to happen and knew that the only way out was not through apartheid and baaskap, more and more rigorously applied, but through non-racialism and equality of opportunity, education and responsibility.

Many English-speaking people were now beginning to leave the country, especially perhaps those with young children; they could not risk bringing them up or sending them to school in the South African atmosphere. They would miss the sunshine, the peculiar beauty and gaiety, but in the final count they had somewhere to go home to. The South African Jewish population tended to be enthusiastic Zionists, contributing handsomely in money, but also sometimes moving on to Israel, where at least they, too, had a home. Only the Afrikaners had nowhere to go. Bram realized this as acutely as any Afrikaner Nationalist. He felt the burden of his Afrikanerdom, the sin of his own people, whom he could never leave.

In 1954, under the Group Areas Act, the Indian schools in Johannesburg were shut down. But the Transvaal Indian Congress started a High School themselves. Here Mollie

Fischer worked as an unpaid voluntary teacher, in addition to all the many other things she was doing.

But for Bram's fellow Afrikaners, the African protests were certainly alarming, especially as presented by the Nationalist newspapers. In 1954 there were further meetings of the various groups, planning a "Congress of the People" at Kliptown near Johannesburg in June of 1955. Here a Freedom Charter calling for a democratic and a non-racial people's Government, was approved; the language was dignified and restrained, somewhat in the tone of America's Declaration of Independence. It had both young and old behind it, Kotane, Lutuli, Sisulu, Mandela. Later this Freedom Charter became the basis of the State's case; it was treason. It was apparent now, how much long-standing enmities or jealousies had melted away in the face of a common enemy. Yet, among non-political urban Africans, street fighting and rows tended to be along tribal divisions.

It was soon after these arrests that South Africa broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This must have been a distinct social relief, since the Russians had obstinately gone on holding mixed parties at the Embassy, which were probably as jolly as most Russian parties are. But this was another sign of fear.

In 1955 came the Sophiatown evictions, when the freeholders of an African township on the edge of white Johannesburg were thrown out in a nominal slum-clearance operation. Sophiatown, though it was slummy in parts, had many good houses, including that of Dr. Xuma, standing in their own little gardens. But it was bound to be over-crowded just because there was nowhere else inside the Johannesburg boundaries where Africans could buy land to build a house

on. Worse slums, where the houses were white-owned, had been left; Sophiatown was to suffer because it was government policy to have no African freehold house-owners in what they were going to turn into a "white area". After this there were to be no more African freeholders in or near white towns. There had been protests for two years and by now the world press was alerted. So when Robert Resha of the Youth League went down there with Father Huddleston, the eyes of the world were on Sophiatown, where two thousand heavily armed police had come to drive out one hundred and ten families. Gradually the rest left and white families moved into better houses. The new white suburb was called Triumph. There were plenty of other evictions, including that of Sibande, who could find nowhere to house his family, nobody even willing to let him work for them. His own house was sold at public auction for ten pounds.

About this time, too, came the start of the Bantu education policy, according to which "natives" were to be taught mostly in their own language (no matter if their families had lived in urban townships for a couple of generations and had almost forgotten it) with emphasis on such subjects as might be thought suitable for them in the role assigned to them by God and the Government. There was theological drill and a remarkably tendentious curriculum of history teaching. Pressure was put on private schools which attempted to teach anything else. Of course, children taught at primary school in "mother-tongue" with its few inadequate books, had much less chance of getting on at secondary where instruction was either in English or Afrikaans. This was clear to protesting parents but was no doubt part of the Government plan.

This went with the increasing interest in the political role of the Bantustans, the "home lands", which were about to be started. The official *Tomlinson Report on Separate Development* (1955) was due to be published. It went into the whole question of setting up Bantustans. This would cost £104 million over ten years on the infra-structure of these possible states, including water and agricultural development, roads, fencing, housing, interim industries until Bantu capital had accumulated, the setting up of the local government machinery, and so on. But could this possibly be sold to the Afrikaner elector? No. It is true that many of the Ministers for Bantu Affairs have struggled to get some of the recommendations put through, to get more money for this and that; they want to make the Bantustans viable, above all a success which can not only satisfy Bantu aspirations, but look good to the outside world.

But even the Tomlinson Report could not but consider the Bantustans (what an odd, bastard word!) as labour reserves. With the best will in the world, the wretched land of the Transkei could not have supported all the ama-Xhosa. Villages were envisaged without agricultural land, from which workers would come to the mines or to white industry, living away from their families most of the year, but sending back part of their wages. The best way out might be "border industries", the other side of the frontier, to which workers living within the Transkei could commute. But these, too, needed heavy cash inducements to start them when it was so much more convenient to the owners to get equally low-paid factory workers in white urban centres; in fact, few have been set up.

Again, the Tomlinson Report estimated that, to make the

Bantustans viable, thirty thousand new jobs a year would be needed over the next twenty-five years. However, the Minister for Bantu Affairs announced that over the first six years there had been a total of 945 new jobs. That is rather a devastating gap.

When Dr. Verwoerd took over in 1955, he was a different type from earlier Afrikaner Prime Ministers, a Stellenbosch intellectual with a degree in sociology, psychology and logic, of course within the framework of Calvinist ideology. His wife, too, was an intellectual, a lecturer, as well as being famous for her delicious *melkterte*, which are a superior kind of custard pie. He had thought out the doctrine and philosophy of apartheid and now was able to put it into practice, or at least to take the first steps. The Transkei, first of the Bantustans, was actually set up in 1963 with Chief Kaiser Matanzima as Prime Minister. We shall see more of what is happening there and in the other Bantustans. The emphasis on notionally self-governing Bantustans meant that the three white representatives of Africans who sat in Parliament, elected from the special roll, could be, and were, removed. Instead a Government-appointed Commissioner General was charged with the task of looking after each of the Bantustans. Since then there have been B.A.D. Ministers (i.e. Bantu Administration and Development) with deputies who are supposed to represent the Bantustans to the Government and also the Government to the Bantustans.

Meanwhile, what was the position of the Trade Unions? The old I.C.U. had come to an end around 1928. But there were other big unions, including the Mine Workers, the Garment Workers and the Food and Canning Workers, who had mixed membership or a parallel African membership.

Their leaders had worked to improve the conditions of both black and white workers. But this, of course, was "Communism" and must be attacked. Solly Sachs of the Garment Workers fought back; he had not only to defend himself and his union against defamatory words, but also broken bottles and brick-bats.

In the late forties there was considerable pressure to have a new kind of genuinely South African Trade Union more in accordance with the ideals of the Afrikaner church and *volk* and with no mixing of races. This was helped by some massive donations of money from anti-Communist well-wishers, and by all the moral and political weight of the Broederbond. Some unions which had been mixed, like the Food and Canning Workers, were forced to expel their African members.

In the fifties African Trade Unions as such ceased to exist. Schoeman, the Minister of Labour, was determined never to let the blacks organize. Strikes were forbidden by law and instead a paternalistic piece of bureaucratic machinery was set up to look after the poor natives. It has, of course, never worked. But even before these more drastic measures, in the mixed trade unions the tendency was for different entrances and different staffs at the headquarters. As one African ex-staff member told me: "We always said good morning to one another, but it never went any further." The very large Industrial Council for the Clothing Industry, founded by Solly Sachs, had a medical and provident fund; among the staff on the African side were several splendid women, among them Helen Joseph. It is worth remembering that Helen Joseph, who is now in her sixties, was under house arrest for eight years. She had her dog and

cat, but only a cancer operation has allowed her in 1971 to be released into hospital and human society and friendship once more, although of course it is still against the law to quote anything she says or writes.

Yet there were occasional victories. When the Transvaal Law Society petitioned to have Mandela struck off the rolls, he was successfully defended by Walter Pollock, Q.C. Another Q.C., Donald Molteno, defended Jo Matthews. This was brotherhood.

But shortly after that, at the end of 1956, there was another mass arrest and seizure of documents and letters. One hundred and fifty-six men and women, black and white, most of whom had been in the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955, were charged with a treasonable conspiracy against South Africa, inspired by international Communism. Some, in fact, were Communists, some not. Among them were Mandela, Sisulu, Kotane, Dr. Naicker, Professor Z. K. Matthews and his son, Jo, Oliver Tambo, Hilda and Rusty Bernstein, Helen Joseph, Lutuli, Robert Resha, Gert Sibande, Ruth First, Lilian Ngoye. After the preparatory examination, some of the accused were discharged. Most of the rest, including Mandela, were allowed bail, so that they spent their days in the dock facing a charge punishable by the death sentence, and their evenings in political and other work. Mandela by this time had a legal practice of his own.

The defence team, led by another Q.C., Mr. I. A. Maisels, took on what was to prove a four years' struggle, gradually breaking down the prosecution case. Vernon Berrangé had led in the preparatory examination, making a splendid address to the court. Bram was one of the ablest of the

defence team, talking over the evidence meticulously with all the accused, getting to know them and their problems. He was also acting in the early stages of a patents case in Southern Rhodesia, giving this all the professional care which was his pride and duty. This meant a 5 a.m. start in the office, but Bram was at the height of his powers. He was also a serving and valued member of the Johannesburg Bar Council.

We get a good idea of how he seemed to those he was defending from Helen Joseph, accused no. 2 in the Treason Trial, in her book *If This be Treason.* She is contrasting him with Vernon Berrangé, his leader, whom they all admired and trusted and who had served them so well in the preparatory stages. She says, "Bram Fischer was Vernon's opposite: sturdily built, fresh complexioned, with a gentle, almost boyish face, despite his now greying hair. But that gentle face was deceptive, for underneath Bram was indomitable, one of the most brilliant of advocates. He could pursue his way with a Crown witness just as relentlessly as Vernon; silver-tongued, he won the confidence of his witness with gentle skill. He didn't chase his witness into a corner and pin him down, indeed, he never raised his voice, but in the end, somehow, the witness turned out to have said just what Bram wanted him to say. We marvelled at his unerring technique. I think the Crown did, too, when they realized the fatal concessions their witnesses were making so unsuspectingly."

This was the first of the South African trials to affect the conscience of the western world. Clearly, many of the defendants were quite poor people who could not manage any of the expenses, and whose families would have a hard

time. So the International Defence and Aid Fund came into being, at first supplementing what the Quakers were already doing to help the families of those in jail.

The intention of the trial was to break the A.N.C., equating it with destructive world Communism. This was, of course, in the MacCarthy era; the same feelings were being aroused in America and in South Africa. It did not succeed, but the A.N.C. certainly suffered. It was still attempting to use non-violence, and the riots at Zeerust, for example, when the women protested against being made to carry passes, was against policy. But there were also splits within the movement.

In 1959, Robert Sobukwe, an able and ambitious young teacher, formed the P.A.C., the Pan African Congress, with no whites in it, although a few were admitted later, rather grudgingly. This was mostly in protest at what he considered the over great influence of the white Communists on the joint Action Committees with the A.N.C. since the banning of their own party, and who were increasingly responsible for policy. Sobukwe may have felt that Mandela had gone too far in friendship or alliance with the whites. But did that include the treason trial Defence Team? Yet it may also have been a genuine suspicion and dislike of Communism as such. Why should the Russians have so much say in African politics? Did they understand real African nationalism, or did they merely use it? Sobukwe thought he knew the answer. It was his party's idea to mass burn the passes, and perhaps this was something to do with the fact that they had not been at all active in earlier A.N.C. campaigns.

Nineteen fifty-nine was a year of riots and arrests. Bram

Fischer would refuse advantageous briefs from big companies in order to defend black or white comrades, Party or non-Party, in the Courts, although his main commitment was to the treason trial defendants. A few other lawyers also helped, refusing fees in the interests of justice. The South African Bar was still not allowing itself to be intimidated but there was a growing number of political appointments to the Bench. Then, in February 1960, Harold MacMillan broke with tradition by making his famous wind of change speech to the two Houses of the South African parliament. He said that black nationalism was a political fact and "we must come to terms with it". By this time both France and England were granting independence to their ex-colonies and these seemed to be going fairly well. But the speech was totally unexpected, especially from a Tory leader, and must have taken Dr. Verwoerd right on the chin. However, he spoke back, in the course of his speech using the very tendentious and much repeated phrase: "We settled a country which was bare." When South African ethnologists took air photographs showing the remains of the great kraal rings at various points on the Rand, some people thought them highly unpatriotic.

No doubt the reaction, both to MacMillan's speech and to the growing unpopularity of South Africa with the rest of the Commonwealth, helped on the voting which led to South Africa becoming a Republic at the end of 1960, leaving the Commonwealth a few months later. The voting was fairly close—it was won by less than 100,000 out of a (white) poll of about 1,600,000. South Africa still, however, shares certain economic advantages of a Commonwealth country and is determined to keep them in the E.E.C.

But that was in October. It was on March 21st that the police fired on a crowd of demonstrators at Sharpeville, killed 69 and wounded 180, while their officer called them unavailingly to stop. Fewer were killed at Langa in the Cape, but that was because a young man, Philip Kgosane, who in the photos looks like a quiet undergraduate in shorts and sandals and open-necked shirt, managed to persuade a mass demonstration to disperse peacefully, after he had argued with nervous police and made his points. Yet was not this control by an African leader almost equally alarming to the respectable?

It seems certain that in both cases the situation could have been controlled in other ways, that is, if the police had wanted not to kill. But a few of them had in fact been killed earlier on at another place; they were taking no chances. It was unfortunate that photographs showed obviously innocent and unarmed Africans dead, mostly shot in the back while running away, and the photographs found their way out of the country. Both these demonstrations had been led by militants of the P.A.C.

The forces of law and order could not allow for such things as argument and persuasion. In 1960 a State of Emergency was declared and lasted for five months, another sign of fear. Some 20,000 people were arrested, men and women, young and old. Bram was expecting them to come for him. The arrangement was that if there was a dawn knock, Mollie should go down and open to the police, and then chat with them in a loud voice so that Bram should hear and make a quick getaway. But when it came and she went down to the door in her nightgown, she called up very coolly: "Don't worry, dear. It's the police, but it's for me."

She went off, reasonably light-heartedly, under arrest. But Bram was completely furious. Half dressed, he ran down the drive after the police car, and, as they drove off with his Mollie, shouted after them: "I'll get you for this!"

He was not arrested himself this time, but it was a busy time for him and his few like-minded colleagues. For many of those arrested it was only a few months in prison, but for others longer sentences. Africans who had been arrested as "agitators" were banished from the urban areas where the authorities felt they were endangering them with their subversive doctrines, into rural, poverty-stricken, hungry areas. It was often a heavy punishment for an African intellectual or semi-intellectual from a city, especially if he found himself under the authority of a backward chief. But it spread the subversive doctrines into the rural areas.

The next Government move was the Unlawful Organizations Bill. This was intended to break both the A.N.C. and the P.A.C., as well as any other groups which might be named. Instead, it sent them underground.

6

Another Way

NOT MANY months before the banning of the A.N.C., its President, Chief Lutuli, spoke to an audience of some 1,500 people in Cape Town. They were for the most part white, some Liberals, but many just interested middle-brow United Party voters. Lutuli spoke of democracy, brotherhood and peaceful co-operation. The banning of the A.N.C. was to end all that. A whole generation—two generations even—had tried this "knocking in vain, patiently, moderately and modestly at a closed and barred door". Nothing had come of it. All the answer was a stepping up of penalties, even for a small, peaceful meeting. The answer of fear.

So what else could unbar the door? Was it possible to make them so uneasy, so insecure in spite of all the police, the regulations, the passes, that they would concede something? Was it possible that mounting fear might force a break somewhere, in this police state? It is incompatible with human dignity to be forever humiliated; it is incompatible with human honour to beg and beg. Once, our people fought.

Yet, in the nature of things, only a minority of any society is truly political. That is why democracy in its original Periclean sense meant that everyone, that is to say all citizens, must be interested. And that is also why it is so difficult to make it work in communities larger than

ancient Athens. Most people in the post-Periclean world are more interested in making money, in having security for their families, in sex and religion and sport. Of course all these are in a sense political, especially religion and sex in South Africa, but they are not specifically so. Yet most men and women will act politically over a short-term grievance or injustice, especially an economic one. This was clear in the bus boycotts organized by the A.N.C. against a raising of fares from the black locations to the places of work.

In earlier oppositions to tyrannies, the printing press had been much used. But it was not so easy here and carried hideously grave penalties, far worse than the Siberian exile of Tsarist times in Russia. Even a small press or a duplicator is easily seen and from the fifties on there were more and more police spies, often Africans on whom the police had some hold. In a poverty stricken society, especially if it is next door to a rich one, bribery is easy and cheap. Urban African communities were becoming increasingly degraded and broken up; the old tribal cohesions and loyalties had gone, helped by the missionaries who always suppressed initiations which, among other things, taught people something of their own culture and history. An anthropologist, who should have known, once told me that he did not think any African who had been through initiation would ever become a police spy; he would still be in an honourable relationship towards others. One cannot be certain of this; it may be a point of view. But instead of mutual loyalty, the highest aim of many was "a good time". If this meant robbery or even murder, that was just too bad.

A few urban Africans had done well in business; they had garages, shops, dry-cleaning establishments and, of

course, shebeens. But obstacles were always being put in their way and the police watched them in case they had bad thoughts or harboured subversive company. It was always possible, for instance, that a licence might be revoked; that is a powerful police weapon. But whatever they did, however law-abiding and successful, Africans could only get into their own imitation high society, never into that of their rulers. This applied equally to those in the professions. In Marxist terms there was a permanent black proletariat, with no funnelling off at the top into the bourgeoisie. Any white who happened to find himself in a proletarian economic situation, would be quickly pulled out. Bram's sister Ada, now married, was doing just this, and how often, when something was asked for on behalf of the Africans, the Afrikaner answer was: we must look after our own people!

But the police spies were not only Africans. Some of them were Special Branch professionals, who had mugged up Marxist phraseology, expressed all the right sympathies, or had even forged letters from trusted friends. It seems that this sort of dishonourable activity is inseparable from the holding of absolute political power, and that people can even be proud of outwitting those who offer them friendship. Of course, when "Communism" and "Liberalism" are presented as bogeys from pulpits and part of the press, the dim-witted are taken in, as they have been in other parts of the world. But the professional police spies were not dim-wits.

Another nasty class of people who have flourished increasingly in the police state atmosphere in South Africa are the professional torturers, the men (and sometimes women)

of the type who ran the German concentration camps and apparently enjoyed liquidating Jews, gypsies, Communists and other undesirables. If one reads the records of those who have survived a term of South African imprisonment, certain names re-appear, for instance, Swanepoel, Dirker, Greyling.

I am not a violent person; I disapprove profoundly of political assassination. But those who have personally committed certain crimes on other human beings, with enjoyment, appear not to merit survival.

Any of us who have lived in South Africa or its neighbouring countries, have met the ordinary Special Branch, usually rather large chaps, quite jolly when drunk, keen photographers. Quite possibly some of them mean no harm. One gets an idea of their general calibre from a book such as Forman and Sachs' *The Treason Trial*, when Berrangé, leading for the defence, pulled them and their evidence to pieces with no trouble at all. Even the magistrates couldn't help laughing. But it is not so laughable to be in their power. They are also the elegant young men with English accents, real dishes, some of them, ready to join in and profess sympathy, rather more subtle destroyers. James Bond fans, no doubt.

Up to a point, the penalties against all political activities worked. There had been a lot of chalking and sign painting, often by young white Liberals. But the risks were getting too great. The signs have now largely disappeared. A stranger can go into Johannesburg and believe that there is no "trouble". It is a curious city. There are quiet and beautiful areas, full of flowering trees and green spaces and pleasant houses set well back with pools and fruit trees and vine terraces. The middle of the city is mixed; there are

new high blocks, yet much of it is still rather like a frontier town, and probably many Jo'burgers like it that way. There are a few bookshops, in some of which banned books have an under-the-counter sale. Most articles for domestic consumption are showy and uncouth. Frills and wriggles and "hand painting" seem to predominate. In fact, it is the taste of the small farmers' wives who have never been in touch with great art and would not approve of it if they had.

It is a sad place for artists and writers, who get more and more disheartened. Some retreat into ivory towers or into angry, vain protests. It is also dangerous. There is constant robbery and violence. And again it is almost impossible to see or speak to an African as a friend without breaking some law. A kind, white employer, stretching a rule in order to help a black employee, perhaps to see a relative, may land in trouble herself. A young, white volunteer teacher, trying to see a Motswana girl whom he had taught in school, but who had, owing to family circumstances, to take a job in Jo'burg, told me how the atmosphere had smeared over with guilt his totally innocent talk with her in her "quarters". Under the tourist image of sunshine and relaxation, there is deep anger and unhappiness, only masked by formal politeness.

Unfortunately, it is clear how much the Johannesburg values have corrupted the Africans in surrounding places and countries. Anything from Jo'burg is O.K. Much is tailored for the African market, including the comics, based on the good time concept, featuring sex and sport. The serious African papers have gone downhill, partly on discouragement, partly on straight censorship. And they started so well!

Movements involving Europeans who were not even "Liberals" came into being, including the Black Sash: ladies who protested silently against obvious injustices, wearing their black sashes. But they, too, were the target of young louts who screeched at them, calling them kaffir-lovers, a usual term of lower-class Afrikaner abuse, or threw tomatoes and eggs, while the police were amiably permissive. During the fifties, much of the protest and many demonstrations had been run by women. But prison conditions were as tough for African women as for men, good food and adequate sanitation not to be had. Only, somehow, they went on singing.

Alan Paton led the Liberal Party in Natal. Leo Marquard and Margaret Ballinger were among his stalwarts. But most of the party could not quite bring themselves to say: One man, one vote. From time to time some person or family could stand it no longer and left for Europe. It did not, of course, stop members of the Liberal Party from being vilified and put under house arrest as notional "Communists".

But by 1960 many of the African intellectuals were out of action. Z. K. Matthews was "detained". The politically involved younger members of his family were elsewhere. There was no income coming in. And Mrs. Matthews, with a home to keep up and children still to educate, was considerably worried. It was then that Bram Fischer turned up, with reassuring news and friendliness. He pocketed one or two outstanding bills and that was the last she saw of them.

This was a time of terrible stress. Almost all the known leaders had been imprisoned. This now included Mollie Fischer. Another was Robert Sobukwe, arrested during the

1960 State of Emergency, whose term of imprisonment was always being extended whenever it seemed to be coming to an end. Perhaps his mistake was in a certain *panache*. He wanted to lead from in front, and did it well. But the times called for leading from behind.

In April 1960 the defence team had been forced to withdraw from the treason trial. The emergency regulations made it impossible for them to continue, but they had made so many holes in the prosecution case that it could only flounder on. There were several lawyers among the accused, but it was Mandela who conducted most of the rest of the defence; he had grown in stature, in intelligence and devotion and capability. People were aware that here was a somebody. The government was aware of it, too. Part of this had been brought out by the defence team led by Israel Maisels, Q.C., in their examination of Mandela as a witness; it became clear that neither he himself nor the A.N.C. as a whole were Communist in any meaningful sense. Above all he impressed the judges. So, it seems, did some of the other accused, including Kathrada, who took on the examination of witnesses during the period of the Emergency Regulations when the defence team had to leave them, but the trial, it was ruled, must go on.

However, the State of Emergency was lifted in August and the team came back. This time Bram asked the presiding judge to recuse himself (that is, to resign from the case) on the grounds that he had consistently been on the side of the State, involving himself in political argument with the witnesses which showed constant hostility to the African case. But Mr. Justice Rumpff refused to be moved. Yet, as time went on, he became increasingly impatient with the

inadequacy and stupidity of the prosecution and its contentions. Finally, in March 1961, more than four years after the accused were arrested, the court cut Bram short in his arguments. Here probably Bram had used his brilliant technique of under-statement, in which he put forward the stages of his argument so gently that the judge felt that it was not the advocate but himself who had reached the final, logical conclusion. The judge president called the accused to their feet and said: "You are found not guilty and discharged and you may go."

But by now the A.N.C. and P.A.C. were banned. A few people, including Oliver Tambo, went out of South Africa in order to get things going abroad. Mandela had been banned from any political gathering for nine years. This was due to expire in March 1961. He went into hiding, then suddenly appeared at the All-in African Conference which had been called by whichever of the leaders were not actually in jail. He came barefoot, a delegate from his village among other village delegates. One of the few facts of life which make things slightly easier for African opposition is that, to many whites, all blacks look alike. So a man can disappear into a sea of faces. Of course this also holds the other way round; one's African friends sometimes don't know one! It certainly helped during the dark days of 1961.

From that day on, Nelson Mandela was underground, only appearing now and then, always with devastating effect. The All-in Conference, which was supported by many Liberals and others, called for a national convention to draft a new non-apartheid constitution for South Africa, and a general strike to drive the demand home.

There was strong support for the strike, and the Govern-

ment had to rush through legislation to allow them to detain suspects without trial. Of course all meetings were banned, and some 10,000 Africans were arrested and put in jail. Even the usually critical opposition press was bullied into suppressing news. But it is clear that there was widespread support; students, for instance, stayed away from classes. Yet it ended in a state of confusion between ex-A.N.C. and ex-P.A.C. leaders. Mandela was passionately anti-Bantustan and anti-Matanzima. So were most of the others. Theoretically they were, of course, correct, since part of the Bantustan idea was to break up pan-African loyalties, but when one watches what is happening, one feels that possibly it is all turning out rather differently, as things sometimes do. Those whom they branded as traitors may now at this particular moment of history be one of the more pragmatically potent anti-Government forces. The needling and protests from the Transkei, which cannot simply be suppressed without a great deal of word-eating and a bad image abroad, may be doing something important. Matanzima (no democrat, he!) has become something of a hero figure with the township masses, while the uncompromising heroes are rotting in prison. Perhaps the masses have something. But the Transkei was Mandela's own country; he could no more take what was happening there at an impersonal level, than Nehru could over Kashmir.

The other Bantustan which is emerging as a force against Government policies is, of course, that of the Zulu nation, led by Chief Gaitsha Buthelezi. Increasingly it makes political nonsense for the Prime Minister of the South African Republic to be on good social and diplomatic terms

with Dr. Banda of Malawi and to turn his back on any idea of meeting the black leaders of his own country for any meaningful discussion. Meanwhile, his Minister for Bantu Affairs continues to try to treat the Zulu people, including highly educated and able persons, as children who cannot be allowed at a conference table, and whose demands must always be met by a somewhat hysterical "No".

In December, 1961, Chief Lutuli was presented with the Nobel Peace Prize. Perhaps it was partly a political gesture, but it gave another platform to the freedom movement. There were some A.N.C. representatives regularly attending U.N. sessions, pressing for economic sanctions against South Africa.

By now, there was considerable student interest. N.U.S.A.S., the National Union of South African Students, had recently become active. White students were beginning to realize that they must help. Of course this was only in the English-speaking universities, which used to have African students, but, under the Bantu education system, were no longer allowed to enrol them. Since then, N.U.S.A.S. has been almost constantly attacked by the Government. Meanwhile, the Afrikaner universities made great play with their Calvinist anti-freedom doctrines.

There was no violence during the strike. The motto was non-collaboration. But organized non-violence was an import from India. It had worked there because the British raj still had a conscience. But it does not work on those who are immune to love and forgiveness. And there were other ideas being imported, for example from Algeria. Mandela and others stayed underground as outlaws; he managed to get to the Addis Ababa conference of the Pan African

freedom movement, and explained what was happening and why a new method of opposition was being tried.

For it was realized that in face of all the guns of all the whites—and the Government armoured cars, tanks and helicopters were matched by the Afrikaner ladies at pistol practice, ready to shoot any black with a disrespectful look—there had to be another answer. In October of 1961 Government buildings, pylons, telephone wires and similar objectives, were attacked, blown up or destroyed. This was the work of Umkonto we Sizwe, the spearhead of the nation. Another chapter was being opened.

However, the older A.N.C. people, including always Lutuli, "the Chief", loved and revered by all, black or white, were very definitely non-violent. Simon Mkalipe, the man who so embarrassed the judges when he read to them from the Book of Daniel, said in his evidence: "My Lords, if that could come, that the African National Congress could change its policy from non-violence into violence, I would withdraw my participation in the liberation movement of the Africans." That is definite enough.

7

The Spear Head

EFFICIENT SABOTAGE avoiding damage to people is not easy. Home-made bombs go off in the wrong place or, if they go off in the intended place, may kill some harmless person. It is not fun. It is not like washing the spears in a war. Yes, it frightens people, but in doing so makes them nastier, crueller, harder. And may do the same to you. Once you start violence it is impossible to keep out the naturally rough and reckless people, including the thugs who exist in all societies and who are attracted by the whiff of violent conspiracy. And again, private vengeance will pretend to be public protest. Nor are those who are most politically educated, necessarily the best at making explosives. The people who had to decide that violence was the only way, knew it all, only too well. They could not entirely avoid the bad effects of a sabotage campaign. Yet the official line made all "terrorists" alike.

No doubt some people in P.O.Q.O. (the name means much the same as Sinn Fein, not all of whom were angels) were out for revenge. But most had thought out what they were going to do and why. These were Xhosa people, descendants of fighters, not urbanized, and in an area where there was little A.N.C. organization. They were efficient and ruthless. The people they killed were or had been police informers. But others were threatened or bullied, including some other Africans, possibly not Xhosa, who had taken a

comparatively non-political line and were, for example, in business. They did some burning and looting, especially in and around Paarl, where they almost captured the police station. The movement was short-lived; after a few months the police got onto it and repressed it bloodily. It is still uncertain whether P.O.Q.O. was involved in the apparently non-political Bashee River murders. Perhaps the full story will never be known.

And again, there were some leaders of A.N.C. and P.A.C. who did little to help their cause. Even allowing for anger and frustration, Potlako Leballo of P.A.C. struck me as the most difficult person I ever came across to have any kind of meaningful discussion with. Those who, because of their situation, were unable to act, continued to boast. This of course normally happens to forced exiles from any country. But Nelson Rohihlahla Mandela, brilliantly escaping to tour the capitals of Africa and Europe on behalf of his people, and then coming back to live underground in various disguises, but appearing suddenly to give explicit directions or splendid encouragement, he was a leader, a symbol, someone to speak about forever.

The sabotage campaign was a good deal more successful than the Afrikaner Nationalists wanted the rest of the world to know. But it was not terrorism against people, since that would only intensify the inter-racial bitterness. Above all it was not an assassination campaign. White politicians had nothing personal to fear. But violence had been used by the white Government increasingly; I have pointed this out in a number of instances, although much has been left out. They had left the African resistance movement no choice "but to hit back by all means in our power in defence of

our people, our future and our freedom". I quote from the 1961 manifesto of Umkonto we Sizwe—the spearhead of the nation.

Yet it was never an easy decision. Many of the older leaders of the A.N.C. had been teachers, ministers of religion, and so on, people whose whole philosophy of life and practice had been one of patience and an attempt to understand other people's difficulties and stupidities. Some of them may well have felt that if they did not themselves take some of the responsibility for violence, it would be left entirely in the hands of the younger people, whose whole lives had been spent in bitterness and frustration, and they might well let it rip and get out of political control. Whatever happens in the future, it may well be the unending patience of the older African leaders and their continuous attempts at understanding which astonished whites will have to hope for, perhaps not in vain.

Various leaders were consulted, but it would have been stupid and indeed impossible, to consult the A.N.C. as a whole, since it was a mass organization. Its job was political propaganda and organization and it was specifically non-violent. This had been emphasized at meeting after meeting, and at times when people had been so angry that violence looked likely and excusable. But individual members of A.N.C., using what Mandela later called "controlled violence", would not be subject to party discipline; they would obey their own consciences. The A.N.C. leaders were passionately against civil war as such; they knew the centuries of hatred it would engender on both sides. Besides, so many of them had experienced non-racial comradeship. What they were doing was essentially symbolic. They were

saying: These are selected targets, centres of Government oppression; we are putting them out of action. Saying: before it is too late—look and think.

In fact, things did not work out that way. There was no response from the whites. They were merely prepared to meet violence with violence and with "standing firm". Civil war came nearer. This led on to a study of guerilla warfare and an increasing involvement with revolutionary movements elsewhere. A few Africans went north to Tanzania or Algeria for training. From the other side came the death penalty for sabotage in 1962, and a year later, as we shall see, the ninety-day detention, to allow police to interrogate any suspects.

It became necessary for the high command of the African resistance movement to find themselves a headquarters. This was Lilieleaf farm in Rivonia, just outside Johannesburg. It was a large and imposing house with plenty of rooms and an arty, steep-pitched roof, standing in its own twenty-eight acres of grounds. It did not look at all like a revolutionary headquarters. Arthur Goldreich was a suitable tenant, not only interested in the arts, but also an ex-soldier of the Haganah, the terrorist wing in Palestine. No doubt he and some of the leaders had much to say to one another. What came of this will be seen in the next chapter. Mandela started visiting at Rivonia in the latter half of 1961; later on he stayed, disguised, close to the Goldreich family. But he was constantly on the move. After seventeen months in hiding, but never far from those he was encouraging, instructing and leading, he was caught by the police, on information given by an informer.

Meanwhile, the sabotage campaign had gone on. The

agents were not necessarily known to one another, nor even in the same grouping or, for that matter, with exactly the same ideology in regard to what they were doing. But all were very careful about human life, in fact the only time when someone was accidentally killed, it was a young white, John Harris, who had planted the bomb. He was not even a member of Umkonto; once he had been in the Liberal party, but had joined the African Resistance Movement which hoped to induce a change of policy through sabotage, though what he did was entirely his own idea. He paid for it with his own death, by legal execution. But this could not entirely pay for the bad effect it had on the public. And yet it did something else. It showed in a hard, clear light that there were whites, too, who were prepared not only to live, but also to die, for African freedom.

There were others in the African Resistance Movement, the A.R.M. It was a small body, but it had some tough, intelligent and entirely committed members. Most of them had realized that turning the other cheek to an Afrikaner policeman had no effect at all. This was a pity but true. They were responsible for some successful sabotage. The same could, I think, be said for other bodies.

Mandela's trial was held in Pretoria, starting in October, 1962, on charges of inciting the 1961 strike and leaving the country without a valid travel document. He conducted his own defence, making a superb speech and pulling the prosecution witnesses to pieces, including police of various kinds. He, a lawyer, who had so many loyal white friends and colleagues, said at one point: "I hate race discrimination most intensely and in all its manifestations. I have fought it all during my life; I fight it now, and will do so until the

end of my days. Even although I now happen to be tried by one whose opinion I hold in high esteem, I detest most violently the set-up that surrounds me here. It makes me feel that I am a Black man in a White man's court. This should not be. I should feel perfectly at ease and at home with the assurance that I am being tried by a fellow South African who does not regard me as an inferior, entitled to a special type of justice." And again: "Broadly speaking, Africans and Whites in this country have no common standards of fairness, morality and ethics, and it would be very difficult to determine on my part what standard of fairness and justice Your Worship has in mind."

This was terribly true, and how painful it must have been for the South African minority to feel themselves accused in this way. And know it was true. Already Bram Fischer was beginning to understand that it might be laid on him to show that it was not universally true.

Mandela spoke of his life as an exile, the separation from a beautiful wife, and from their children. He said of this: "But there comes a time, as it came in my life, when a man is denied the right to live a normal life, when he can only live the life of an outlaw because the Government has so decreed to use the law to impose a state of outlawry upon him." Nothing had any effect in turning the course of white justice, and he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. If they could have connected him, at this time, with the sabotage campaign, no doubt it would have been worse, but this they had not yet managed to do, though they must have suspected.

By now an increasing number of people, including whites, had been arrested, questioned and imprisoned, often without

being able to communicate with their homes or with a lawyer. Probably physical torture was more used on the Africans, and in any case their general treatment was worse. But there are various techniques for dealing with the effects of pain and fear and loneliness; some of these had been more or less scientifically worked out by the Communists. One only hopes they are still standing Bram in good stead. No doubt one technique deals with minimizing the effect of total boredom when someone used to action and thinking, to quick sorting out of the news and decision making, is kept entirely without knowledge of what is going on in the outside world. For how many months, for how many years, will such techniques work?

Certainly, there were many people who could not stand up to skilled questioning, combined perhaps, with threats to the prisoner's family and friends and statements to the effect that someone else had given everything away. Can one blame them? Are any of us totally sure of acting well in this kind of situation?

A number of books have by now detailed the treatment of political prisoners in South Africa. These have almost all been by white prisoners; one must remember that African, Indian and Coloured prisoners are always treated much worse, especially the Africans, however much they may have been members of learned professions. That did not save them from filthy, louse and bug infested blankets and insufficient food, revoltingly served: nor from sanitary conditions perhaps no worse than those in 18th century Europe, but inexcusable today. Yet prison treatment was quite sufficiently unpleasant for the European prisoners, none of whom were members of the "criminal classes".

Bram knew all this; he had consulted with prisoners, for example during the long months of the treason trial between 1958 and 1961. He had his eyes open. He knew what he might have to suffer. Or part of it. Clearly he was still doing things of a kind which were against the law; he would know this far more clearly than an ordinary non-legal person, who might sometimes be uncertain. He did these things because he knew they were right. This rightness outweighed the fact that they were illegal. I think we can guess what kind of things they were.

Month after month, the police net was closing. There were more raids, especially on those who had ever been previously arrested, especially in the big treason trial sweep. Books and periodicals were banned. It became a crime to happen to have old numbers of banned magazines, perhaps sent in by someone from outside who didn't realize they were putting a friend into danger. There were police raids, suspicious matter taken out of people's houses; and it was for only semi-literate policemen to judge what was suspicious! Letters were of course opened in the mail, and still are. And there was constant watching and harassment of anyone suspected of being "Liberalistic". Yet it was hard for those who had supposed themselves to be living in a civilized country to adapt themselves completely. Some were careless; they left files or lists of names where the police could find them. It is difficult to learn total mistrust. We in Europe learnt the hard way in various national resistance movements, during World War II. It is something one learns by doing.

Yet by now more and more people from outside were beginning to find themselves involved in African affairs. The

authorities were not quite so prepared, eight or nine years ago, as they are now to crack down on the dissident but highly respectable churches or on "heretical" Christians. Bishop Reeves and Archbishop de Blank could still for a time come and go and speak about what was happening. Certainly there were differences in exactly where the various churches dug in their toes on apartheid, where and how compromise took over. Much depended on their environment and, perhaps always, on a few committed people.

The image of South Africa was changing for the worse; it only stayed good for those who were willing to accept official explanations and excuses, or for those—an increasing number—who saw it as a place where cheap labour, firmly held in place, would maximize profits. More and more British and other European firms developed subsidiaries in South Africa and it was only when shareholders managed to put on pressure that they either considered pulling out or at least trying to give their African employees a few side benefits which would bring them a little nearer the "poverty datum line" above which so few African workers ever rise.

8

Rivonia

The 1962 General Law Amendment Act, introduced by Vorster, made almost anything a crime, possibly punishable by death: possessing firearms, going on strike, painting slogans, endangering law and order. The net could be extended indefinitely. There was provision for summary trials with an element of secrecy and without a preliminary investigation before a magistrate, retrial after acquittal, the lot. There were special powers against persons "listed" as Communists, even those who had never been near the party or were, in fact, anti-Communist. A great many people all over South Africa woke up and protested, not least the lawyers who saw in this a denigration and shaming of the law. But the Commissioner of Police gave public thanks for legislation which would provide his men with the necessary equipment to rid the Republic of its enemies.

Under one clause of the Act, no speeches or writing from a list of 102 people could be published. One was taken back, to the fiercely ironic abuse of an illiterate ruling class in Roy Campbell's *The Wayzgoose*, forty years before. For all this was not only the police, not only the machinery of oppression, the sound of the car stopping and the heavy steps; it was the mob; it was the filthy abuse; it was the anonymous dirty phone calls. Or children wanting their mothers at birthday parties, but mother banned from any such "gathering".

The Publications and Entertainments Bill provided for blanket censorship of almost everything. Nothing new could be started. More and more intelligent and therefore "liberal" people lost their jobs or were unable to go on with them owing to the conditions which were imposed. Then in 1963 came the Security Bill under which anyone could be arrested and held for ninety days without any rights at all, including the right to see a lawyer. In the ninety days of solitary imprisonment and police questioning, always including some form of torture unless people spoke at once, even the strongest can be broken. They will say what is wanted. Or manage to kill themselves. And, increasingly, their friends and relatives outside knew this.

On July 11th, 1963, the police raided Lillieleaf Farm in Rivonia. They caught Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Lionel (Rusty) Bernstein, Ahmed Kathrada, Denis Goldberg, Bob Hepple and Arthur Goldreich. But Arthur Goldreich managed to escape, though they arrested and held his young wife in solitary confinement for three months trying to get her to talk. Harold Wolpe, who was arrested immediately after the others, escaped with him; so did two other Indians, prisoners on the African side. A 19-year-old warder charged with helping them to escape was sentenced to six years' imprisonment; that was the atmosphere of fury, especially at losing Goldreich, whom they assumed to have been a king-pin of the loathsome Communist conspiracy. The rest were held in solitary confinement until October, then brought out into court along with Nelson Mandela, almost unrecognizable after two years in solitary, twenty-three hours out of twenty-four, in conditions thought suitable for Africans, although he was allowed some law books for study.

Two other Africans arrested weeks before were also brought in. The other prisoner was Jimmy Kantor, whose only crime was to have been Harold Wolpe's quite unpolitical brother-in-law and legal partner.

Since the date of the arrest all the mass media, of course including the Dutch Reformed Churches, had been turned on to make the Rivonia prisoners appear guilty of "violent and hellish revolution". The fears of a white minority, however well armed, in a black country, worse, in a black continent, were whipped up. There were constant new arrests and terrifying police questioning, including 70-year-old Mr. First, Ruth First's father. By the time of the trial the guilt of the Rivonia prisoners for every terror and every discomfort of their masters was assumed to be proved. So much for the background in which it might seem than an even partially fair trial was unlikely.

So now we set the scene. The Judge President of the Transvaal, Mr. de Wet, is there to try the eleven men on charges of direst conspiracy, all carrying the death sentence. The defence, with Joel Joffe, as always the attorney in charge, has not even been told the terms of the indictment until the day before. The defence counsel asks for a six weeks' adjournment. He is given three weeks. He is, of course, Bram Fischer. All the defendants had asked for him.

Of course? Bram had been at the farm at Rivonia, just as Harold Wolpe had. Harold, knowing he probably faced a death sentence, managed to escape out of the country; one can be sure he had friends helping him. Bram, as he said quietly to someone, bought himself a short immunity by appearing for the defence. Even in South Africa it would have looked bad to arrest the leading counsel; they could

scarcely defy world opinion that far. But in any case Bram now had increased responsibilities in the Freedom leadership. And also under it all there was the strange obstinacy of the Afrikaner; he could not desert his country. Under all his kindness and gentleness and understanding there was a hard core: ***Hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders.*** He would not leave Afrikanerdom in its dire moral state. When his comrades were in two minds about going, he always told them their duty was to stay, if necessary to go underground. This was something he felt so deeply about that there was no question. His friends knew it was useless even trying to persuade him to leave. Some of them were Jewish. They had made their homes in South Africa and loved it and felt themselves to be South Africans, but yet, for those who had suffered from centuries of the diaspora, it was perhaps a little easier to find a home elsewhere.

Yet it would not be easy for Bram Fischer to examine the accused. He knew too much. A slip of the tongue, an incautious look even, from someone tired and desperate, and it would be clear that counsel's position was in fact the same as that of the man in the dock. But this was a risk he had to take. It was also, of course, a risk that his wife knew about and approved. One courage strengthened the other.

The legal side had to be built up. Bram had immediately found two juniors, George Bizos who had escaped from the Nazis in Greece, as a child, before the days of the Colonels: and Arthur Chaskalson, a young barrister with a rising reputation. Israel Maissels was by this time Judge of the High Court in Rhodesia. Berrangé was in England, but was now arranging to come over. Understandably enough, not all counsel of the South African Bar wanted to take

this case. But there was one other member of the team. Bram had Mollie with him, full time; she was as completely trusted by all connected with the prisoners as he himself was. What more could one say?

Many of the families needed comfort; some needed material help of other kinds. They went, as a matter of course, to Bram and Mollie. It had always been like that. Some people have a kind of inner strength on which others can draw. This was how it was with those two. Nobody has been able to take their place.

Dr. Lowen appeared for James Kantor; he, too, like Bizos, was a refugee from the Nazis and his earliest legal experience was in Nazi-engineered trials in Germany. But Bob Hepple was not legally represented; he had agreed to give evidence against the accused, for the State. Luckily for his own peace of mind he made a break and got out of South Africa before he was called. In fact, he had made a statement while in solitary confinement, under police pressure and threats. But he refused to be a political tool.

On the first day of the trial Bram begins his attack on the indictment, in his slightly diffident, but utterly effective way. It has been remarkably badly framed; the accused still do not know exactly what charges they have to answer; he must have time to examine it thoroughly; he also says "the accused in this case are the people who carry the deep respect of a very large proportion of the population and for this reason alone, justice should be seen to be done". In fact, the indictment is a political rather than a legal document; Bram tears it gently to pieces. Inside the court it is hot and difficult to hear; it is an old nineteenth-century building with curtains and carvings, and Mr. Justice de Wet

in a kind of four-posted pulpit; an old electric fan, high up, barely stirs the air. The court is so crammed with armed police and specials that there is little room for spectators, though most of the wives are there, Winnie Mandela not able, at this trial, to wear her splendid Tembu dress, but still a remarkably beautiful woman. Seats are kept for a few privileged observers from foreign embassies or official bodies. Outside, rain, heavy rain clearing to drizzle on the police and the police dogs and on the quiet, patient African crowds in the Square at Pretoria, unable to get in, only wishing well, forever well, to their leaders in mortal danger.

Dr. Yutar is the prosecutor, the same Dr. Yutar as in the trials of 1947 and 1948, but even more deeply committed to Government policy. His first set-back comes when Mr. Justice de Wet, conceding that the State has not supplied sufficient details of its allegations, quashes the indictment. Legally the prisoners are free. Joel Joffe, their attorney, knowing what is certain to happen, tries to clear a way so that their wives can speak to them and kiss them again. But the Special Branch intervene; the prisoners, struggling to speak to their families, are re-arrested and pushed down into the cells. The only sound in the grim quiet is one girl sobbing.

The new trial opened formally in December. The State's indictment was little better, though it was longer, but clearly the judge wanted to get on with things. All pleaded not guilty to the rather ridiculous string of charges. Then Yutar swung into it; sabotage, violence and destruction, planned, engineered and directed by the A.N.C. with its headquarters at Rivonia, but a terrifying network of tentacles spread out elsewhere, a "vast Communist machine"

ready to assail and overwhelm white civilization with bombs, hand grenades, mines, and of course unlimited money from all sorts of hideous and powerful external sources, intent on the destruction of Christian Afrikanerdom. He spoke of plans for a mass escape of the prisoners, of new plots; he worked himself into an embarrassing state of hysteria. State witnesses were brought in, thoroughly coached and cowed, repeating statements they appeared to have learnt by heart. We in our time have seen this in too many countries. Berrangé was now back and made hay of their statements.

Twenty-nine of the State witnesses had been held under the ninety-day law, some of them mothers with young children. Who would not agree to a few lies?—even if perhaps it tipped the balance towards someone else's death sentence. The African foreman at Lillieleaf farm, who knew nothing about the business of the visitors, had been very unpleasantly assaulted by the police. Was what he said true? He answered: "A man speaks better when he has not been hit." And to be questioned and threatened day after day until one doubts one's own mind and memory?

As it happened, this man was asked in court to identify those whom he had seen at Lillieleaf farm. It was known that this would probably be the procedure. He might have identified not only those in the dock, but also Bram, whom he had seen several times. On this, Bram was begged to absent himself from court for a while. He refused to do so. It would have been improper for defence counsel. The foreman looked all round the court, but, for whatever reason, did not recognize Bram.

In February the privileged seats for foreign officials and

observers were no longer allowed. This was because one, Dr. Carter, appears to have made a face expressive of disbelief during the evidence of one of the State witnesses.

All this time the Presiding Judge is largely silent; perhaps he dislikes both sides almost equally. But he is, inevitably, on the side of law and order. And sometimes law and order say one thing and justice another. Jimmy Kantor is allowed to go at last, with his legal practice ruined, his house sold, on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He could have got out of it all immediately and simply, by betraying someone he knew well, who had helped with his partner's escape. But he did not do so. Human decency and loyalty remain.

Now there were five weeks left for the defence team to examine all the State evidence, including piles of documents, some relevant, some not. On the main charges, three people had nothing in the way of conspiracy proved against them; these were Rusty Bernstein, Raymond Mhlaba, who was one of the Africans, and the very intelligent and devoted young Indian, Ahmed Kathrada. They pleaded not guilty. For the others, the evidence of conspiracy, though not to make a bloody and immediate revolution, was overwhelming against some. But no doubt there were collective decisions on what pleas to make and who were to defend in court the principles which they all held. It was not easy for counsel to consult with them or advise them; all consultations in the prison waiting room went quickly back to Dr. Yutar. Any sign that Bram knew more than a lawyer should, must be watched for and suppressed.

Nelson Mandela, in his prison, had been writing final papers for a London University law degree. He passed. A useless degree for a man forever stopped from using it?

Perhaps. But, somehow, the mind must be kept going, the bright mind. Meanwhile, he must prepare his speech from the dock. It was a magnificent speech, dealing with the foundation of Umkhonto, the reluctance of the A.N.C. to consider violence at all, and the fact that the aims of the A.N.C. and the Communist Party differed. He spoke of his childhood; he spoke of suffering and freedom and harmony; it was a five-hour speech, carefully argued, listened to by the judge and the press at least. He ended: "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But, if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

As Mandela had perhaps hoped, but maybe is never to know, this speech was reported all round the world. Far off in Scotland I cut it out of the *Observer*. I have it still.

Others were examined, kindly by Bram, and cross-examined with a tone of racial sarcasm which infuriated Berrangé and others, and in such a way that they and their colleagues were as far as possible smeared, by Dr. Yutar. But, of course, that was his job. Sisulu went through this and Kathrada who had been and remained, a Communist Party member. There was some anger in court. Yutar denied that police went about arresting people indiscriminately. Sisulu looked at him, told him they had arrested his wife and son without evidence, while he himself had been arrested

six times in one year by Warrant Officer Duiker. He added: "I wish you were an African and could find out what persecution really means." Rusty Bernstein, in cross-examination, answered that he was a Communist Party member up to the time of its dissolution; with the rest he refused to answer more or to give names. All this annoyed Justice de Wet. Naturally Yutar also wished to smear Bram, counsel for the defence, in the eyes of the judge and the public. From his point of view and assuming he believed totally in Government policy, he was presumably entitled to use any and every weapon—that is, if he could find this consistent with his duty as a member of the Bar. Yet one might have supposed that certain professional decencies would have been observed. If the Special Branch had managed to get any completely firm evidence on Bram, they would no doubt have gone right ahead. They must have tried to get it from some of the prisoners. But in order to get it they would have to twist the minds of their witnesses to believe evil of Bram, and this they could not yet do. In fact, he was so much loved that, even under duress, he was the last person anyone would name.

However, it is clear that during the Rivonia investigations by the State, which were extremely thorough, they were gradually beginning to discover almost enough evidence to convict Bram. Some may even have come out during the actual examinations of witnesses in the trial. He would have been aware of the mounting danger; so would Mollie. It made no difference to their actions; we do not know what they dreamed.

It was clear that Dr. Yutar was also trying to put Christian Aid and Defence and Aid into the dock. To some

extent he succeeded. He gave them a bad name with the Government and with the average Afrikaner elector.

Govan Mbeki, perhaps the most experienced politician, well-educated, an ex-teacher, admitting to all the counts against him, explained that he had a moral duty to tell the court the reasons why he joined the named organizations, including Umkonto. But again he gave no names. Denis Goldberg, too, felt he must give his reasons. He was an engineer; after thinking it over, he had decided that, because he believed in African freedom and because, now, there seemed to be only one way of achieving it, he ought to give certain pieces of technical information to Umkonto, which could be used for sabotage. In fact, he had, on technical grounds, advised against the practicality of anything like guerilla war; not that this was accepted by the judge. Some very definite lies had been told about him by State witnesses; he had to clear himself.

It is sad to re-read in old newspapers the moral indignation and even promises of intervention from other African countries, from India, the U.S.A. and the British Labour and Liberal parties—and indeed others. Pressure on the South African Government, sanctions—everything was talked about; little was done. Yet the threats, the telegrams, even perhaps the arguments, had some effect on some people, not necessarily acknowledged. It is just not true that international intervention merely drives countries into laager; the wiser ones attend, make adjustments, know they cannot afford to be everyone's enemy. That was why the defence team and their friends spent time and energy in organizing and getting information to overseas pressure groups.

Yet I remember also, a story from the next year, 1965.

In a certain prison the African prisoners had got the news and shouted with delight to hear that the Labour Party had won the British election: "They'll get us out!" It was no more probable than that the Russian or Chinese Communist governments would ever have actually intervened in a practical way. The U.N., whose job, perhaps, it was, is remarkably powerless. As for Great Britain and the United States, these are "democracies" which means that their governments must do what the electorate want, or at least that is the big idea. Are most of the electorate interested in what happens to prisoners in South Africa? Not on your life.

So now to go back to the Rivonia trial and Bram Fischer coming into court with his brows contracted under his white hair and the ends of his white legal cravat floating out. The defence finished; they had hoped to get one more witness but he was not forthcoming. Probably he was too scared.

At the end of it all, Yutar, armed with three bound volumes of "documents", made one of his speeches; it went rambling into the African political past of which he knew so little, imagining, as so many rulers have done, that 99 per cent of the ruled are "faithful and loyal". So that if only one could eliminate the one per cent of troublemakers, all would be well. High treason, murder, attempted murder had been proved. How often, in how many countries, in how many languages and with different phraseology, has this been said! Death sentences have been passed and carried out. Brave men and women have died. The human spirit survives. Some of those on trial must have thought that. Some mothers and wives, desperately longing for contact with their caged and forbidden men, must have said it

to themselves. Could the edifice of lies and power anyhow be toppled? It rested with the defence.

First Chaskalson, in a speech full of legal fireworks, then Bram Fischer and Vernon Berrangé, tore up the legal arguments, Bram in particular dealing with the basic politics. But Govan M'beki, Mandela and Sisulu were found guilty under various counts of the indictment, Goldberg, Mlangeni and Motsoaledi on lesser ones. The judge conceded that the A.N.C. and Umkonto had never decided on armed revolution, though inevitably it was bound to be considered for the future if there was so sign of political change. And again, he conceded, that the A.N.C. and Umkonto, their spearhead, were two separate organizations, independently controlled.

The judge's concession on the second point meant that A.N.C. members, although they could still be charged with belonging to an illegal organization, could not automatically be charged with treason and sabotage. This, for the future, meant all the difference between ten years' imprisonment and the death sentence.

Berrangé also attacked the methods of Dr. Yutar and the smear technique, the absence of facts and direct evidence. He had been, as a lawyer, disgusted. Now it was over, once more the police and their police dogs cleared the square. The court adjourned for three weeks while the judge considered his verdict. The prisoners were back in their cells.

It must have been quite clear that all the high command of the African Freedom Movement were now out of action, probably for ever, except as story and inspiration: Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki. Others were out of the country or so closely under house arrest that they could do nothing. Only a very

few could now take over, perhaps only for a short time until the net closed in on them, too. But there were decisions, involving other people, which had to be taken, channels of communication to be cleared or closed, and much else. One of those who must do this, as he must have seen with utter clarity and control, and as Mollie must have seen, was Bram.

9

The Next Strike

THE MEN of Rivonia had been sentenced, in spite of an appeal for mitigation by one witness who came forward—Alan Paton, deeply opposed to violence but deeply certain that the accused had acted from right motives; Yutar's smear tactics to "unmask this man" were used on him, too. The judge, perhaps aware of the eyes of the world, perhaps also with some understanding of the nature of this "treason", avoided the capital sentence, but instead sentenced ten men to life imprisonment, including Kathrada and Mhlaba, who were not guilty on all counts, but on sufficient for maximum sentence. They were secretly flown to Cape Town, thence to Robben Island. The world protested and South Africa paid no attention. But he found Rusty Bernstein not guilty. Rusty was to have new charges brought against him, for the prosecution were furious that one of the accused had escaped; but after a struggle by Berrangé, bail was allowed. The next day Bram was persuaded to drive down with Mollie towards Cape Town where they were to celebrate their daughter's twenty-first birthday and take a few days' rest before the ordeal that was bound to come. They never got there. A motor cyclist swerved. Bram swerved to avoid him. The car went over a low bridge. Mollie was drowned.

Bram asked Hilda Bernstein, Rusty's wife, one of their very old friends, a Party comrade, to speak at Mollie's

cremation, since they did not want a religious service. She agreed, but then they found that this would be a contravention of her banning order; she would simply be arrested, and though at the time she didn't care, so deep was her love and grief, the others stopped her. Some three hundred people, Africans, Indians and Whites, came to the funeral, many under bans so that they could not speak to one another. They left, knowing in their hearts that worse was to come.

The crowds outside the court on the last day had held up banners affirming that the life sentences must not, would not, be served; they had sung *Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika*: "God protect Africa". But that was eight years ago and these sentences are still being served; the conditions are barely less harsh than they were at first.

At the end of June 1964 the Special Branch struck again in a chain of raids; those arrested included all sorts of people so far relatively immune, university heads of departments, journalists, the respectable, those who had intended to keep out of direct political involvement. Rusty Bernstein broke his bail and escaped just in time, with his wife, through Botswana; he had not recovered from his spell in solitary; a further prison sentence might have been the end. A few others escaped, though some, who had been caught in the 1960 raids and had been given three-year sentences, came out, to a more terrifying ambience and with the knowledge that they were watched, that everything they did and said would be liable to land them in the same place. There would be no mercy now. Presumably Vorster, the Minister of Justice, felt that he almost had the whole thing under control. There were only a few more he had to catch.

How many more months for Bram? How many weeks? It was getting as close as that. Paul was becoming increasingly ill and Mollie was not there to fight for his life. One knows that Bram's family backed him with affection and solidarity. He worked on the Rhodesian Patents case. It was going to the final court, the Privy Council in England, when Bram was opposing leave to appeal. It was full of extremely intricate and difficult points of law.

Let us look, then, at this man in his mid-fifties while we still may. Those who remember him best as an advocate say that he never made eloquent speeches in court; he often seemed to hesitate, to think while he was on his feet. Yet this sometimes made him the more convincing. What he did was to go over his briefs with immense thoroughness, leaving no small point unexplored. Then he knew exactly what he had to bring out in examination or cross-examination. He did this quietly, gently even, in a completely controlled way appealing rather to the intellect of a judge than the emotions of a jury. All those I have spoken to say that he was a great lawyer. But this lack of obvious brilliance was perhaps in the same pattern as that of the young man who got a third in Jurisprudence.

He was also a completely convinced Communist. That means acceptance of a basic philosophy which appears to make sense of current history. I am not a Communist myself and never have been, but I have been closely in sympathy with Communists, and have worked amicably with them at various times. It seems clear to me that Marxist analysis and criticism is always valuable, even when there appear to be other countervailing explanations.

It is quite certain that Communism has been interpreted

differently in different countries and historical periods. Words and phrases, translated, carry different meanings and feeling-tone. But when there is a black proletariat, firmly kept in its place, with any white who happens to fall into it quickly pulled out, and when the owners of practically all the means of production are white, there is a classic situation and only one answer. If I had lived in South Africa during the forties and fifties I hope I would have had the courage to join the Party. People become Communists out of different motives; it seems to me that Bram Fischer joined the Party out of logic and out of love. Put together, the two fuse into a hard core. That was what he had.

Yet this might have made him a hard man. He was never that. He was strangely optimistic. He felt that, because South Africa was such a beautiful country and because it was his own country, it must some day be free and happy. Perhaps this was something to do with his own personal happiness with Mollie; it is a rare and wonderful thing to have two people who share so deeply and completely. During the Treason Trial they used to ask batches of the accused to supper in their Johannesburg house, to meet people who were uncommitted, who had perhaps never met an African socially before. It was a house which gave itself to hospitality; it had been built by an architect to their specifications. Nobody else will ever be able to use it as they did. It was hard work for Mollie, the hostess, lightly worn. The atmosphere of those parties was one of immense courtesy, out of an old Afrikaner world where such things mattered. Within its ambience, people blossomed; black and white were able to talk with one another and be friends; the free-

dom which he and his comrades worked for was, for a time, real.

And again, so many people came to him, not just for legal advice but because there had been family quarrels, worries, something they had to talk over. They knew they would find unfailing kindness and patience. He might have to work an extra hour into the night. That didn't matter. He listened to them; so did Mollie. Nobody came away unhelped, even if it was only that they had found someone to listen to them. How often, too, he would take the trouble to drive African visitors back to their locations. It didn't matter that it had taken an hour of his time, which would have to be made up for somehow. What mattered was their feeling at the end that they had been treated as equals.

Physically, Bram was suffering at this time from high blood pressure. His face was often suffused with red. Those who knew him best worried that, if ever he went underground, as they knew he intended to do in certain eventualities, this would give him away. The specials were increasingly well instructed to take notes of the kind of physical peculiarities that cannot be disguised, and this appeared to be one.

He, however, did not seem to be worried, at any rate about himself; probably by now he had worked out his moral position and made his decisions. He had to see Mandela and the other convicted prisoners from the Rivonia Trial about a possible appeal. The first week-end of July he and Joel Joffe, the faithful attorney, drove down to Robben Island with Paul and Ilse; they had decided to come back by the coast route. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki refused to appeal; they did not

admit that they had done wrong; they would go on serving their unjust sentence, black men condemned by a white court, advocate and teacher put to breaking stones all day. The others, though it appeared that their appeals might be partly successful, were certain that, if so, they would be immediately re-arrested and kept indefinitely in prison. Kathrada was the most likely to win an appeal, but he would not leave the others. They would not waste any available funds, which might be used to help others.

So that was that. Bram and Joffe said good-bye to the men they loved and respected and took the ferry back from Robben Island to Cape Town. At George, a small town on the coast road back, the Fischer's car was held up. Special Branch men searched them, their luggage and the car, for four hours. They found some documents which they took away.

A few days later the almost expected dawn knock came at the Oaklands house; seven specials came in to search it. Four hours of this and Bram was taken away for questioning and then driven to his chambers where another search was going on. Ruth, now Mrs. Eastwood, Ilse and Paul were waiting to say good-bye. How long would it be? The full ninety days? Where? Nobody knew. The specials gave no hint. The world press was as much in the dark as everyone else.

But three days later the family and one or two friends were in the house, desperately anxious, completely cut off, well aware by now of what could be done to people held on ninety days. Would they—could they—do it to this prisoner? It was getting late. There was a knock on the dark window. It was Bram.

One can only guess what happened. Bram did not speak. Did the police question him? If so, did he answer anything or nothing? Did they perhaps let him know how much they themselves knew or guessed? Did they show him copies of incriminating documents? If so, what kind of warning was it? Did they think they could entirely stop his political actions? Or did they conceivably want him to go—to leave the country? They must have realized that his Privy Council Appeal case was due to be heard in London within the next month or two. Suppose he went to London and never came back, Afrikanerdom might reunite as a *Volk* with its traitor son thrown off and discredited. The Fischer name could be wiped off. Yet this is only guesswork. Doubtless there are those who know, but they are not likely to say.

There was a little longer for the family, with an old friend who was staying to help, to be together. Bram worked on the patents case and doubtless got his other briefs into meticulous order so that they could if necessary be taken up where he had to leave off. In the day time he would be in chambers, then again in his study. Saying good night, he would ask if everyone had everything they needed, a drink, an aspirin, a sleeping pill. There would be talk, a provisional facing of inevitable problems. Perhaps Bram's political beliefs helped him to achieve calm, as his ancestors' religious beliefs must have done in periods of other, equally wearing, stress and danger: at least to have something bigger than the self, beyond the measure of individual love or loss. His, after all, was a comparatively simple, romantic Communism (and by that I mean, deep down, a hopeful idealism); it was not, so to speak, an intellectual's, but the belief of common man, the worker and peasant. He could get irritated by

questioning, however well-intentioned, of its fundamentals which, surely, anyone could see! He was no hair-splitting Kremlinologist; it was the Party and Marxist Leninist analysis which mattered. He knew quite well that if, in another context, this included, for instance, Stalin, that was not important for the South African Communist Party.

Meanwhile, some time round 1962, a man called Gerald Ludi had been recruited by the Special Branch, who offered him a particular job for which he seemed suited. He had been at university, was in journalism, liked his comforts. Since he had already gone to London, Moscow and a youth festival at Helsinki, as a "sympathizer", it was natural that young Jean Middleton felt able to introduce him to her Party cell. If he was anything like the photograph in his book of proud reminiscences—weak, slack-mouthed and anxious—I wouldn't have trusted him with sixpence, but some who knew him say that he had a certain charm which he could turn on, especially with younger women. It is also not impossible that at first he was a genuine sympathizer, until, perhaps, the police managed to find his weak spot. However it was, Ludi remained part-time in his existing job but was also, as part of his elaborate spy routine, running a taxi service which enabled him to keep tabs on certain suspects. Again one wonders whether enough care was being taken and whether there were not occasional loud-mouths. Some whites in the academic world, still could not help thinking in terms of freedom of speech. If one feels one is doing the right thing, it may be difficult not to talk about it. But that is the one thing which must not be allowed to happen. Ludi, in any case, got himself accepted as a Communist Party member, was trusted with documents and

secrets. He stole one of these documents, *Time for Reassessment*, analysing Communist Party mistakes and the lessons of tactics to be learned from them; had it photostated and returned it. He also found out the code names of most of the important people; Bram was Jan, for instance. And probably he was accumulating evidence which could be used to terrorize men like Beyleveld on the Central Committee.

One of the ingenious things which the Special Branch did, and will certainly do again should occasion arise, was to take a flat next to one of the accused, in this case poor Jean Middleton. As these flats were built with electric fires at opposite sides of party walls, it was quite simple to run cable through and tape conversations. This is a technique which was often used to break down people who were being questioned. One's own recorded voice often has a very unpleasant effect, and supposing, for example, that the taped people were having an intimate, private conversation, the replaying of this could be a nightmare. Such evidence could also be produced in court. A thing said jokingly could, without the smile or the gesture that went with it, sound completely incriminating. Probably Ludi got a lot of fun out of this kind of thing.

According to his own account he witnessed not only revolutionary intentions, orders and actions, but also countless scenes of sex orgy which he was later to describe in court as one of the main witnesses in the next trial. These, of course, included breaches of the Immorality Act, white women in "compromising situations" with black men, nude bathing and so on. Two of the younger women accused had, according to him, had abortions. Poor dear Ludi, having

in the interests of the higher police morality, to bare his noble white penis in mixed company! But perhaps, after all, he had made the whole thing up? Politics can be proved: sex, not. Yet do not let us be unfair. There is some suspicion that when Ludi himself was found in a compromising situation with an Indian lady, it was not merely being done in the interests of the job. It might have been a very handy way for his superiors to put pressure on him.

All this came out a year later when the dossier was complete, when the network of spying and intimidation had been neatly tied together, and on September 23rd, 1964, Bram Fischer with his old friend Eli Weinberg were arrested and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act. They were remanded until mid-November, when they were to join twelve other accused who were arrested rather later, some of them quite young, others in their forties or fifties. Their names were Ivan Schermbrucker, Norman Levy, Jean Middleton, Ester and Hymie Barsel, Mollie Boyle, Paul Trewhela, Florence Duncan, Anne Nicholson, Konstantinos Gazides, Lewis Baker and Sylvia Neame.

Bram had got his visa for the U.K. the week before and had to be in London for the Privy Council case within the next few days. He had originally been briefed in this case nine years before, and had it all in his head. He applied urgently for bail, declaring that he was an Afrikaner and would not leave his country because his political belief conflicted with those of the Government.

The police opposed as strongly as possible, saying this was a dangerous man who might escape. Presumably by now they had all Ludi's treacheries fully to hand. Bram in the witness box explained with some indignation that his

family came to South Africa in the eighteenth century and now what happens—he is harassed, spied on, has his telephone tapped, he is watched and worried by the Special Branch and this has been going on for fifteen years! All this was reported in the main newspapers of the world. While the argument went on and the reporters watched and surmised, the London Times noted and reported other arrests, trials and sentences on black and white in various parts of the country. Some were open, some not. There were, for instance, the secret trials at remote Somerset East, in the Cape, going on during the next few months; no public, no newspaper reports. In these there was a careful splitting of charges so that membership of the A.N.C. (a banned organization), also showed that the accused was guilty of attending meetings, distributing leaflets or collecting money. These were all separate offences, each carrying its own sentence.

Dozens of Africans were picked up almost at random, some A.N.C. members, but others non-political or, perhaps "cheeky". There was police evidence, also evidence from carefully coached witnesses. A very junior advocate, from Defence and Aid, defending them—and without Defence and Aid they would have had nobody—was grossly intimidated by the prosecution, using remarkably filthy anti-Semitic language and gesture; the presiding magistrate was uninterested. The same advocate, having to leave the court for a few minutes, came back to find his briefcase being searched "in the interests of security". In one case some of the witnesses, wives of the accused, were arrested because they now "knew too much". The quality of justice was going down.

Why, in fact, did the Nationalist Government bother to hold trials at all? Wouldn't it have been simple and cheaper not simply to arrest a few on ninety (later 180) days detention orders, but to imprison everyone they suspected of anything? Habeas Corpus was theoretically available, but unless legal advice was forthcoming, the accused might not be aware of it. I suppose one reason was that it would have looked bad, both to most of the Bar at home and to all those annoying Liberals who kept on yapping, and also to people abroad, the Communistic critics of noble South Africa, the defender of the Free World. These people were capable of making themselves very unpleasant. So trials went on, and at least the accused never knew exactly what sentence they would get. It was always possible that the police might annoy the magistrate too much.

There must have been well over two thousand politicals in jail by this time. Many were held for months before their cases came up and they were simply treated as ordinary prisoners. Of course by now there are far more and the statistics of jail sentences and whippings make nasty reading. For instance, during the year when this trial was taking place, 16,887 offenders (mostly Africans) got 79,038 strokes of the prison whip under the Criminal Sentences Amendment Act.

Finally the court agreed and Bram Fischer's bail of £5,000 was paid in. But no bail was allowed for Eli Weinberg. Bram left for London; he was not well and he was alone. Yet perhaps not alone, for Bram was of such a kind that he could not help having friends. He consulted some of them in his spare evening time. The case was so clear-cut that his clients could probably have managed with a

junior, but Bram had been with them so long that they wanted him. It left him some free time and he wanted to make the most of what he half knew might be his last visit to a free country. This meant going to plays but he found most modern theatre not to his taste. Luckily one could almost always find Shakespeare in London. Like most Communists he was something of a square; cultural revolution (even when that is what it is) has seldom much real connection with the political revolution. Certainly the timing is out. But for Bram without Mollie in the next seat, Shakespeare must have been deeply apposite: "time and the hour run through the roughest day."

No doubt his mind was, consciously, on his work. But how often there must have been the quick plunge back to Africa, to his love and hate, here in October London, with the cold air from the Thames in Parliament Square and Whitehall. There would be the quick glance at Big Ben, then along past the Cenotaph which had already become part of the past, and round the Downing Street corner to the entrance of the Privy Council building. Past the swing doors the entrance hall is elegant and pretty, but the stone steps are worn down by generations of feet.

Up the stairs to the first floor for Mr. Fischer from the Johannesburg Bar and the other counsel. The robing room (doubtless like others from overseas, he would have hired his robes) looks out over the breadth of Whitehall, the capital of a great power—or is it? He would come through to the ante-room, dignified and calm, with a portrait of Westbury, one of the great nineteenth-century jurists. But indeed the Law was well represented on the walls. In the main room behind counsel, but facing the judges, is my

uncle Haldane of Cloan, the pale, intelligent face peering out from a dark suit and a dark background—no dressing up for the Haldanes. It was painted by Stockdale Coke, for Cassell, who gave it to the Privy Council.

Oddly enough, my uncle had a great admirer in Bram's father. "As a result I read his autobiography as quite a youngster. Still remember how he said, as Lord Chancellor, he used to plan his judgments walking thro' the park, walking home after midnight. Always thought: that's the way to fill the unforgiving minute." My uncle, my brother, Bram: there are certain patterns of living which seem, in different surroundings, to repeat themselves.

The main court room is very beautiful in a formal, European way, with panelled walls and at each side three great windows, properly proportioned. By late October the plane trees in the Treasury Green would be losing their leaves, gusts sending them swirling over the patchy London grass. The case opened with Stuart Bevan of the English Bar and Abram Fischer of the Johannesburg Bar opposing Leave to Appeal. The three judges, Lord Guest, Lord Pierce and Lord Upjohn, sat behind the shallow curve of a polished, wooden table, made pleasanter, not only by piled law books within easy reach, but by some of the Privy Council silver. In front of the table was the Bar, but the rostrum for the speaker was on the same conversational level.

Privy Council cases are curiously informal, the atmosphere is one of intelligent conversation; the red leather chairs are made for comfort. All would be done by the Registrar of the Judicial Committee to make an overseas counsel feel at home. Outside the policeman amiably keep-

ing an eye on Downing Street comings and goings, would soon recognize him, the kindly unarmed British bobby only anxious to help and protect.

But Bram was an Afrikaner. He had to go back.

10

The Whole Intolerable System

The case re-opened in November 1964. Bram came back and into court in good spirits, to be charged with the rest of the accused, with being members of the banned Communist Party, taking part in its activities and furthering its aims. The prosecution alleged that a flood of Communist literature was coming into the country, often in disguise, corrupting society. Money, too, was flooding in, from Moscow and Peking, the old flesh-curdling technique.

The trial went on through the hot South African December and January. Police witnesses were called and, although Berrangé pulled most of their evidence to pieces, a good deal of it stuck. Strange for him, to have his old colleague no longer at hand, but in the dock! The Special Branch had by now become extremely efficient, recruiting anyone with good brains who would take this kind of job, and paying well; in fact, it was much more capable than the sometimes rather innocent and starry-eyed accused had ever supposed it to be. It was no longer something to be laughed at. There were also the experts like Professor Murray of Cape Town University, who had already appeared for the State in the treason trial and been made to look stupid by Berrangé and Bram himself. He explained the nature of revolution and how armed violence was always necessary for a Communist take-over, how inevitably the accused believed in and encouraged violence and destruction.

Although it was submitted that this type of evidence was irrelevant, it had its effect. There were bound to be fairly heavy sentences coming up.

Perhaps now we should try to catch up with what else had been happening up to 1964 in the Nationalist Government's attempt to ensure that their bit of the world was exactly as they would like it to be, above all safe and virtually unchanging, since they felt they had come to rest after many troubles on the rock of their own Covenant. In a way, one might think that they would be in some sympathy with the Zionists, who also felt they had come to rest, since for both peoples, the unhappy truth was that their final resting place was already occupied. And again, both the Afrikaners and the Jews in Israel felt in their bones that they were in some way special—Chosen People. Both invoked the same Book—the Old Testament—and the same exclusive God. Both had been persecuted but had been steadfast in their beliefs. Should they not have felt for one another? But this was not so. On the contrary, the Africaners were steadily and consistently anti-Semite; one has to blame somebody, and for some at least of their discomforts or unfairnesses, one couldn't blame the blacks or even the English. It was awkward for the Nationalists, later on, to know which side to favour in the Six-Day war, since the Egyptians, Palestinians and so on were undoubtedly non-white.

All round them the world was changing and this is rather terrifying if one wants to stay still. In the newly independent African states, there were almost always troubles, sometimes civil war. When one considers that the boundaries of these states conformed to no ethnic realities,

but were whatever the colonial powers had managed to acquire or bargain for among themselves, so that two or three nations with different languages and culture levels might find themselves enclosed together, with power always gathered up in a centre on which one of them tended to be over-represented, this was not to be wondered at. Nor must we forget that, for many of them, independence turned out not to be quite what they had worked for, since the economic strings were being pulled by the same old investors. But in general among the Euro-American public and especially in South Africa and Rhodesia, anything which went wrong was seized on and exaggerated. All the emotive words, loot, rape, blood, were publicly and privately used to justify further fears and further oppression, even when a considerable amount of it was due to mercenaries, usually white.

But Europe and America were changing, too. In the U.S.A. the MacCarthy madness had subsided, but instead the colour struggle was beginning and spread elsewhere whenever the economic situation made it acceptable. It is terrible when you know your opponent a long way off because he is black—or white. Communist and capitalist can't identify at once, nor for that matter can rich and poor always do so. An Ulster Protestant and Catholic, meeting on neutral ground, may not realize for a long time that they are enemies—perhaps too late, after they have got to like one another. But if you can see the distance of a thrown stone—worse, a bullet?

And South Africa had become the centre of it, radiating hate and anger, which were picked up and magnified. Ordinary "moderates" in other countries began to feel that

because of South African oppression, their own black citizens were beginning to be more active and dangerous. Yet investments' opportunities grew and action was always delayed or side-tracked. One curious thing was that the Nationalist Government prided itself on being Conservative, although in many other countries Conservative governments insisted that they were really progressive and, in fact, in some spheres, often were somewhat more so than Labour or so-called socialist governments. This was partly of course to do with the massive Dutch Reformed Church influence; the Rock of Ages prefers not to be moved.

What had they been doing to consolidate their conservatism? They kept a steady advantage in the over-represented rural areas with the deeply reactionary small farmer voters. But even in the towns their opponents, the United Party, were almost if not quite as racialist as they were, but affirmed it in a more English way. There was also the Broederbond; the year before, 1963, the Rev. Beyers Naude, Director of the Christian Institute of Southern Africa, who had himself been an almost lifelong member of the Broederbond, had resigned because of his deep personal concern that "the Broederbond, contrary to the Scriptures, wants us to use the Church of Christ to further its own interests". He was deeply concerned because of the whole apartheid concept, especially some of the recent Acts which had in his opinion violated the Christian concepts of neighbourly love, justice and mercy.

His colleague, Dr. Geyser, who had been convicted of heresy because of his opposition to apartheid, though this had subsequently been set aside, said of the political leaders of the Broederbond that they were making the Church,

which is the bride of Christ, the servant girl of politics. There was much turmoil and discussion and a commission was appointed to hold secret investigations. It came out with a report exonerating the Broederbond of anything except respectability and anti-Communism, but this did not lead to any lessening of the certainty that this was a body which included most leading Afrikaner Nationalists; its chairman is also the chairman of the Board of Governors of the South African Broadcasting Corporation; it stands for the policy of South Africa for the Afrikaners, in all spheres. It seems likely, though not proven, that it has sympathetic leanings towards various kinds of neo-Nazi movements. Mosley had been over, not for the first time, in 1964 and been received by members of the Broederbond in high political places. Adolf von Thadden of the German N.D.P. was another apparently welcome visitor.

More factories went up in the sixties, more industries started, and, increasingly, these were Afrikaner owned and operated. Capital must be attracted, yes, but the South African capital was not by any means exclusively in English or Jewish hands, not any longer. In fact, there was Afrikaner capital in many of the large international companies and cartels, bringing in interest in more senses than one. The Afrikaners, the poor farmers who came together in laager, who fought for and gained their independence, were becoming rich, although, as a community, they had not quite caught up on incomes with the English. And yet there was profound insecurity. The murder rate throughout the Republic was remarkably high : some fifty hangings a year. But the suicide rate was also unusually high and the suicide statistics do not include Africans, even those who killed

themselves in prison to escape further torture. There were defections from the Church; and some of the best writers in Afrikaans, who could and should be the builders of the nation, were writing critically or bitterly about cherished institutions and ideas. Sunday sport was on the increase. So what was the answer?

The Government answer was more and more thought control and more and more laws, all aimed at making the State, the embodiment of apartheid and baaskap, secure against what it saw as its internal enemies. Many of these laws have already been mentioned; others tightened up existing ones or did away with possible evasions. Some were old laws, increasingly being put into practice. The actual numbers are astonishing. In the 1963 Session, sixteen Acts were passed, all to do with security and apartheid, including the General Law Amendment Act which has been responsible for the worst crimes against persons during their "detention". As Vorster himself said "It is not a very nice thing to see a human being broken". No doubt if he could have attained his ends by milder means he would have done so; he is almost certainly not personally a cruel man. But he who wills the end, wills the means. In the 1964 Session there were four Acts, and in the 1965 Session twelve. So it goes on.

Meanwhile, the Group Areas Act of 1950, under which people of the wrong colour could be turned out of their homes, was being steadily applied to more and more places, in many of which families had been living for generations, with homes, businesses, gardens and, often enough, friends of a different colour from whom they must now be separated. In fact this was part of the intention. Probably the

most valuable property, in terms of rates, was that belonging to the various Indian communities. Nor is the compensation offered anything near the value the owners put on it. In 1964 Nr. Nana Sita, chairman of the Transvaal Indian Congress, was serving a jail sentence for refusing to leave the home where he had lived for thirty-seven years. The Johannesburg Indian community have not yet been moved, but when they are it will be twenty-two miles away from the city centre, where many of them had businesses. In Cape Town it was the Coloured communities which were and are still worst affected. This includes the beaches where they and their children have traditionally picnicked and bathed; more and more of these are now for whites only.

The Native Laws Amendment Act, passed in 1952, was aimed at keeping "surplus" Africans out of the towns. These of course included the aged, widows, children and so on, the unproductive. In 1964, the Minister of Bantu Administration told the House of Assembly that 464,726 Africans had been "endorsed out" of the bigger South African towns during the seven years previously. But in 1964 itself, his figure showed that about 85,000 men and 15,000 women had been endorsed out. The Black Sash organization took this up, detailing the misery that had come of it. The South African Government constantly complain of outsiders who do not understand their problems trying to interfere; the Black Sash are not outsiders.

Under the Bantu education system, it became harder and harder for any African to get adequate higher education. This was partly because of the low quality of primary education. It is curious that all the South African propaganda material claims that there has been an immense increase in

African school enrolment. But how many go on beyond the lower primary school? Only about a quarter, and only three per cent go on to secondary, with the percentage dropping form by form. The Church schools used to give reasonably good education, but almost all have been closed or have had to accept Bantu education. *Per capita* yearly expenditure tells its own story: whites—£57.05, Africans—£6.75. The "ethnic Universities" are ludicrously unlike universities. In 1959 the University of Fort Hare Transfer Act changed a reasonably high standard of open university into a tribal college with staff carefully purged of all "liberal" elements. At the same time it has become increasingly difficult for any black South Africans to go abroad for education. If in the end he was allowed it was usually on an exit permit, so that he could never come back and corrupt his fellows.

Inevitably, censorship increases in this ambience. If once everybody thought right, it would all be so easy! Newspapers and books get banned, teachers can only recommend reading out of a narrowly proscribed list. It is not even as if many Africans had the money to buy a paper-back; they are down to the most basic expenditure. And the outside world continues to point a finger at the Republic of South Africa.

The outside world, or part of it, watched the latest trial with interest, especially as there was a case on in The Hague International Court, questioning South African rights in the territory of South West Africa (Namibia) mandated to them by the old League of Nations. It seemed to some people that Fischer should have been there. But no, he had given his word as an Afrikaner to come back. In this December trial,

the accused were a strange mixture of people, spanning two generations and very different social backgrounds. Yet these had all merged into a particular view and determination. This time they were all white and it was clear that Bram Fischer, perhaps with his old friend Ivan Schermbruker, would probably receive a heavy sentence; these two were looked on as the leaders. They must be put away, especially Bram.

The usual kind of evidence was laid before the court. Much of it came from Gerald Ludi; this must have been particularly painful for those who had trusted him and allowed him to have access to documents. Some of his evidence was so clearly untrue that it was met by laughter in court. Among those who had been arrested was one of the Central Committee, Beyleveld, a trade union organizer. He was one of those who had been put on after Rivonia, when so few were left, and an old member of the Springbok Legion. Now he turned State witness. One sees the pressure which had been put on him by his statement, when asked why he had elected to give evidence for the prosecution: "I wanted to be released from the ninety-day detention. My liberty became very important to me. I can think of nothing but my liberty and I am prepared to forsake my life-long principles for it. I have no other principle but to obtain my own liberty." He was to testify again in further trials against his old friends. But should one believe evidence from a man in this state?

Bram was defended by Mr. Hanson, but as January went on, it became clear that he was going to be convicted. On January 25th 1965 he disappeared, early one morning. The family found two letters by his bed, one to his daughter Ruth

and the other to his counsel. He also arranged for his bail to be repaid to his guarantors, so that they should not suffer financially.

The letter to Harold Hanson reads as follows: "By the time this reaches you (the letter was addressed to the counsel who was defending him) I shall be a long way from Johannesburg and shall absent myself from the remainder of the trial. But I shall still be in the country to which I said I would return when I was granted bail. I wish you to inform the court that my absence, though deliberate, is not intended in any way to be disrespectful. Nor is it prompted by any fear of the punishment which might be inflicted on me. Indeed I realize fully that my eventual punishment may be increased by my present conduct.

"I have not taken this step lightly. As you will no doubt understand, I have experienced great conflict between my desire to stay with my fellow accused and, on the other hand, to try to continue the political work I believe to be essential. My decision was made only because I believe that it is the duty of every true opponent of this Government to remain in this country and to oppose its monstrous policy of apartheid with every means in its power. That is what I shall do for as long as I can.

"In brief, the reasons which have compelled me to take this step and which I wish you to communicate to the court are the following:

"There are already over 2,500 political prisoners in our prisons. These men and women are not criminals but the staunchest opponents of apartheid.

"Cruel, discriminatory laws multiply each year, bitterness and hatred of the Government and its laws are growing

daily. No outlet for this hatred is permitted because political rights have been removed, national organizations have been outlawed and leaders not in gaol have been banned from speaking and meeting. People are hounded by Pass Laws and by Group Areas controls. Torture by solitary confinement, and worse, has been legalized by an elected parliament—surely an event unique in history.

"It is no answer to all this to say that Bantustans will be created, or that the country is prosperous. The vast majority of the people are prevented from sharing in the country's wealth by the Colour Bar in industry and mining and by the prohibition against owning land save in relatively small and grossly over-crowded parts of the country where, in any case, there exist no mines or industries. The idea that Bantustans will provide any solution would deceive no one but a White South African.

"What is needed is for White South Africans to shake themselves out of their complacency, a complacency intensified by their present economic boom built upon racial discrimination.

"Unless this whole intolerable system is changed radically and rapidly disaster must follow. Appalling bloodshed and civil war will become inevitable because, as long as there is oppression of a majority such oppression will be fought with increasing hatred.

"To try to avoid this becomes a supreme duty, particularly for an Afrikaner because it is largely the representatives of my fellow Afrikaners who have been responsible for the worst of these discriminatory laws.

"These are my reasons for absenting myself from court. If by my fight I can encourage people to think about, to

understand and to abandon the policies they now so blindly follow, I shall not regret any punishment I may incur.

"I can no longer serve justice in the way I have attempted to do during the past thirty years. I can do it only in the way I have now chosen.

"Finally, I would like you to urge upon the court to bear in mind that if it does have to punish any of my fellow accused it will be punishing them for holding the ideas today that will be universally accepted tomorrow."

And so, for a time, no more.

11

A Matter of Honour

THE OTHER prisoners were sentenced, most to between a year and three years. But Eli Weinberg and Ivan Schermbrucker got five-year sentences. It seems likely that Bram would have got the same. If it had been that he would have been out by now. Perhaps it might have been longer, but even so, the end would be in sight. He must have known that what in fact he did was bound to earn him a much stiffer sentence, and he can scarcely have thought that he could avoid being caught in the end, with all the odds against him and the probability that he could be betrayed, either inadvertently or by terrible pressure being put onto someone. So, what happened or what did he think that made him break bail and take to the life of a fugitive?

Most of his colleagues at the Bar were deeply shocked and applied within days to have him disbarred, on the grounds of unprofessional conduct. This must have been very painful and, oddly, a surprise. He was rather innocently aware that most of his colleagues liked him a lot and he never thought politics could take them so far as to hurt him deliberately.

Nadine Gordimer, who is not only a South African, but a very intelligent and sensitive novelist, seems to have felt that he owed it to the people he had been working for, that he had, as a matter of personal integrity, to keep faith with

them. Here was the fine point of honour of a small national group which had managed to survive through terrible hardships and trials, to feel itself a people in a very special sense; it was the point of honour of an Afrikaner and some day, perhaps, when historical judgments do one of their topsyturvy reassessments, which by this time we should be used to, it will be understood by all Afrikaners and become a matter for pride. It is, I think, understood now by some Afrikaners, especially those who have been tortured and imprisoned and have survived. What is clear is that his being out, on the run, meant a special kind of pride and delight, especially to the Africans, who had so little to delight them. It seems doubtful whether he managed to do much in the way of actual political direction or even advice, nor did he open new channels of communication. Part of the time he must have been enjoying the dance he was leading the Special Branch.

It is possible that he never thought he could stay underground for as long as he did. If it was a gesture, a symbol of Afrikaner honour, a short time would have been as good as a long time. If he had intended to produce any serious political consequences it would have meant more preparation and better contacts, but this in turn might have meant an absence abroad and he had it deep in him that he was not leaving South Africa. Most of the time Paul was away in England with his sister Ruth. The old house in Johannesburg was constantly being combed through on snap raids. It must have been often a very lonely time for a man used to constant company and regular work at his own desk and his own skill. It must have been very lonely for Bram without Mollie.

It should, however, be noticed that the official line from the Special Branch and, doubtless, the Government, was that Bram's escape had been a decision by a "world wide Communist network". Of course this tied in with the idea that the A.N.C. was a Communist front organization, in fact, the most important one in southern Africa. Whether the authorities really believed this or not, whether it was a piece of imagination, on a par with the Calvinist image of "sin", the rest of us will never know. No doubt some people believed it sincerely. I sometimes wonder whether this favourite network image is not something akin to the networks and rays which are so commonly envisaged as the enemy by schizophrenics. Frightened people are always near to the edge of insanity. It is almost worth looking at Ludi's account of how he thinks it was done—through the Soviet network's "South African Resident Director" who prepared beautifully forged documents. And of course there was an unlimited quantity of "Moscow Gold" as well as an "attractive brown-eyed young woman" who bought a house, opened a bank account, said her uncle would come and live in the house, and disappeared to wicked old, permissive England. Certainly the lady existed—and exists—but her suggested affiliations are somewhat imaginary. Once Bram, disguised as her uncle, Mr. Black, had moved in, he channelled, according to Ludi, the Moscow gold into the Communist Party and its "allied subversive organizations—some through known legal institutions such as Christian Action and the Defence and Aid Fund and some secret courier contacts." By this time it was becoming very important to smear bodies such as Christian Action in the eyes of the respectable in South Africa.

What is, I think, true, is that Bram came down to Rustenberg and stayed at the farm house of Dr. Raymond Midlinton, the rather eccentric lady who was the owner of the farm; here he altered his appearance and tied up the necessary financial arrangements. Part of this was by strict dieting. Mrs. Midlinton was something of a health food devotee and no doubt supervised this: it had the effect of bringing down his blood pressure and so altering his whole physical set-up.

Then he came back to the Johannesburg neighbourhood, where he saw some friends and members of the family. Naturally he had helpers. The Special Branch knew or know about some, not about others. Sometimes they thought he had crossed the frontier or was about to. He wrote letters which were posted in various South African towns. Some were intercepted. Perhaps he underestimated the Special Branch. Perhaps it is impossible for someone who has never been afraid to take on the reactions of a fugitive. On July 14th he wrote to the Bar Council, stating that he intended to oppose the application to have him disbarred.

It was tremendously exciting and encouraging for the rest of us to know that he was still out, still free. Was he somewhere in the mountains? Was he in Botswana? We, there, hoped so. Bram stories and jokes circulated. It was a breath of fresh air. There was a ten thousand rand reward for his recapture, but it had brought nothing but false clues; it meant nothing to those who knew. But the police were constantly being rung up and rushing here and there to arrest suspects or those who were thought to be Mr. Fischer in disguise; once this turned out to be a close relation of Dr. Yutar.

But, inevitably, there were slip-ups. He had been living rather too openly, buying meat, groceries, milk and newspapers in the Johannesburg suburb where he was Mr. Black. There were one or two crucial arrests. On November 2nd, 1965, the Supreme Court struck his name off the roll. Mr. Justice de Wet said it was clear that he was guilty of subversive activity in the past and "probably at the present time is still engaged in such activity". It may be that the police found it less embarrassing to arrest someone who was no longer a Queen's Counsel; it certainly cheered them up to think that now they had the Law on their side. Earlier there had been plenty of criticism of the police and the new laws from the Johannesburg Bar, but now they seemed to be on the same side.

They got him on November 11th, and also found some incriminating papers, some in his pocket, some on the back seat of the car. They should not have been there. Other things were found in the house where Mr. Black had lived. The attractive, brown-eyed young woman, finally tracked down and on holiday in Europe, refused to come back to South Africa and become a state witness. Her rich suburban relations were duly shocked.

Among those arrested was the seventy-one-year-old Mrs. Midlinton of Rustenburg. A few days earlier it had been Mrs. Weinberg, whose husband was in prison, and still another was Mrs. Schermbrucker; her husband, like Weinberg, had a five-year sentence. Both could have freed themselves and possibly shortened their husbands' sentences if they had been willing to give evidence at Bram Fischer's trial. No doubt this was put to them very persuasively. They realized that they could be held indefinitely under the ninety-

day conditions which were in many ways much worse than those of an ordinary prisoner. What do children think when both their parents are in jail and one of them could get out at once if only she would say something? Can courage and pride go on sustaining them?

Some did speak, including people who had been very close to Bram politically. Perhaps only a little, but enough to put the Special Branch on the right track. Can one condemn or even pity, since pitying implies a superior condition? It was simply too much for them. Perhaps some people felt that the whole thing had collapsed and it was no use going on. Everyone has a breaking point. But with some it remains a secret.

12

I must therefore explain

There were 15 charges against Bram Fischer under the Sabotage Act, the Suppression of Communism Act and for various charges incurred whilst he was "Mr. Black", such as getting a driving licence under a false name. His children and relations were in the first row of the public gallery. There were diplomatic observers and a full Press representation. All heard him plead "not guilty". He was looking worn and much aged. Mr. Leibenburg led for the State, while Bram listened carefully and took notes. The prosecution witnesses were called: Hlapane and Beyleveld, both at one time genuine Communists, and our old acquaintance Gerald Ludi.

There was some rather curious evidence about military training in Russia; it seemed at least very odd that it should have been conducted with the incompetence described by the witnesses! But it was all beautifully designed to bring in as many other names as possible in the so-called Communist Network. There was much quotation from documents which had been seized at various places. No doubt some of these documents, like all political documents everywhere, were partly hot air, designed to stir up some kind of response in a lethargic audience. Few non-legal documents can stand up to a skilled, legal "pecking to bits"; they have to be seen in context.

Hlapane under cross-examination from Kentridge

admitted that he "might have become confused". But apart from this digging into the credibility of witnesses, including Ludi, on evidence which had already been partly exposed during the earlier trial, the defence waited for Bram's own statement from the dock. Meanwhile, messages and telegrams came in from various interested bodies, including the most reputable lawyers of Scandinavia and the United Kingdom who were all watching the trial closely. But all these broke against the determination of the South African Government not to be deflected from their number one enemy. Then, on March 28th, 1966, Bram spoke from the dock knowing that it was his last chance to say who he was and why. He had earlier smiled across at his daughters and spoken light-heartedly with his counsel. He had been taking notes during the whole of the trial. He was prepared for the sentence. Now, when he came to speak, it was from typed notes, much as he might have done in the concluding address as counsel in the same court. The reason he spoke from the dock was that if he had gone into the witness-box he might have found himself, under cross-examination, having to implicate other people, directly or indirectly, or to lie under oath. He was not willing to do either.

The speech took four and a half hours. Only occasionally he paused for a sip of water. He began by stating the bare facts:

"I am on trial for my political beliefs, and the conduct to which those beliefs drove me. Whatever labels may be attached to the fifteen charges brought against me, they all arise from my having been a member of the Communist Party and from my activities as a member. I engaged upon those activities because I believed that in the dangerous

circumstances which had been created in South Africa, it was my duty to do so.

"When a man is on trial for his political beliefs and actions, two courses are open to him. He can either confess to his transgressions and plead for mercy, or he can justify his beliefs and explain why he acted as he did. Were I to ask forgiveness today I would betray my cause. That course is not open to me. I believe that what I did was right. I must therefore explain to this court what my motives were: why I hold the beliefs that I do, and why I was compelled to act in accordance with them.

"My belief, moreover, is one reason why I have pleaded not guilty to all the charges brought against me. Though I shall deny a number of important allegations made, this court is aware of the fact that there is much in the State case which has not been contested. This court was entitled to have had before it the witnesses who testified in chief and under cross-examination against me. Some of these I believe were fine and loyal persons who have now turned traitors to their cause and to their country, because of the methods used against them by the State—vicious and inhuman methods. Their evidence may therefore, in important respects, be unreliable.

"There is another and more compelling reason for my plea and why I persist in it. I accept the general rule that for the protection of a society, laws should be obeyed. But when the laws themselves become immoral and require the citizen to take part in an organized system of oppression—if only by his silence or apathy—then I believe that a higher duty arises. This compels one to refuse to recognize such laws.

"The laws under which I am being persecuted were

enacted by a wholly unrepresentative body, a body in which three-quarters of the people of the country have no voice whatever. These laws were enacted not to prevent the spread of Communism, but for the purpose of silencing the opposition of a large majority of our citizens to a government intent upon depriving them solely on account of their colour of the most elementary human rights; of the right to freedom and happiness, the right to live together with their families wherever they might choose, to earn their livelihoods to the best of their abilities, to rear and educate their children in a civilized fashion, to take part in the administration of their country and obtain a fair share of the wealth they produce; in short, to live as human beings.

"My conscience does not permit me to afford these laws such recognition, as even a plea of guilty would involve. Hence, though I shall be convicted by this court, I cannot plead guilty. I believe that the future may well say that I acted correctly. My first duty then is to explain to the court that I hold and have, for many years, held the view that politics can only be properly understood and that our immediate political problems can only be satisfactorily solved by the application of that scientific system of political knowledge known as Marxism. I shall also have to explain why this view compels me to act as I have. . . . But looking back I cannot say that it was Marxism as a social science that drew me originally to the Communist Party. Just as little presumably as a doctor would say that he was originally drawn to his own field of science by its scientifically demonstrable truths. These only become apparent later. In my mind, there remain two clear reasons for my approach to the Communist Party. The one is the glaring injustice which

exists and has existed for a long time in South African society. The other a gradual realization, as I became more and more deeply involved in the Congress movement of those years, that is the movement for freedom and human rights for all, that it was always members of the Communist Party who seemed prepared, regardless of cost, to sacrifice most: to give their best, to face the greatest dangers in the struggle against poverty and discrimination.

"The glaring injustice is there for all who are not blinded by prejudice to see. There is not even a question of the degree of humiliation or poverty or misery imposed by discrimination on one section of the community. Hence, it cannot be justified by comparing non-white standards of living or education in South Africa, with those in other parts of the Continent. It is simply and plainly that discrimination should be imposed as a matter of deliberate policy, solely because of the colour which a man's skin happens to be, irrespective of his merits as a man, a worker, a thinker, a father or a friend.

"Yet the injustice of the system does not, in itself, explain my conduct. All white South Africans can see it. The vast majority of them remain unmoved and unaffected. They are either oblivious to it or despite all its cruelty condone it on the assumption, whether admitted or not, that the non-white of this country is an inferior being with ideals, hopes, loves and passions which are different from ours. Hence the further tacit or open assumption that he need not be treated as a complete human being, i.e. that it is not unfair to make him carry a pass, to prevent him from owning land; deprivations which, if applied to whites, would horrify all and cause a revolution overnight."

After this Bram told the court of his experiences as a child and a young man, including his early attempts to ameliorate African conditions without the idea of altering them completely. He thought back to the days of literacy classes in the old location at Bloemfontein where "I came to understand that colour prejudice was a wholly irrational phenomenon and that true human friendship could extend across the colour bar once the initial prejudice was overcome. And that I think was Lesson No. 1 on my way to the Communist Party which has always refused to accept any colour bar and has always stood firm on the belief, itself 2,000 years old, of the eventual brotherhood of all men."

He then spoke of the actual practice of Communist Party members, who were always the ones who would put their whole heart and energies in helping in every way, not only politically but with things like night schools and feeding schemes. Apart from the white members, "It was African Communists who constantly risked arrest or the loss of their jobs, or even their homes, in order to gain or retain some rights, and all this was carried on regardless of whether it would be popular with the authorities or not. Without question this fearless adherence to principle must always exercise a strong appeal to those who wish to take part in politics, not for personal advantage, but in the hope of making some positive contribution. The court will bear in mind that at that stage and for many years afterwards, the Communist Party was the only political party which stood for an extension of the franchise." This could have been qualified by the fact that the Liberal Party were at least fighting to retain the old Cape franchise and some of them

would certainly have wished to extend it. But in general it was true.

"But I have to tell this court not only why I joined the Communist Party when it was a legal party—when at times it had representatives in Parliament, the Cape Provincial Council and the City Council of Johannesburg: I must also explain why I continued to be a member after it was declared illegal. This involves what I believe on the one hand to be the gravely dangerous situation which has been created in South Africa from about 1950 onwards and on the other, the vital contribution which socialist thought can make towards its solution. I shall start with the latter."

At this stage he began a resumé of the Marxist historical analysis, including two basic propositions, "One is that the economic form which one society assumes is incompatible with that of the society which preceded it or with that which will succeed it. The second is that a new form of economic society cannot finally establish itself unless it also develops a new political form which can allow it to develop to its full extent." After giving historical illustrations he went on, "The political changes therefore are as inevitable as the economic changes and ultimately both depend on that slow, but ever accelerating process of the change in methods of production. It is these political changes which in Marxist language are known as 'revolutions', whether they take place by violent or by peaceful means, and this again depends on the circumstances at any given stage of history. It is not difficult to illustrate this proposition either if one merely compares the French Revolution with the evolution of the Capitalist democracy in England during the nineteenth

century . . . it also explains why one type of society must, of necessity, give way to a new and higher form.

"History, therefore, becomes something which can be rationally understood and explained. It ceases to be a meaningless agglomeration of events or a mere account of great men wandering in haphazard fashion across its stage. Similarly, modern society itself assumes a meaning as well. It does not appear on the scene by mere chance; it is not final or immutable and in its South African form it contains its own contradictions which must, irresistibly, lead to its change.

"This is part of Marxist theory, and the first point, therefore, which I seek to make is that Marxism is not something evil or violent or subversive. It is true that propaganda against it has, in recent times, been unbridled and unscrupulous. It is also true that for 16 years now its principles have been outlawed and that prejudiced propaganda has made it almost impossible for our people to give unbiased thought to those principles which most closely affect our future. They do not even study what the people they choose to look upon as enemies are thinking. In fact, they have no idea what socialism means and the tragic stage has been reached where the word 'Communism' evokes nothing but unthinking and irrational hatred.

"But this does not alter the character nor the accuracy of the Marxist view of South African society, nor does it alter the fact that socialism has already been adopted by fourteen states with a population of over one thousand million people . . . what it does is to throw into high relief the absurdity of legislation which seeks to abolish a scientific approach to history, which, as I shall show, has so much to contribute to the solution of our problems."

Here he reminded his listeners of the war years, when the Soviet Union took the brunt of the Nazi attack and then went on to define capitalism, leading to imperialism and the scramble for Africa. Then he reminded his hearers that "for the vast majority of men the system is based upon fear, fear of unemployment and poverty. This is so in the older industrial countries. It is more particularly so in the colonies and ex-colonies and in South Africa it is a fear which is accentuated by the colour bar. At heart the problem is an economic one which becomes only too apparent in South Africa, when one takes note of the reactions which, even in a period of apparent prosperity, follow any attempt to permit non-whites to perform skilled work; in the back of every white man's mind lurks a fear of losing his job. This fear is always with the white man in this country, be he miner or bricklayer, steel worker or bus driver. For the non-white the position is intolerable. He knows he will always be the first to suffer loss of employment. He realizes that so little concern is shown for him that in South Africa the number of unemployed Africans is never even counted or known.

"Now it is the fear bred by this system which is a fertile soil for producing racialism and intolerance. It was a similar fear which in Europe enabled Hitler to propagate his monstrous theory of race superiority which led to the extermination of five million Jews in Germany. It is this fear which provides scope for the ready acceptance by whites in South Africa of many distorted ideas; that Africans are not civilized, that they cannot become so for many generations; that they are not our fellow citizens but really our enemies and hence must be ruled by extreme police state methods

and must be prevented from having any organization of their own; that their voice should be heard only through mouthpieces selected by our all-white government; that their leaders should be kept permanently on Robben Island. As far as South Africa is concerned, it is the economic fear which is the greatest evil which our system has produced, for it has severed all contact between the two main races of the country and it is daily making it more difficult for those two races to get together, to work out by discussion and not by violence a method whereby they live together in peace and prosperity in this great country of ours.

"What I have had to say about Marxism is also directly relevant to the indictment. I am charged with performing acts calculated to further the object of Communism, to wit, the establishment in South Africa of a despotic system of government based on the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is a gross mis-statement of my aims and those of my party. We have never aimed at a despotic system of government. Nor were any efforts ever directed to the establishing of a dictatorship of the proletariat in this country. It is necessary, therefore, for me to explain what we have worked for.

"It is true that we say that the ultimate remedy for the evils I have described and the many other evils which exist today, lies in a change to a socialist system. Socialism is a system under which the means of production are owned by the people. Under that system production takes place, not for profit, but for the benefit of the people as a whole, and in accordance with a planned economy. It is therefore not subject to ups and downs and the fluctuations of a capitalist economy. It can ensure full employment at all times and

will therefore abolish fear. . . . All this we maintain goes hand in hand with an ever widening democracy and an ever increasing degree of individual freedom and participation in the control of the country. But, as far as South Africa is concerned, these are matters which the future will settle."

He went on, "We have never put forward socialism as our immediate solution. What we have said is that immediate dangers can be avoided, by what we always refer to as a national democratic revolution. That is, by bringing our state to this stage and into line with the needs of today by abolishing discrimination, extending political rights and then allowing our peoples to settle their own future." Here he quoted from the Communist Party programme, with its hope of uniting "All sections and classes of oppressed and democratic people" and which went on to demand free and urgent discussion, not for the immediate implementation of socialism, but for the building of a national democratic state. He then referred to the enormous increase in South African military expenditure, which by 1965 was twelve times what it was twenty years before. "History shows us a system breaks down just at that point at which it displays its greatest weaknesses and there can be no doubt that in the past few decades the greatest weakness in the present system has been displayed in the imperialist sector: i.e. that sector in which one people tries to rule and dominate another. This is the point at which it has already broken down.

"Over the past twenty or thirty years, the weakest link in the Imperialist system has been its inability to deal with the wants of the colonial peoples. There it has bred its own downfall because on the one hand it created mass poverty and economic instability and on the other, developed

intense feelings of nationalism. What imperialism succeeded in doing in the colonies of the Twentieth Century was to produce the worst evils which the Industrial Revolution produced in England in the early Nineteenth Century, plus a deep sense of national consciousness. Hence in those parts of the world—India, Africa and the East—the so-called revolution has taken place, but in different forms. Four empires have had to dissolve themselves and have been compelled to grant political independence to some thirty or forty states just as Britain was compelled to give the vote to the so-called 'lower' class last century. But with three or four notable exceptions, these states have achieved their independence peacefully and without having to resort to any form of violence.

"South African state propaganda suggests that this was due to some mystical decadence in the West. Nothing could be further from the truth. Britain, France, Holland and Belgium have not, in a couple of decades, become soft or decadent. Far deeper forces have come into play, which left no alternative but to do what they have done. The combination of the new nationalism and the urge to take control of their own economic future, proved in the new states to be irresistible.

"It should, indeed, not be difficult for South Africans to understand this process. In one sense, we Afrikaners were the rearguard of this liberation movement in Africa. Of all former colonies, we displayed the greatest resistance to imperial conquest, a resistance which a handful of freedom fighters carried on for three years, against the greatest Empire of all times. We failed then. A few decades later, without having once to resort to arms, we succeeded in gain-

ing our independence because it was impossible to stop us. And we did not say then, whichever date one chooses to regard as the date when we achieved freedom (whether in 1907, 1910, 1931 or 1961) that we had obtained freedom because the West had become decadent. We knew that we could not be resisted. Now, as we Communists see it, those who rule South Africa are trying to do just those things which imperialism could achieve in the Nineteenth Century, but which are impossible in the second half of the Twentieth. The attempt must lead inevitably to disaster."

Next, he spoke of the necessity for acting against existing laws. "I suppose it can never be easy for the normal citizen of a state to break the laws. It is usually only amongst those who are mentally sick or warped that law breakers are found, for the normal healthy citizen is a social creature, bred to respect the rules of his society. If, in addition he has been trained as a lawyer as I have, his instincts are reinforced by his training. For him to make the departure is doubly difficult. Only profound and compelling reasons can lead him to choose such a course.

"In my view, such powerful and compelling reasons have been brought into existence in South Africa, during the past fifteen years or more, and they have, as I shall show when I deal with the indictment, led many thousands of South African citizens, including many of the country's kindliest and wisest and in normal circumstances most law-abiding citizens, to transgress against unjust laws. . . . There has always, since the days of slavery, been racial discrimination in South Africa. I suppose at the beginning when people enjoying a more advanced civilization, come into contact and intermingle with those not so fortunate, this is inevitable,

though according to the tenets of true Christianity, it should not be so. Today we know from experience in other parts of the world, that it is possible to make illiterate people literate and to 'civilize' them in one, or at most two, generations, provided those who hold the state power are prepared to devote sufficient resources to that object—even if that entails sacrifices in other directions. That course South Africa never took. For 150 years it hesitated. Then, the white rulers chose a road which led in an entirely opposite direction. To preserve 'civilization' one would think it prudent to spread it as rapidly as possible. Instead, our rulers elected, as far as possible, to retain it as a white monopoly.

"Deliberately we chose the path of segregation which, whatever changing appellations we may give to it, was, and is, a policy intended to keep the non-whites in a state of permanent inferiority and subjection—an inferiority which is political, social and economic. This, in itself constitutes a grave menace."

Here he began to picture for his hearers, a kind of apartheid system aimed not at Africans, but at Afrikaners: If they were condemned to a homeland in, say, the Orange Free State, carefully shorn of its gold and coal mines. Anywhere else, they would have no rights, would never own their own homes, would always be poor and insulted. One only wonders whether in fact any of this got through to the imagination of any of his opponents. Probably not.

He asks what the Afrikaner answer to oppression of this kind would be, and goes on "the answer should be obvious. But what does not seem to be obvious to the white people of this country is that the attempt to implement their present

policy is one which is fraught with peril. Here too, argument is superfluous if for one moment one uses one's imagination and pictures its application to one of the white races in this country. The situation created would immediately be explosive and would lead overnight to extreme unrest and violence—as indeed much milder policies have in the past led . . . that similar reactions on the part of the non-white have not been produced during the past fifty years, is no tribute to the policy of segregation, but rather to the tolerance, understanding and infinite goodwill of the African. The only surprising thing is that it has produced nothing more violent than some highly controlled and restricted sabotage. But there are circumstances which make the policy of segregation far more dangerous in the 1950's than it would have been in earlier decades. South Africa has chosen the 50's and 60's of this twentieth century as a point of time at which to signal the full steam ahead for these policies. Historians will point to that period approximately as the end of the colonial system. It has been in these decades that political independence has spread through Africa and Asia. And it has spread not by mere chance, or because of some so-called decay of the imperial powers, or of the West. It has spread because historically, imperialist domination has outlived its purpose and is now about to be replaced by something different. Consequently, former colonial peoples are today able to demand and obtain independence—something they were quite unable to do even twenty-five years ago.

"This has far-reaching consequences for South Africa which is, in effect, trying to establish a 'colonial' system of its own brand at this stage of history, complete with indirect

rule and even with a re-establishment of tribalism. This can never succeed, for one can never move backwards in history.

"I am not trying to dramatize this situation. I am stating nothing but plain, simple fact. It is there for anyone to see—for anyone whose vision is not totally obscured by the myopia of the white South African.

"There is a strong and ever-growing movement for freedom and for basic human rights amongst the non-white people of the country—i.e. among four-fifths of the population. This movement is supported, not only by the whole of Africa, but by virtually the whole of the United Nations as well—both West and East.

"However complacent and indifferent white South Africa may be, this movement can never be stopped. In the end it must triumph. Above all, those of us who are Afrikaners and who have experienced our own successful struggle for full equality should know this.

"The sole questions for the future of all of us, therefore, are not whether the change will come, but only whether the change can be brought about peacefully and without bloodshed; and what the position of the white man is going to be in the period immediately following on the establishment of democracy—after the years of cruel discrimination and oppression and humiliation which he has imposed on the non-white people of this country."

And then he went on to argue that all repressive legislation, including the Act under which he was actually being tried, was simply designed to "prevent the growth of two ideas accepted throughout the whole civilized world today; the idea that all men should have a say in the manner in which they are to be governed, and the idea that it is

possible for men of different races to live and work together in harmony and peace—to co-operate for the good of all."

He detailed how one after the other all the bodies which strove for these two ideas had been outlawed and banned and thousands of people jailed, banished and driven into exile. "The police state does not create real calm or induce any genuine acceptance of its hated policy." Then back to himself, "I believe that when I joined the legal Communist Party that South Africa had set out on a course which could only lead to civil war of the most vicious kind, whether in ten or fifteen or twenty years. Algeria provided the perfect historical example of that. I believed, moreover, and still believe, that such a civil war can never be won by the whites of this country. They might win some initial rounds. In the long run the balance of forces is against them both inside and outside this country. In Algeria, a close historical parallel, a French army of half a million soldiers, backed by one of the world's great industrial powers could not succeed. But win or lose, the consequences of civil war would be horrifying and permanent. Clearly, it is imperative that an alternative 'solution' be found, for in truth, civil war is no solution at all.

"Here I believed, and still believe, that socialism in the long term has an answer to the problem of race relations—that is a socialist state. But by negotiation other immediate solutions can be found. They must, however, not be imposed but worked out in co-operation and that is what the Communist Party has stood for."

He spoke of all the alternatives to violence in a society where all races could live and work together in harmony. "Had our white political leaders during the last thirty years

preached the possibility of inter-racial co-operation instead of using every means of destroying any belief in it, we might have already reached a position of safety. South Africa would certainly by now have achieved a unique leadership among the States of Africa and would have undoubtedly influenced the history of the whole of the Continent and the future of the white man's position in it."

This part of Bram's speech was adversely commented on by some Communist writers and speakers. For them it was a case of "Ecrasez l'infame". He had slipped aside from the true doctrine. For a moment he had loved his country more than his principles. In fact, the action he had taken was in a sense "patriotic" and therefore wrong. He should not have even wanted to save the South African state in any form. Well, he was paying for it now.

He went on to ask "Who was there to preach this co-operation but the Congresses and the Communist Party? If one believes that these things can only be achieved by political means, what party was there to join but the illegal Communist Party? Moreover, such ideals are not achieved by theorizing only. To convince people, one must put them into practice. Over the past two or three decades, it has been the Congresses and the Communist Party who have demonstrated in practice that men and women of different races can work together without difficulty on the basis of complete democracy, and who have produced leaders prepared to sacrifice everything—even their lives—to achieve this ideal—people who have actually hammered out a policy, the Freedom Charter, in terms of which there will be room for all to exercise their rights. With these leaders, no one need fear that he will be 'driven into the sea'. I speak from

practical experience. I have worked with every Congress leader in South Africa. With these beliefs I had no alternative but to break the law."

Then he spoke with an ever-increasing passion, baring his soul to the court, knowing it was his last chance to get something across, not only to Mr. Justice Boshoff, but to the world beyond. "During the previous decade, too—and now I speak as an Afrikaner—something sinister in the future of my people happened; it is true that apartheid has existed for many decades, with all that it entails, in shapes ranging from segregation and the deprivation of rights to such apparently trivial things as a constant depicting in our Afrikaans newspaper cartoons of the African as a cross between a baboon and a Nineteenth-Century coon. What is not appreciated by my fellow Afrikaner, because he has cut himself off from all contact with non-whites, is that the extreme intensification of that policy over the past fifteen years has lain entirely at his door. He is now blamed as an Afrikaner for all the evils and humiliation of apartheid. Hence today, the policeman is known as a 'Dutch'. That is why, too, when I give an African a lift during a bus boycott, he refuses to believe that I am an Afrikaner.

"All this bodes ill for our future. It has bred a deep-rooted hatred for Afrikaners, for our language, our political and racial outlook amongst all non-whites—yes, even amongst those who seek positions of authority by pretending to support apartheid. It is rapidly destroying amongst non-whites all belief in future co-operation with Afrikaners.

"To remove this barrier will demand all the wisdom, leadership and influence of those Congress leaders now interned and imprisoned for their political beliefs. It

demands also that Afrikaners themselves should protest openly and clearly against discrimination. Surely, in such circumstances there was an additional duty cast on me, that at least one Afrikaner should make this protest actively and positively, even though as a result, I now face fifteen charges instead of four.

"It was to keep faith with all those dispossessed by apartheid that I broke my undertaking to the court, separated myself from my family, pretended I was someone else and accepted the life of a fugitive. I owed it to the political prisoners, to the banished, to the silenced and to those under house arrest, not to remain a spectator but to act. I knew what they expected of me and I did it. I felt responsible, not to those who are indifferent to the sufferings of others, but to those who are concerned. I knew that by valuing above all their judgement, I would be condemned by people who are content to see themselves as respectable and loyal citizens. I cannot regret any condemnation that may follow me."

So this was it. At least one Afrikaner must then be prepared to stand up and as always in human history to give his life for his people.

After that ex-Q.C. Fischer tore to pieces in detail with all his legal ability much of the evidence given by Hlapane. He went over again, all the attempts by all the various political bodies to bring about peaceful legal change. No use. Next came the Defiance Campaign, the formal and non-violent breaking of laws. Still no use. The Congress of the People. The Freedom Charter. Still nothing moved, only increased violence from the Government side. It was as though one spoke to a stone. The 1961 All-in Conference,

followed by further repressions and mass arrest. The law was being abused. "In these circumstances, history will not blame those Congress leaders, who in some way or another, came together in July of 1961 and devised a scheme by which the Spear of the Nation was to be brought into existence under the control of one of its ablest and most responsible leaders, Nelson Mandela."

So what were the alternatives? "To do nothing and simply accept apartheid would have meant total and unconditional surrender to ideas which were, and still are, intensely hated. To proceed to personal violence against whites or white leaders would have been to negate all the Congresses had ever stood for: the establishment of racial harmony and co-operation.

"Therefore, there was devised a plan which it was hoped might help to achieve the required result without injury to persons or to race relations: viz. the formation of a small, closely knit multi-racial organization which would practise sabotage against carefully selected targets, targets which could be attacked without endangering life or limb but which, because of their nature, would demonstrate the hatred of apartheid. For this purpose, therefore, targets were to be Government installations and preferably those which if successfully attacked, would disrupt the process of governing.

"Two further ideas were of importance in this scheme. One was that the leaders of Umkonto gave the assurance that it would not depart from its self-imposed limitations without prior reference to the political movement. In the circumstances the A.N.C. and the Communist Party took no steps to prevent their members joining Umkonto.

"The second was that the organization was not only to be secret, but was to be self controlled by men selected by Mandela, was to finance its own affairs and was to be kept entirely separate and distinct from the Congresses and the Communist Party. This was of equal importance. The Congresses and the Communist Party still had important political functions to fulfil as several exhibits clearly indicate —the functions of political education and organization, of making use of every political opportunity which presented itself to advance the cause of freedom and democracy.

"The Congresses and the Communist Party did not wish to have their membership held liable for every act of sabotage, nor—and this was of crucial political importance —did they want their members to gain the idea that once sabotage commenced, political work should cease. This separation of organizations was always maintained. I had no hand in the founding of Umkonto and I was never a member. I became aware of its existence and I did not disapprove.

"It was never believed that a fundamental change in South African policy could be brought about by sabotage alone. What was hoped by those who devised the plan was that it should highlight the ever-growing dissatisfaction and that steady political work by the Congresses and the Communist Party would have to continue to try to bring about a change."

Again he stated that the Communist Party had always been "rigidly opposed to individual acts of violence. Such acts are regarded by Communists as acts of terrorism which achieve nothing." He suggested also that the planned sabotage of Umkonto was the most likely way of stopping

the extremists "whose numbers and influence were growing at an alarming rate from undertaking precisely that kind of terrorism which we have always sought to prevent".

Again he referred to details of Hlapane's evidence and also of the charges of "forgery", but he spoke also of how police methods had twisted and distorted human personalities like those of Beyleveld and Hlapane. And then he spoke a little more about himself and how, even as a child, he had been an Afrikaner Nationalist and how he had "never doubted that a policy of segregation was the only solution to this country's problems, until the Hitler theory of race superiority began to threaten the world with genocide and with the greatest disaster in all history".

But doubts came to the young man. "One night while I was driving an old A.N.C. leader to his house far out to the west of Johannesburg, I propounded to him the well-worn theory, that if you separate races you diminish the point at which friction between them may occur and hence ensure good relations. His answer was the essence of simplicity. If you place the races of one country in two camps, said he, and cut off contact between them, those in each camp begin to forget that those in the other are ordinary human beings, that each lives and laughs in the same way, that each experiences joy or sorrow, pride or humiliation for the same reasons. Thereby, each becomes suspicious of the other and each eventually fears the other, which is the basis of all racialism.

"I believe that no one could more effectively sum up the South African position today. Only contact between the races can eliminate suspicion and fear. Only contact and co-operation can breed tolerance and understanding. Segre-

gation or apartheid, however genuinely believed in, can produce only those things it is supposed to avoid: inter-racial tension and estrangement, intolerance and race-hatred.

"All the conduct with which I have been charged, has been directed towards maintaining contacts and understanding between the races of this country. If one day it may help to establish a bridge across which white leaders and the real leaders of the non-whites can meet to settle the destinies of us all by negotiations and not by force of arms, I shall be able to bear with fortitude any sentence which this court may impose on me. It will be a fortitude strengthened by this knowledge at least, that for twenty-five years I have taken no part, not even by passive acceptance, in that hideous system of discrimination which we have erected in this country and which has become a by-word in the civilized world today.

"In prophetic words, in February 1881, one of the great Afrikaner leaders addressed the President and the Volksraad of the Orange Free State. His words are inscribed on the base of the statue of President Kruger in the square in front of this court. After great agony and suffering, after two wars, they were eventually fulfilled without force or violence for my people."

Bram Fischer quoted the words in Afrikaans—his own native language. It is equally valid in English: "With confidence we lay our case before the whole world. Whether we win or whether we die, freedom will rise in Africa, like the sun from the morning clouds."

That was when the Boers, the tiny stubborn Afrikaner nation were facing the whole British Empire and its great

strength. We know the history. They won. Bram Fischer ended his speech. "In the meaning which these words bear today they are as truly prophetic as they were in 1881. My motive in all I have done, has been to prevent a repetition of that unnecessary and futile anguish which has already been suffered in one struggle for freedom." And with that his speech ended.

13

An Afrikaner Keeps Faith

PREDICTABLY LEIBENBERG made a final speech attacking his old colleague. A typical sentence: "I believe that he had no principles whatsoever; the less I say about his convictions the better." One important piece of damage had been done; one of the ex-party members had said that salaries of Communist Party officials were paid out of the Defence and Aid Fund. This line was to be extremely useful to the Minister of Justice, Mr. Vorster, when he came to ban the fund in South Africa later on, and thus make things harder for any poor person (usually an African) on a political charge and for their families. I suppose it was more than the government could bear to think that the children of persons in jail or detention should receive the luxury of food and education.

Bram Fischer had been found guilty on fifteen counts. Mr. Justice Boshoff spoke at considerable length before coming to the sentence; it is clear that the main consideration was public safety as he understood it. "The offences," he said, "were committed because of the moral beliefs of the accused and he himself expected other convicted Communists on their release to play their essential part in working for the cause of Communism. The reformative aspect of punishment is therefore of no consideration in assessing the measure of punishment. The retributive aspect

also does not seem to apply." That left him presumably with the deterrent aspect.

Mr. Justice Boshoff went on: "Having regard to all the circumstances the accused is sentenced on the sabotage charge to life imprisonment; on the first Suppression of Communism clause to eight years' imprisonment; under the remaining Suppression of Communism charges, eight years on each count, sentences to run concurrently; on the alternative fraud charges, sentence on each charge a fine of twenty rands and on default of payment, one month's imprisonment. All these sentences to be served concurrently with the sentence of life imprisonment."

Bram accepted this with the fortitude expected of him. Possibly his counsel were more distressed than he was, having had less inner preparation. He looked across, smiling at his children up in the gallery. He lifted his hand in the clenched fist salute of the Third International. Then he shook hands with his counsel. And after that he was led away by the Special Branch.

People stared at the children, Ruth and Ilse and Paul. They did not allow themselves to break down.

The gates of the prison were locked. No news was supposed to go out or in. Sooner or later, however, the whispers get by. The next six months were the worst, in a small cell with two thin felt mats to sleep on, a pot and a water jug for all other needs, with an Afrikaans Bible and two books chosen arbitrarily each week by warders for reading matter. That was not all. There was, for instance, that old knee injury which the young Rhodes scholar had got, playing football for New College; it was discovered that kneeling on a hard floor was particularly painful, so

this criminal was set to scrubbing the dirty cement on hands and knees. It was also pleasurable to force someone who had not only been at the top of his profession, but whose life compared with that of the warder, had been one of riches and finicking cleanliness, to scrub out the nasty prison latrines with a tiny toothbrush or a piece of rag. If they could humiliate or break him—if they could see him broken—that would indeed be a pleasure and a proof of victory. Colonel Aucamp certainly thought so, and also the warder, B. J. du Preez, in whose power Bram was. But one can be in the power of evil and yet survive.

At first it was solitary with no privileges. A warder can make his prisoners feel worse by easy techniques a long way short of torture. For instance, by violent actions, door slammings, threats, insistence on quick obedience and the externals of respect. You are locked in and sit alone through the night reliving it, not able to sink back into forgetfulness. All this happened to Bram.

Later there was a slight easing of conditions, as Bram and the other politicals moved up from D grade which allows only one letter and one half-hour visit every six months, through C which allows the same thing every three months. But an absolute clamp-down on news from outside, and remember, these half-hour visits are conducted through a perspex grill, with both parties sitting in boxes with a warder ready to break in and end it if a bit of news seems to slip in. The main thing perhaps to end Bram's almost complete isolation came when all the white political prisoners were brought together. They were by no means all A.N.C. or Communist Party. What was to be done with them? A problem for the state, since if they were separated and put

with non-politicals they might easily contaminate so-to-speak innocent murderers, burglars and wife-bashers. The craftiness of these politicals was infinite and few of them broke, though most of them had been given a very serious going over at the first questioning after arrest. One, for example, had been kept on his feet from Thursday morning till Saturday evening. Finally, the authorities decided to put them all in together. Denis Goldberg was there already, serving his life sentence from the Rivonia trial.

At first there could be little communication, but much depended on the humanity or venality of individual warders. The prison yard where they exercised had high, dark, enclosing walls. You remember Van Gogh's imprisoning walls perhaps; they give the idea. And yet it became tolerable for newcomers, as one expressed it "By the courtesy and kindness of my fellow-prisoners". These young ones tried to spare Bram the hardest and nastiest of the prison chores, but it was difficult. Bram insisted on taking his share. But none of them any longer felt desperately alone.

Very occasionally a bit of news got through. When on April 30th 1967 Bram was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, he knew because a visitor to another prisoner had blurted it out and been hustled away, but not before it was heard. The whole group felt themselves pleased and honoured. The politicals who were in the Central Prison and still with the ordinary criminal prisoners, heard about the assassination of Dr. Verwoerd within minutes of the warders hearing of it, and they passed the news on to Bram when they joined him.

The "politicals" also began to talk amongst themselves during the hours when they were together. They were an interesting group, ranging from long-time members of the

Communist Party through some well-read Marxists who had been Trotskyists to radical younger whites who were critical of much of the older Stalinist ideology, but were even more critical of conditions in South Africa. It was in many ways a peculiar situation; ideological differences did not disappear, but they did not prevent very frank discussion.

This was what happened in prison. Ordinary everyday news items were prevented from coming in by the vigorous censorship. What news did filter through was literally snatched out of the air in stray gobbets. But if there was no news, the daily irritations that accompany news were also missing. No one had to defend or explain dubious policy decisions. In such an atmosphere, men were driven back to their knowledge, in many cases extensive, of the country, and to their sense of history. Marxist opinions became again useful tools for analysis. Criticism of the régime by non-Marxists proved valuable to everybody. Talk centred on the possible re-interpretation of South African history to explain the situation that had brought so many people to prison.

Talk also centred on the future. It was not the immediate future: that was prison and mail bags and scrubbing floors and years of hard slog. It was the further future of the national liberation of the country. No prisoner could talk of how he himself could help with this. That would have been not only painful but futile and illegal; the warders could, or did, listen to everything. Instead, they spoke of how it was to be used in the time of achievement. This belief in national liberation was, after all, the bond which united everybody far beyond the ideological positions which might have divided them.

But somehow none of the differences counted against

the great fact of comradeship first in the field of action and now in the more difficult and trying discipline of acceptance. And all the time, Bram's Communist faith acted as a Rock of Ages for all. They often thought of their African friends on Robben Island having, as they must have guessed, a much worse time physically and mentally. This went as far as the rare letters which the African prisoners were allowed to write. I myself saw a letter of condolence and explanation from Nelson Mandela, where every essential or important word had been blacked out by a malevolent prison censor. Can they, too, survive in the power of even greater evil? One doesn't know. If only all the political prisoners could have been together! But apartheid held even more strongly in prison.

Occasionally there would be some little treat, when finally, long after ordinary prisoners were accorded the privilege, some politicals were allowed to purchase from the canteen. This would, of course, be shared. There was an occasion when one of the prisoners, desperate to shorten his sentence, had given State evidence. He appeared as a witness for the prisons in a case dealing with prison conditions. He did not survive cross-examination, and while forfeiting his fellow prisoners' comradeship, he did not secure his release, either. His comrades, having already suffered at the hands of informers and State witnesses, wouldn't speak to him. Then when the treats started, Bram shared with this man and when the rest protested, said to them that he was now suffering deeply; it would be wrong to make it worse.

All of them above all wanted to talk to Bram, to tell him things. He was strangely back in his old position of helper and comforter, as one of them said "living other people's

lives". Nor was this only his fellow prisoners; a warder, too, may have legal or family problems. Yet the rest of the prisoners, even while they sat around sewing sacks, worried a good deal about Bram's health. Prison diet and prison exercise, or lack of it, are not the best for someone who has had a longstanding arthritis and blood pressure condition. His eyes gave him trouble. But the exercise problem was somewhat solved by a version of cricket they managed to devise. By now the warders had developed a certain respect for the whole group, with their courage and gaiety and ingenuity. When the shorter sentenced prisoners left they felt that they had been strengthened and in a sense, privileged through their contact with this white-haired man, the same Bram Fischer, not certainly as strong and fit as he made himself out to be, but with an inner strength which he gave out to all who were with him.

All the time others remembered. I used to think about Bram Fischer in Botswana with anger and frustration, and yet knowing that because of him the white image in black eyes was a better one. Nothing had been in vain.

After a time he was allowed the privilege of working in the garden of the new prison block built specially for politicals. He was now an A group prisoner and can get no further. The A group of criminals is allowed newspapers, radio and contact visits where a prisoner and his visitor are actually in the same room. But an A political is allowed no newspapers of any kind, no radio, only three letters a month, to and fro, strictly limited to 500 words with no "news" in them. He can have a visit from two people at a time for two half hours a month, or one hour, in the boxes, through the separating grill. He can expect nothing

more. Remember, this is someone who has always been deeply involved with people, especially his own family and children. One builds up for weeks before the visit, thinking how to make the most of it, but it can never be even briefly satisfying. The Special Branch have their own little ways with the political prisoners. When Denis Goldberg's children were flown out to see their father again after so long and were allowed only three-quarters of an hour with him, Bram brought Denis flowers so that he would have something to give to his children. And again when in 1971 Paul died, but Bram could not be released for a few hours to attend the funeral (what were they afraid of—that the mere sight of him would do something unforeseen to some people?), he was able to send out a bunch of roses : the rose Peace. Thereafter there was a complete ban on sending out flowers.

Most of all, perhaps they want him to be not only powerless but forgotten. Memories are, of course, short. The beautiful house has been sold, the servants whose memories were long have been pensioned off, the family is loyal but scattered. But every time there is a political trial, as with the 1971 trial of the Dean of St. Mary's, and with other trials as inevitably they go on coming up, memories will be fortified.

How does Bram Fischer survive in good heart? As we should know by now, people in prison or detention camps survive if they have a reasonably simple and optimistic belief. It may be religious or political; it may not stand up to argument or even the facts of history. But it is strong, *ein feste Burg*.

Let me quote from Bram's own words: "Have we the strength to abolish white domination?

"At times, looking at the problem from within our police state, the task would seem to be beyond the power of the oppressed people. Today the people's forces and organizations appear to be scattered and disarmed. Many leaders are serving long prison sentences; many are house arrested, banned and banished; many are in exile. Police powers are used freely to destroy new organizations, to spirit people away, to detain them indefinitely, to torture them, often to death, or to drive them to suicide.

"The State, with the help of certain European powers, is arming at the rate of R300 million a year.

"Despite all this, I believe that to take a pessimistic view of the present situation would be a mistake. An oppressed people bows at first before its oppressor. It is compelled to do so by his superior power. Oppression may also bring about division amongst the oppressed, particularly when it is designed in part precisely for this purpose. But oppressed people bow down only up to a point. Beyond that, sooner or later, there comes a time when desperation cancels danger, when the will to sacrifice drives out fear and creates a willingness to die for freedom. Beyond this point, instead of division, oppression creates unity.

"In its long history of suffering, South Africa is rapidly reaching this point. Brave men and women are acting, despite the dangers that face all opponents of the government's mad race policies. Imprisonment has become honourable. Even torture can be faced when the immediate goal is fully understood: the goal of the destruction of white domination.

"The people may not yet have the arms, but they have behind them the experience of decades of struggle and of

organization. They have the ever-growing will to win. And in the long run, this counts for more than immediate military strength, especially when the people are buoyed up by an overwhelming degree of international support, a degree which is perhaps unique in the history of freedom struggles.

"Therefore, let no one lost heart. The vast majority of South Africa's 21 million people—more than three-quarters of them—know what they want and know they will get it. They will finally abolish white supremacy from this rich land of ours and so take an immense step forward towards ending white exploitation throughout Africa.

"And then? Relationships between races will not cease to exist at that moment. How will they fare thereafter? The problem is not finally solved by the destruction of white supremacy.

"It is here that our second task arises. And for this we must again make use of the knowledge gained from South African history.

"First and foremost, there is the experience of a long period of struggle carried on by the great majority of our people *against* the evil of racism and *for* a society of racial equality. Nobody should under-estimate the power of an ideal—and we in South Africa know that the ideal of striving for a non-discriminatory multi-racial society is a powerful one that has sustained the freedom movement in South Africa through many sufferings. It has welded together our non-white races and inspired many whites. It has thrown up great leaders. It will not come to a sudden end when victory is won.

"In fact, it is the only guarantee that white South Africans have—little as they deserve it—that, when victory comes,

they will not be discriminated against merely because they are white.

"But victory over white domination alone is not sufficient. Ideas in the long run are shaped by environment and I am convinced that the history of South Africa shows beyond doubt that it is impossible in a multi-racial society to establish harmonious race relations permanently as long as the system prevailing in the country is one which depends upon the use of labour for profit. As long as one entrepreneur can fight his way into a market or can defend his market against the onslaught of others by increasing the exploitation of labour, there will always be an excuse for lowering wages and degrading workers. While this is possible in a multi-racial country—when indeed the entrepreneur can often ensure his continued existence as an entrepreneur only by cheapening labour—then there exists a perpetual, driving reason why race should be used as an excuse for cheapening labour and hence for discrimination.

"It is therefore essential for future race relations in South Africa that the people take possession of the basic economic structure of the country and that a non-profit-making co-operative system should be established in which all can work together for the benefit and for the rising standards of all. In such a society work will not depend on profits or on the cheapness of labour but upon planned production, and in that planned production there can never be fear of recession or a scarcity of jobs—both factors which produce the most virulent racism.

"Many, especially amongst white South Africans, may dislike this reality. If they do, let them face the alternative: a country perpetually torn by hatred and strife, in which a

few will grow rich and the vast majority live in the shadow of poverty and police terror—as exists in South Africa today.

"I have no doubt that this is the lesson to be learned from South Africa's experience. I have no doubt that the adoption of socialism would have far-reaching consequences, not only for South Africa, but for Africa and the world as a whole.

"By abolishing racism through socialism South Africa can become a leader amongst the ex-colonial countries of the world. It can make a vital and lasting contribution to the solution of the race problem that plagues many countries and which brings deep suffering to many millions of people.

"More than this: the abolition of racism in this way will at last enable South Africa to play the continental role which, as the most advanced industrial country in Africa, it is her duty to play. By using the skill of 21 million people in this country—instead of that of only 4 million—massive economic development can be achieved within a few years. Then there will be no limit to the growing aid—*true* aid—that South Africa can give to her neighbours and other states of Africa.

"At present its entrepreneurs, under the pretence of aiding Africa, are extending their hold into other states. In some, they exploit minerals at a minimum of cost; in others, agriculture, forests and raw materials. From some they import nothing but cheap labour—some of the world's cheapest. In yet others, they take pride in contribution to "development" by building hotels with night-clubs and gambling dens for white South African tourists who, there, are only too happy to step over the colour-line.

"This is not aid for Africa. This is the first emergence, in

our South African crucible, of a new imperialism. It does not spell aid. It spells naked exploitation—and, in future, when vested interests have to be "protected" against young nations struggling desperately to raise the standards of living and of education of their own people, it means war.

"And this is why the nations of the world are entirely justified in regarding South Africa's policies, not as something internal which concerns South Africa alone, but as a question of vital interest to the whole of Africa and the world—a question which contains the threat of conflict for all Africa and for the world.

"Here, then, is the choice which is placed before us by South Africa's experience. We can go forward to a new and brilliant future—or we can fall ever deeper into the strife and hatred of racism.

"I know where the majority of South Africans stand. They will not let slip the opportunity which history presents to them. Whatever the cost, they will play their part in the abolition of oppression. They will go on to achieve the noblest goal of all: the brotherhood of all races and of all men."

Is this altogether too starry-eyed? It may seem so, but very strange things have happened in history and may happen yet. Self-interest is not the only motive. Materially a police state with modern arms and a soaring military budget for defence—against whom?—may be invulnerable. The days of revolutionary uprisings may be over. But that is not all. What moves the human spirit is still unclear. But there are certain stories which appear to re-enact themselves and to have the same kind of impact every time. It seems

possible that Bram Fischer has re-enacted one of these stories and because he has done so and because he has gone through pain and humiliation and loss, certain kinds of forgiveness may be generated and certain other very terrible things may not after all happen.

Postscript

Month after month the logic of a police state develops in South Africa. There are more arrests, more investigations, more fear and an ever-growing army of informers in any association, including the Churches and the Universities. Laws become more stringent; so does their enforcement. Great moral pressure is put on Afrikaner youth not to be corrupted by books, television or ideas from the outside: instead a special new indoctrination course of "youth preparedness".

All the same, young people are questioning the structure of the apartheid state, so far the means employed rather than the underlying philosophy and end. It is increasingly difficult for an intelligent person, young or old, not to see the indignities and injustices inherent in baaskap. Professional and business men and women are more and more worried, though few can face the real solutions. The Government is well aware of this, attacking NUSAS, the student organization and, increasingly, the Press, which, in spite of severe restrictions on its freedom, does struggle to give some unslanted news and allow some criticism. Some members at least of the Bar and Bench try to keep up the old standards. Holes appear in the iron curtain of sport, mostly from the sportsmen themselves, but are often plugged again.

Meanwhile there are a few possible platforms for African and Coloured. These are respectable, designed only for show,

But brave and determined people can use them, and are doing so.

We do not know what the shape of things in the Republic of South Africa will be in five years' time. We can only see mounting tension. We can look for precedents. Political institutions have never remained the same, and our's is a century of very rapid change. Perhaps we are not even aware of the beginnings of what is, inexorably, going to happen.

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Bram Fischer

Naomi Mitchison

We all condemn apartheid. We all condemn the cruelty and stupidity of the South African Government, which treats those with a different skin colour as permanent inferiors. Here is the story of an Afrikaner, one of the governing class, who looked another way, as other brave and intelligent South Africans are doing. This is why he is singled out for special punishment and like so many of his black South African friends is now a prisoner, serving a life sentence.

Naomi Mitchison brings to this study the same accuracy and scholarship which are found in the historical background of her novels and stories. Although a prohibited immigrant in South Africa and Rhodesia, she is familiar at first hand with Southern Africa, its people, their aspirations.