RADICAL ENGAGEMENTS

by

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INTRODUCTION

There was a time in the mid 1990's, in London, a lull in activity, a cross roads in my life, when I started to write the story of the past years, a memoir. The journey seemed quite interesting as I put down all the different things I had done, with the assistance of a number of documents, diaries, letters and notebooks, my own archive; I had stored and carried it with me over the years.
Perhaps I formed the habit of recording interesting events and titbits because of my lonely childhood and instead of talking, I wrote them down.

At the top of our house, in what we called my studio, I sorted through these papers and began to write. I travelled down memory lane and a good deal of it was a painful experience, particularly reading letters of much loved people such as my father, long since deceased. This assortment of papers, including old speeches, enabled me to make some sense of my past, starting with distant events.

I decided to focus on the evolutionary path of a suburban white South African girl, myself, who chose an atypical radical alternative when quite young. People often ask me why I changed course and took another direction. Shimoni's• conclusions persuade me that the radicals and liberals among us "were not made but simply born that way." As a student in Johannesburg, I drifted towards that small group of white people who challenged the harsh political realities of the times, in the late fifties and early sixties, which resulted in exile in England. With little preparation, I lost my early landscape and in my mid twenties needed to find another identity.

The swinging sixties were fun and the challenges and pleasures of life in London helped to mask the deep pain of exile. Those first years in England were tough and I consciously decided to become British, to delete that past life in South Africa. Now I realise it was my way of coping and in the next twenty years, life changed course completely.

However, in the mid nineteen- eighties I found myself drawn back to South Africa and became increasingly active in the ANC in London, involved in its activities, absorbed by the final struggles against apartheid.

• Shimoni Gideon (2003) "Community and Conscience, the Jews in Apartheid South Africa" (David Philips)

This was the important era in my life, as I completed, in some senses, the circle.

The most significant parts of my life have been involved in political activism, radical engagements, from the time I became conscious of such things. The buzz for me has come from politics. Not only have political ideas, analysis and events been in the fore of my thinking, doing and talking, but they too have been the focus for much of my most pleasurable and painful experiences.

A story has to end, and this memoir lay unfinished for years and now, living in Cape Town, I have been able to complete it. My chronology is conventional as I begin with details of my ancestors and first memories. By researching my heredity, I uncovered and remembered the past, many strands obscured by time. - and put together a more complete history of myself.

Lorna Levy
Cape Town,
November 2005.

PART ONE:
CHAPTER 1

MY ROOTS: THE HIDDEN PAST.

My story may not have been written but for the desire to find out about my grandfather who was brutally murdered in 1906, on the road to Brakfontein Farm, near Hopetown, scene of the discovery of the first diamond. My father was four at that time and the youngest of five children.

Up to the time I was in my thirties, living in London, no one had ever told me about this grandfather. There was a silence around Philip Borkum and I assumed he had just died young when my father was a little boy. I suppose it was something too shameful to mention or commemorate. Then casually, one day my father dropped the fact…perhaps he thought I knew it. I was shocked by the news and about a century after that event, when I, a rather disorientated returned exile in Cape Town set out to uncover this. I knew it to be an important case for me to unearth - a key to my own roots and identity.

I did establish that my paternal grandfather, Philip Borkum had been reluctant to leave Riga. His family were prosperous hat merchants but my grandmother Ella persuaded him to join the rest of her family, including her parents, my great grand parents, in Kimberley. It was there, in Fergusson Lane, on 7 August 1902 that my father was born.

I played around with parallels as I tried to unearth the details. Was the path of my own life a journey along the road to Brakfontein Farm? Metaphorically speaking, is the road back to my roots my own murder? How would it have affected my life had Philip Borkum lived to rear his five children? There were so many possibilities that I dreamed of as I scoured the South African Library and the Archives until I found the Court Record of the murder.

As soon as I was able to consider such things, I believed myself to belong to two very different and in fact, opposite traditions. The Heydenreichs on my paternal grandmother's side were a definable tribe. They were

bold, articulate, successful and exotic. The older generation were educated, spoke German together and came from Riga.

While the Jankelowitz side were an altogether less sophisticated group on my mother's side, there were fewer of them and they were decidedly more foreign and orthodox Jews. And so paradoxically, although my maternal grandmother, Chaie Riva, from Ponevyz in Lithuania, acted as a mother figure to me in my early childhood I still took my family identity from my father's side. My maternal grandfather, Yehuda Leib Jankelowitz died a year before I was born and my name, Lorna, was after him, however vague that connection now seems. He married twice, his first wife was a granddaughter of the venerated Vilna Gaon, and she died in childbirth. Although my grandmother, many years his junior, was related to his first wife, we have no evidence to prove that she too was related to the Vilna Gaon. On that side of the family, therefore, I cannot claim any special '*yiches'*.•

The Heydenreichs, on the other hand, imparted their unshakable faith in themselves to all their children and grandchildren and this stood us in good stead. It was self-confidence, a feeling of equality to all others, which my mother scornfully referred to as 'our blue blood.'

ELLA HEYDENREICH (married Philip Borkum, Abraham Glatt)

When I was a little girl, she was a towering figure in my life. My father adored his mother and her whole family and many others revered her. My mother felt slighted by her, judged she felt as an inferior choice of wife for my father. This message came through to me too. It helped to skew my perception of my mother.

As it was, because of her authority and majesty, I chose to describe myself as the granddaughter of Ella. She was the matriarch of her large family and had a huge influence on all her relatives. As a child, I referred to her as 'Big Granny' because she was large and fat and my other granny was small.

• yiches – Yiddish word meaning an honour, something worthwhile to be proud of about which one can boast .

My grandmother's early life took place in quite liberal times, as described in 'The Jews in Latvia'.[•] Merchants and professional German speaking Jews took part in the life of the cities of Latvia. They were middle class and did not experience consistent unfavourable discrimination in life and work. It was towards the 1890's with the "Russianification" of Kurland and the attempts then made to conscript young men into the Tsar's Army for lengthy periods, that the first Heydenreichs began to emigrate.

My paternal great grandparents, Celina and Samuel Heydenreich immigrated to South Africa from Mitau in the 1890's and died in Kimberley, buried in the Stead Street Cemetery. Great Aunt Anna, in her unpublished chronicles of the family, 'The Heydenreich Saga', claimed her parents were quite prosperous having inherited a brewery and potato factory in Latvia from their parents. Nonetheless, they followed their son Herman to South Africa and eventually most of their family settled in the Kimberley area.

Every member of the family received a copy of Auntie Anna Hoffman's genealogical findings. Until the 1950's when she died, she traced our reputed connections with many illustrious families in Europe going back to the eighteenth century. It was a story of one of those rambling Jewish families one does come across. We questioned the pretentiousness of Auntie Anna's claims but all the same, I did enjoy knowing that perhaps, we had some renowned ancestors. It never occurred to me to ask more about these people, to check how true or false her memories were. The assumption was that Auntie Anna, a schoolteacher, would be as exact as possible about the past and passed on some knowledge of their Latvian life.

She wrote that her grandmother, Pauline Lasersohn, who died aged 95, *"remained surprisingly young to the end of her long life, and she told me the secret of her youthful outlook on life was she had always kept herself surrounded by young people*."
With hindsight, so did Ella. She kept open house and there was always a caller in her living room to join her for a sundowner or afternoon tea. I remember vividly one of my cousin's discarded young boyfriends, a medical student, drinking whisky with my grandmother and playing to her on his guitar.

[•]"The Jews in Latvia" (1971) edited by the Association Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel
(Published Tel Aviv)

In my childhood, my grandmother certainly not an orthodox woman had this odd friendship with Chief Rabbi, Louis Rabinowitz. Her background was uncommon for a woman of her time because in her youth in Mitau, she organised teaching groups for poor Jewish girls to teach them the three R's. The Chief Rabbi clearly enjoyed her company and her lack or orthodoxy seemed not to bother him. Long after she died, he would always attend her grandchildren's weddings to propose the toast to her memory.

In 1955 when Auntie Anna died her daughter, Nora Kane[*], a writer herself, described the "passing of Anna Hoffman as the ending of the old generations of unselfish, generous and clever women who for a century had graced the Heydenreich line. She was the last of the old Matriarchs."

Ella, the eldest, married Philip Borkum in Riga and two of their five children, Flora and my father were born in Kimberley. In my life and before, the family had removed his name and existence from family lore. Silence reigned about him after he died tragically aged only 45 years old. I have pieced together, nearly a hundred years later that he was the son of Myer Liebel and Anna Borkum of Riga and working as a 'smous'[•♣] when he died during his last round near Britstown near Kimberley. He had intended to set up a boarding house together with my grandmother in Kimberley proper.

Following his death, my grandmother took her five children and went to live in England with her cousins, Alexander and Jane Bernstein. They were the parents of Sidney Bernstein, Granada Television magnate and philanthropist. The Bernsteins then lived in Ilford and because Ella was close to Alexander, this must have been the reason she went to England and where she remained for two years. In her grief, I assume she ran away from the tragedy. Perhaps she hoped her relations would help her to establish a new life in England. "You're not the only one to live in England," Uncle Joe once recalled as an old man. "I even went to school there for a while." By then, his memory had failed and he was unable to

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[•] Nora Kane wrote "The World's View, the Story of Southern Rhodesia" (1954) with a foreword by the then Prime Minister of the Rhodesian Federation, Sir Godfrey Higgins.

[♣•] 'smous' refers in this instance to an itinerant Jewish peddler "who brought to the isolated farmer the material goods and also some of the cultural wares of civilisation." (Shain, Milton (1994)
"The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa p1

[♣]

give any further information. He did not shed any light as to why they all returned to South Africa. We never discussed it.

Those parts of the puzzle are lost but when she returned to South Africa Ella married Abraham Glatt. He was a widower whose first wife was Afrikaans and his marriage to my grandmother seemed a business contract. He wanted to ensure that his three daughters be brought up as Jews and Jewish husbands found for them. In exchange, he would provide support for Ella and her three younger children. Benno and Joe, the two oldest boys left the family home to fend for themselves from their early teens, excluded from the 'deal'.

When I look back, it seems that my father's boyhood started in Vrede, a small country town in the Free State. This is where Mr. Glatt had his hotel. My father's endless repertoire of stories of his boyhood started from that time. They were about his school, his friends, his sisters, his stepsisters and life in Vrede where he grew up in this Afrikaans environment. Their large extended family lived in a rambling house adjoining the hotel. I loved to listen to the stories he told me about that life and would constantly say: "tell me about when you were a boy" and time after time listen to those stories. My father did not like his stepfather; he always referred to him as 'Alte Glatt'. Eventually he completed his schooling in English, sent away to boarding school, to Marists' Brothers College in Pietermaritzburg. He never returned to Vrede. When his sisters grew up they moved away and my grandmother left too and from then she lived with one of her children in Johannesburg.

Later on when my mother was already on the scene, she remembered Alte Glatt arriving in Johannesburg. He wished to resume life with my grandmother but she told him to go to the Jewish Old Aged Home where presumably, he died.

My grandmother, Ella Glatt ended her long life in Johannesburg in October 1953. She was well into her eighties when she died, surrounded and mourned by a large family and friends. A special plaque in The Hall of Remembrance at West Park Cemetery enshrines her memory.

PHILIP BORKUM

As I searched for information about my grandfather, it mystified me that such a seemingly extroverted family had never talked about this episode. Auntie Anna's Saga did refer to this death as tragic, but gave no details. Did my father know more and did he speculate during his lifetime on the different upbringing he may have had with his own father as head of the whole family? By way of some explanation, I must accept that theirs was a generation who accepted such tragedies and afterwards did not delve into what had been. You hear this a lot. It was an era of terrible happenings and consequently, discussion of unpleasant and sad memories took place only when necessary. Was there also a shame attached to their changed status and circumstances?

As I scoured the newspapers of the period for an announcement of the murder, my first surprise was there were no reports of that violent death and the subsequent trial. It became clear to me that the murder of a Jew did not warrant reporting in the newspapers of those days, even in a place as small as Kimberley that did have a sizable Jewish population. Jews in that period had a strange status in South Africa. True, their race classification was white, just about, but they were regarded as a group just a notch above the Coloured, foreign, alien with peculiar habits and languages.•

Eventually I found the trial record in the South African Archives. In the Circuit Court for the District of Victoria West, there was a murder charge of Philip Borkum against two young men - Frikkie, alias Fred Brown, (white) and Christian Smit, alias Nicholas Loggerenberg, (Coloured). The charge sheet stated that they both wrongfully, maliciously and unlawfully murdered him on about 27 January 1906. This happened four years after the end of the Anglo Boer War, near Ganskuil, in the District of Britstown. Borkum, described in the trial record as being "in his lifetime, a trader carrying on his business in Britstown."

Nineteen witnesses gave evidence in a trial conducted with utmost propriety, recorded in black copper plate handwriting. There emerged a picture of the last days of my grandfather. The accused were servants, helpers who worked for him. He had only just hired them and this was their first trip together. They accompanied him with his wagon, eight donkeys and a small amount of sheep as he plied his goods to surrounding farms near Britstown. His wagon was loaded with merchandise. The deceased complained to a number of farmers that his employees were always unwilling to do what he told them. Everybody

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in the trial referred to the deceased as 'the Jew,' ' the Jew Borkum' or the 'Jew trader' –the word Jew always describes him. It shocked me. Clearly, however, there was a poor relationship between employer and his employees, and it was Philip Borkum's intention to dispense with their services when they reached Britstown. He felt them to be untrustworthy and not doing their work properly.

A picture built up of a short thickset man, muscular with a black beard and 45 years old. There is nothing else to help form a picture, no other sources of information about the person, only the events of his last few days told by witnesses. Which, I wonder of his children or grandchildren resembled him? There are no photographs and no other description so that he remains forever mysterious. One witness thought he wore a white jacket on the day of his murder but that is not altogether clear. Recently I established from the Latvian Archives that his full name was Philip Mayer Borkum and he was born in Riga in January 1861.

I can create this life story now by its end revealed in the sanitised Court record. I looked at his death for clues to his life but received only a few. After all, I was searching for somebody without whom I would never have been. In what seems now a far away country a set of events unfolds. Olive Schreiner captured that landscape of a dry sandy earth and its inhabitants in "The Story of an African Farm". The discovery of diamonds took place in this locality. The Heydenreich family moved there too, surely in search of the fortune that some relations made in time.

Why did the Heydenreichs choose South Africa in the first place and particularly Kimberley, dry and dusty? Dan Jacobson[♣] believes that the publicity given to Sammy Marks' sensational financial success made public in Lithuania and elsewhere had the effect of making South Africa a fashionable destination in the 1890's and beyond, particularly Kimberley where the diamond fields were flourishing. Reports of gold, diamonds and wealth reached the far-flung Russian Empire and gradually the numbers of Jews who emigrated increased.

Farmers were the witnesses who described the last few days of Philip Borkum's life. They were the people with whom he traded and where he spent his nights, after unharnessing his wagon. These farmers knew him. Jan Gabriel Myburg, a farmer described 'the Jewish hawker who arrived on his farm with eight donkeys, a wagon loaded with merchandise. He arrived on Sunday, 21 January and stayed until

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[♣]Dan Jacobson (1998) "Hershel's Kingdom" (Penguin Books)

Thursday because four donkeys had strayed and the accused were away looking for them.

Mr. Herman Blumberg, a shopkeeper and friend of my grandfather identified the dead body. He told the Court that he had known him for some years and lately Philip Borkum had hawked in the Britstown district. The deceased always wore a chain buttoned to his trousers with a purse tied to it when he made purchases at his shop but he found these missing and the chain wrenched off. As a trader himself he realised that the deceased could not have been away from home for five or six days without having any money on him. In any case, he must have sold goods for cash on his trip but Mr. Blumberg found no money on him.

Andries Pretorious, a resident at Ganskuil testified, "the Jew came to our house and asked if we could couple the goat" as his servants did not know how. This he did and then watched them depart until they disappeared over the rise. Nicolas was leading and Philip Borkum was driving. Frikkie was walking twenty yards from the wagon with the stock.

On that day, Saturday 27 January several people saw the wagon along the road to Brakfontein, at first three people were identified with it…but then only two people were seen.

Jan Benson testified that on returning from the village to Brakfontein on the Saturday afternoon he saw a tent wagon outspanned opposite a railway cottage. He looked straight into it as the front was open and noticed a bundle of sacks lying in the wagon towards the front. "They appeared to be loosely thrown there," he said. "There was sufficient time to cover a body. I went home," he continued. "On my return to the village later and I once again stopped near the wagon. Is your baas (that is, boss) back, I asked?"

They told Benson that Borkum had gone into the village to secure a room. He became slightly suspicious when told that he had made the journey by cart and he could only see his own spoor marks. Later that evening he saw the two accused together in the village.

The next witness described what he found the following day, Sunday 27th January. Jacobus Smit was herding his horses and noticed a wagon unharnessed) on the other side of the railway line. This was close to the level crossing of the De Aar railway line. He went to the wagon for water but there were no people or animals around, but as he left, he noticed a spade lying on the line and close by, the body of a dead man

where the upper part of the body was covered with hay and ground, and the feet protruded. The ground was quite loose and a slight rain had fallen. There were no human spores around, only a few donkey ones. He did not touch anything but reported it immediately. He identified the wagon and the spade before the Court as those he had just described.

The police constable then described the state of the wagon loaded with merchandise that" had been pulled about". There were no signs of a struggle on the wagon but about thirty yards from the wagon and on the inside of the railway fence, he identified a human body partly covered by hay and earth. A closer inspection revealed a very swollen and discoloured head and around the neck, a thin rope as thick as his little finger. In his opinion, the body had been placed in position before the rain the previous night and more than one person had been involved, to get it over the fence.

The District Surgeon's verdict was that death was from strangulation. In his view, there was a struggle based on the positioning of the rope. In this case, the knots of the rope were at the back, one behind the ear and the other at the back of the head. That indicated a struggle had taken place although they could not detect any other signs of a struggle because there had been heavy rain the previous night.

The arrest of the accused took place almost immediately after the offence. Philip Borkum engaged them both in De Aar on 30th December 1905 and they started their work for him on January 6th 1906. Twenty-six days later on 26th January they killed him.

Frikkie's account of the killing:

"*As I left the wagon to go to the sheep and was about a hundred yards away I heard my master shouting: Frederick come, come, Frederick come help. I looked around and saw Nicholas had hold of my master by his throat on the wagon. They were struggling very much. I rushed up to stop the donkeys and when I got up to the front donkeys, the two fell off the wagon. I stopped the wagon and rushed up to where they were. Nicholas was on top of my master who was lying on his back with his one knee in my master's stomach and the other on his chest, his fingers were around the Jew's throat.*

I said ' man, let the man be.' Nicholas replied –' he must die. The bugger must die.' I was bewildered and hardly knew what I did. I remember going and picking the food basket up and placing it again on

the wagon. It must have fallen off in the struggle. Nicolas then picked up the Jew and placed him on the footboard of the wagon, turned and cut a piece of strand rope that we used to tie the bags of forage. He got onto the wagon and moved the body back resting the head on the wagon box and took the rope and tied it round the Jew's throat saying: 'perhaps the bugger is still alive.'

He then lifted the body right into the wagon and covered it with the Jew's and his own jackets, took the Jew's bundle of rugs and placed them at the feet. He told me go to the sheep and gave me £2 for saying nothing that he killed the man. They can find out themselves, he said. They found the money I put in my waistcoat pocket in jail. As we walked to the gate, Nicholas said 'we must run away to Johannesburg, keep together and once we cross the border they can do nothing to us. My father has a farm there,' he said. We were walking along with the wagon and at one point, Nicholas stopped the wagon and told me to get a bucket of water that I did. He drank the water and then filled the bucket with cash, kept, locked on one side of the wagon.

Then we went on our way to Britstown. We passed people on the way that recognised us. We talked about what we would do. Nicholas said he would buy tickets for both of us when we got to De Aar and we would have a good time when we got to Johannesburg where we would stay. After one of the people who we passed asked where the Jew was, I got very frightened. I could smell a stink and was afraid the passing driver would smell it too.

Later on, we turned the donkeys towards De Aar all along the wire fence and as we came up to the crossing, Nicholas found a place to bury the body. He got through the wire and saw a hole there. He returned to the wagon, got up and took the bundle of blankets at the Jew's feet and threw them on the ground, took the coats off the corpse and covered the face with a sack. He slid the body down and jumped off the wagon, put his one arm under the legs and one round the body, lifted it up, and carried it to the hole. With the shovel usually tied to the other side of the wagon, he began to cover the body with earth. When he had only half covered the body, he heard a train coming and saw the light as it approached. Nicholas flung the shovel from him and we both began to run. The train passed and that was the last I saw of Nicholas.

It started to rain and I got through the wire and took shelter under the culvert. I stayed there until near daylight, then I went into town, and reached there at about 5.15a.m. I went down to a Coloured person

named Steyn. They were asleep when I got there and I waited until they got up. Steyn wanted to know how things were and whether I had returned with the Jew. I said yes but then told him there was a 'great fault' in that answer. Then I told him about the murder. About the time the church came out, a constable came with another man and arrested me. I was taken to the magistrate and afterwards put in jail."

Before he made a cross instead of a signature, Freddie ended his testimony by saying: "the Jew and Nicholas were always quarrelling."

Nicholas Loggerenberg insisted throughout that the "*nigger named Frederick had a row with the Jew every day and told the Jew he would break his neck. The Jew told me that as soon they came to Britstown he would him put in gaol."* He overturned the blame, it was all Freddie's responsibility; and the language was more virulently racist.[•]"

"*At eight o'clock the same evening the nigger asked me if I was willing to help him kill the Jew. I told him no. I don't want to go along with a thing like that. I agreed to keep quiet and help him bury the Jew as long as I didn't help to kill him.*

Nicholas then continued to describe the same events as Freddie but substituted Freddie as the murderer. According to Nicholas, he only helped to pick up the corpse and put it in on the wagon. Freddie said they must bury the dead man when it got dark but while they were covering the corpse with sand at the railway land, they saw a man coming towards them. *"The nigger ran away and I did too," he said.*

The next day he went back to the wagon and took the clothes that he was then wearing in Court. They caught him that same day on the train at De Aar; he intended to take the train to Bloemfontein.

Judge Masdop found the two accused guilty of murder and sentenced them to death in The Circuit Court for the District of Victoria West on 27th March 1906. The Court documents state finally that both were hanged on 2nd June 1906.

[•] After the South African War, (1899-1902) there was a rising sentiment of 'anti-alienism.' This often blurred blatant anti-Semitism, as the notion of Jewish economic domination was part of the anti Jewish stereotype. Scurrilous accusations against the Jews were widespread which included hostility towards the Jewish trader. From Milton Shain, "Vant to puy a vaatch?" Jewish Affairs, Vol. 57, No. 3 Spring 2002

During my search for these records, we guessed at dramatic motives for the murder. Was Philip Borkum involved in diamond smuggling? Therefore, it was more of a shock to finally find that the murder had almost no motive. He was a 'smous', with a well-stocked wagon of goods and robbed of some money and merchandise only a few weeks after engaging these employees. Their relationship was clearly not a good one, yet there is no evidence to suggest he was even a bad employer. The two younger men could have overpowered him and robbed him, if that was their prime motive, without resorting to murder. The reason for killing him seemed a primitive urge, a spontaneous act.

It all happened nearly a century ago but it shaped the lives of the generations that followed. Philip Borkum was to have become a boarding house keeper, another step towards integration. He may have followed his brothers-in-law into the cinema and mining industry.

Those are questions without answers and time has now obliterated the chance to get more information. I will remain close to that sad story of a near anonymous Jewish smous, my grandfather, whose life came to a tragic end that Saturday afternoon near Britstown. His wife and five children were probably waiting for him to return, to get started in their new life. As for his other family who stayed behind in Riga…. well, I suppose they ultimately perished in the Holocaust.

This is also an African story, of the landscape and the people. It was in the days following the diamond rush in the Kimberley area, where dusty sun scorched roads led from one cluster of farms to another, miles and miles of nothingness in between. It resonates deeply with me, a second generation South African with a close affinity to the country and its people. I too have come to this land – in a second coming after thirty years of enforced political exile.

CHAPTER 2

DISTANT MEMORIES: CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE

Born in Johannesburg at the outbreak of the Second World War, I grew up a lonely introverted only child. My brother was born when I was six and died six months later. The event changed our lives for my mother never recovered from his death. She was unable to have any more children and it seemed to me, she mourned the loss of her baby, Peter Leslie, all her life. Now, it seems clear that she needed treatment for depression, but in wartime, it was probably not available.
My relationship with her was fixed from that period and to this day my earliest memories are of a woman lying alone in her bedroom, crying. Time may have exaggerated the whole scene, but I still hold the view that in my childhood my mother was never there for me. It shaped my relationship with her and I never really forgave her for finding a dead baby more important than me, given that I was there and breathing.

My 'Little Granny' who lived with us brought me up. She was a deeply religious Lithuanian woman. Her main occupations were cooking, baking and praying three times a day. Orthodox prayer is always said in the direction of Jerusalem so that my grandmother would face the correct wall in her bedroom to say her prayers. This added to the other strange customs that she established in our home. I did not find any of these rituals pleasing; they provided no fun and seemed so alien. I realised early on that she did these on her own, so to speak, for neither of my parents participated in the ceremonial life she created; they just tolerated it. However, 'Little Granny' did look after me, provided the love and attention otherwise absent in my early childhood. As I was an avid reader from the time I learned to read, she indulged me and gave me money to buy all the books I wanted. From time to time when there was an overflow of books, she would arrange to give these to the Jewish Orphanage.

My exposure to religion was in essence one connected with the Jewish Dietary Laws, that is, keeping a strictly kosher home. Until I was fourteen and she died, my 'Little Granny' lived with us. She oversaw the

weekly 'kashrit' (making kosher) of the meat in the scullery adjoining our kitchen.[•] I knew that from an early age that after this weekly ritual of salting the meat; our food would be dry and tasteless. These were also the worst cuts and excluded, as not being kosher, were my favourites, sirloin, leg of lamb and fillet of beef. A 'meat' dominated meal always excluded butter, milk and cream – they had no place on the table.

That custom of separating the meat from the milk things meant that there were special drawers and cupboards for meat, cutlery and crockery, pots and pans. Another section of the kitchen housed the ones for milk things, such as for fish and pudding. What a palaver when someone used the wrong piece of cutlery or crockery! My granny, usually, would remove the offending object, to plant it in the rock garden by the kitchen door, to facilitate its re-integration process. How unhygienic! Fortunately, we did not err too often so that there was never more cutlery in the rock garden than plants.

My parents respected her devotion. Later I could describe their subsequent attitudes and behaviour as at least agnostic, they were probably atheists. I viewed my exposure to religion and its impact on me as one of inconvenience.

Towards the end of her life when she was over eighty, my mother would sometimes send me down to the Yeoville Synagogue to check on my granny's well being. Was she managing? This could be on a Saturday morning but particularly during the High Festivals.

There she would sit or be standing in her front row seat upstairs facing the Ark, the same seat year in and year out. I had a bad relationship with the Beadle, known as the Shamus, who if he saw me, would try to prevent me going inside. It was because of the occasion I dropped my handbag over the side onto the praying men downstairs. It was a stupid prank to relieve the boredom I felt on that particular day and to measure the reaction from downstairs. I tried not to aim the bag at anyone's head but afterwards, I was in the Beadle's bad books and he tried to ban my entry to the Synagogue.

[•] Chaim Bernant (1968) in a "A Latvian Childhood" says: "The Jewish laws of koshering meat or Shechitech derives from an obscure verse in Deuteronomy. 'Thou shalt kill of thy herd of thy flock which the Lord hath given thee as I have commanded thee' on which the rabbis have built a mountain of laws"

The feud with the Beadle continued after my granny died and he arrived at our house with a pile of prayer books for the 'Prayers for the dead' service and to offer his condolences to my mother. I opened the front door and immediately closed it in his face. My mother ticked me off for this behaviour and I never again went to the Yeoville Synagogue. I was annoyed too, at the time, to find that my granny had bequeathed their collection of religious books to that Synagogue and the family only received a cursory letter of thanks. I do not think the Rabbi even visited my mother although my granny had been a member of his congregation as long as I could remember. How different was the treatment meted out to my other grandmother, Ella, who died a year before…. and she was not orthodox.

My 'Little Granny' was the most observant person I knew. She had a simple belief in her religion and lived by it. I have continued to use her orthodoxy as a measurement of other peoples' claims. For me she had been the real thing.

With her death, which I mourned very deeply, I severed my link with religion. It was also the end of the kosher era in our home. All the same, I have continued always to enjoy High Festival dinners, which seem as well, to celebrate family life. Otherwise, the Jewish religion gave me no other special values and I would define myself as a 'non-Jewish Jew.'•

I suppose being Jewish in the forties also meant despair and tears. The needs of a little girl were secondary to the more important things in the world and this concentrated the minds of the adults around me. It was wartime and my father was a soldier. I was aware of suffering through friends and family discussion focused constantly on the war and the wireless was always on for the news.

My playmate up the road had her whole family wiped out in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. I went to her house one day to find her mother and father screaming and crying when they had received that news. I had not seen a man cry before and those moments of suffering haunted me. However, I was too young to understand the scope and impact of the War.

• Hobsbawm Eric (2002): "Interesting times, A Twentieth Century Life" (Allen Lane)
He defines himself, as did Isaac Deutscher before him as a non-Jewish Jew "but not what the miscellaneous regiment of religious and nationalist publicists call a self-hating Jew."

On Saturdays, I would go with my father to the Drill Hall at the bottom of Hospital Hill where he had his office and there I would play on the typewriter. Later he told me that his work was in Intelligence and focused on Italian prisoners of war. We would walk across the Union Grounds and other soldiers would salute him. At the end of the war, he received commendations from King George VI and General Smuts. Later he and my mother attended the Trooping of the Colours in Pretoria when the Royal Family made their State visit. The invitation was to honour his war record. My mother had a beautiful aquamarine dress for the occasion, styled in the New Look. She looked stunning.

I was only seven when my father was 'demobbed' from the Army and I thought he looked so funny in civvies. I particularly remember that he always wore a hat when he went out, the kind you now only see Humphrey Bogart wearing in old movies. For about five years after the war, my father had different occupations; he must have found it difficult to settle. At first, he worked for his uncles in their large chemical business, General Chemical Corporation in a managerial pen-pushing job. It was far too humdrum and after a couple of years, he joined his two brothers who were prospecting for coal in Witbank. Benn and Joe Borkum were archetypical buccaneers, types who abounded in Johannesburg at that period, who made and lost fortunes. In their case, they did both.

Finally, my father returned to his profession, law. He built up a largely criminal practice in the fifties and did a lot of unpaid work. He was one of the 'old school' who never minded dispensing free advice, he liked to help people in need.

As I got older, I became very close to my father who became a confidante, a close friend. Later as I became more radical, I think I carried him along with me although he initially and indirectly politicised me by introducing me to the real hardships of Africans, by stories of his clients. Nonetheless, he was a white man too of that era: he never looked for political solutions; rather he still had immense faith in the rule of law.

I suppose it was until the fifties that the family voted for the United Party. They had admired General Jan Smuts and Little Granny knitted hundreds of pairs of socks for Ouma Smuts' (Mrs Smuts) 'comforts' for soldiers. Little Granny always told me as a child that only someone in Ouma Smuts' position could get away with looking unkempt. She particularly disapproved of my crooked seams on the black stockings I wore to

school. It was in that context that she brought in Ouma Smuts - I only remembered that she always seemed to be seen, wearing veldskoene on all occasions. In a funny way, I hung onto that piece of homespun advice.

The Nationalist Party won the 1948 election and the family worried that action would be taken against the Jews. Many prominent members of the new government had openly supported the Nazis. South African Jews were in mourning. However, within the next fifteen to twenty years many piled up money and chose not to notice the parallels in South African race laws with those of the Nazi era. Some became open supporters of the racist regime in South Africa, while others closed their eyes to the plight of the majority of their countrymen and women. The central question always – was it good or bad for Jews, and with time, the consensus seemed to be that it could have been a lot worse.

When I was a little girl, I took the racial divide quite for granted. At the back of our house was the ugly little brick hut, without hot running water, where the servant lived. The separate lavatory outside, without a proper seat, adjoined the room. This toilet arrangement intrigued me and I would peep in there from time to time. We always had a maid who never used our plates or cups. Hers were enamel and very separate.

From time to time the maid would disappear in the night, she would do a ‘runner’ and in the morning there was consternation when the adults had ‘to do’ for themselves. There would be an immediate search for a replacement and that desertion by the servant severely judged. There was no compassion or reasoned exploration as to why a middle-aged woman (usually!) would make such a dramatic exit from our lives. It was often a hurtful experience for me, not understanding the causes, but only reacting to a loss of a member of the household.

The maid was a necessary adjunct in the white family. Nearly everybody had one or more. They also filled in the great technological gap and it took hard labour to keep a house in shape. Some floors required scrubbing, others polishing, and great piles of laundry and ironing needed to be done. In addition, part of her daily routine would be to wash up the dirty plates and dishes after mealtimes; often, the domestic worker cooked the meal and always waited at the dinner table.

When Pauline Makosi came to work for us, fulfilling all the above functions, she became my friend. She remained for many years until we moved further out and the journey was too much for her. She taught me some Tswana and I talked with her a lot. Her husband was an undertaker in White, City, Jabavu, a suburb in Soweto. The Makosis had a house there but she spent most of the week in the dingy little room at the back of our house. With her arrival, life at home lightened up considerably for me. She brought fun and a wealth of stories, folklore and jokes. This was my first proper introduction to Africans, not just as ciphers and employees, but also as people and friends. I did not know it then but this relationship could have been my first, hesitant step in preventing me from developing into an archetypal white South African of the day who gave the orders and wallowed in privilege.

I belonged in this time warp society, largely cut off from the political upheavals in the post war world and ignorant of the struggles against British colonialism around the world. However, the Government kept us up to date on the "evils of communism" and devised strategies to protect us from its ghastly clutches.

There was an incident at Barnato Park School, my High School, I still remember vividly, so it must have been especially prophetic for me. It was during an Afrikaans lesson and I may have been about twelve or thirteen when the teacher, Miss Nuivenhuizen, launched into a tirade on the evils of the Soviet Union and its system. I turned around in astonishment when a classmate stood up and contradicted her and the moment is still vivid. "It is untrue," she said, "my mother has been to Russia and found something quite different." Miss Nuivenhuizen and her class were speechless. No one ever challenged her on anything, let alone such an erudite subject and Rhona Kiel had spoken clearly and defiantly.

That night I told my parents what had happened. I then found out that Rhona Kiel's mother, who I often met at the school gate, was a 'named Communist.' She had been a 'trade unionist' and was now a 'banned person.' All these were new terms to me and needed an explanation. Rhona's family took on a new quality for me.

We were not rich but compared with the abject poverty around us were not poor either. However, as some of our family were enormously

wealthy I would describe us as being part of the poorer side. My father was fond of saying that one could be happy in one room. It was all in the mind. Even as a youngster, I rejected both - I found them irritating and a self-delusion, if he believed them.

Our house in Yeoville was a rather spacious one that my grandfather had given to my mother as a wedding present. My parents never intended to live there, they said. However, during the War they could not find tenants for it and so moved in to prevent it being vandalised. Mother regarded our stay there as temporary, she was always waiting to move on. They made significant alterations to the house and had the garden professionally landscaped. She also believed the house to be "unlucky" as two deaths had taken place in it – my brother and then her mother.

In my youth, I always wondered around the streets of Yeoville and knew the area very well. It had a very different feel then, and there was never a question of safety. I went to school on my own from the time I was old enough to do so. I suppose there could have been police patrols in the area but I was unaware of them. I did know that the police would raid the neighbouring 'back yard' regularly for illegal alcohol where there must have been a shebeen.[♣]' I would be woken up, scared at night by the sounds of barking police dogs, running feet, screaming and shouting. It made me scared of the dark and I needed a night light for years.

I was about sixteen when we eventually moved to a large modern flat in Illovo, the posh side of town. I enjoyed the change of locality and the novelty of new furniture but I did not remain in the new neighbourhood long enough to really get the feel of it.

In Yeoville, I had used the bus numbers 11 and 12 to go to the town centre and back. Different sorts of people used these busses, and I recall I always studied the passengers. The number 12 from Cyrildene, always carried those with a feel of a newly arrived bourgeoisie from their yellow brick, neat and newly built single storey houses. The women on the 'whites only' bus would be dressed up for their trip to town, perhaps overdressed. They could have been on a trip to one of the department stores, John Orr's or Ansteys where they met others for tea.

[♣]shebeen was where alcohol was sold illegally and/or made. The liquor laws of the day prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol to Africans.

I loved the centre of town, and went there often when I was old enough, for the many lessons, the extra mural activities that took up my afternoons. I went to elocution to learn to speak well, to eurhythmics to improve my deportment, even to ballroom dancing. I suppose my parents were giving me the better things in life, that part of the 'quality' upbringing denied to them by different circumstances and times.

Eloff Street was the main shopping street of Johannesburg. It was the centre to which we gravitated, the street that stretched from the Railway Station passing the great hotel of the day, The Carlton, and on to Commissioner Street with its large Art Deco cinemas, the Coliseum, Her Majesty's and the Empire. Johannesburg was a city of wealth, skyscrapers and cars that blocked up its streets, designed on a grid system of short blocks. There was the OK Bazaars, started as a dead cheap New York style bazaar across the road from the more fashionable John Orr's and Cleghorns, which imported most of their goods from England and beyond. Katz and Lourie was 'the' place for dazzling jewels and it is where I once helped my father buy a special birthday present for my mother. Eloff Street, when I was even younger, had its red tramcars too. It was stylish in the fifties and represented in its time, the wealth and prosperity of Johannesburg.•

When we moved our new flat was close to the bus terminus, my main means of transport. . The transport system starkly illustrated the apartheid system because there were two Number 5A bus stops in Oxford Road, Dunkeld, next to each other. One always carried few passengers; mainly kids like me and some old people and it came infrequently. The other bus 5A picked up crowds of people. It was clearly marked "Non Europeans Only" and most of those people were the servants who worked in the posh houses and flats.

Rosebank, a new up-market shopping centre, was developing near our new home so that there was less cause to go shopping in town. I missed those shopping expeditions to town where my mother had charge accounts. A few leading shops supplied all our needs. She would choose something and then give her name "G. Borkum" and the money and paper work would be placed in a little tube and I suppose that a switch would get it going when the tube would shoot across the shop on a wire to an office for the necessary authorisation. That was fun. We did not carry our parcels, the purchase was usually delivered; some purchased

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•Clive Chipkin (1993) Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society (David Philips)

came on approval, to be kept or rejected at leisure. Mother would even order goods, by phone and would send them back if not suitable.

It was still the era of the specialist grocer and the butcher and from a list, once or twice a week my mother would order supplies by telephone. An African man on a bicycle would deliver these and unpack them in the kitchen so that the maid could pack them away. The greengrocer was different. Known generically as "Sammy", he came a couple of times a week in a van piled with vegetables. He would come to the back door because he was "Indian" (i.e. not white) to get his order and because trade took place at the back of the house. My mother would haggle and argue with him and often we would go out to his van to inspect something or other.

All through my childhood, my aunts and uncles were a central part of our weekend life. There would always be Sunday afternoon tea at one or other aunt. A wonderful spread of home made cakes, biscuits and other delicacies would be laid out on the dining room table and depending on which aunt, we would sit around the table or devour the spread on the veranda.

We would celebrate the Jewish High Festivals with large family gatherings at one of the aunts. There was little religious content but the food was always traditional. I do not remember my mother hosting one of these gatherings. She did not go in for entertaining; she must have found it too much of a strain. However, we always gave a verdict on the quality of the food dished up. Auntie Sarah made the most divine apple tart and Auntie Flora was remembered for her matzos balls always being as hard as golf balls.

Grandma Ella, 'Big Granny's' birthday was celebrated on Christmas Day. It was open house and through the day cousins, aunts, uncles and friends would come to give her their good wishes and perhaps, a present. At some point of the day, there would be the present opening ceremony – her presents. She was loudest in her approval of presents given to her by her favourites, irrespective of their quality. She took little notice of our offering though much thought and effort was made in acquiring an appropriate gift for her. We were just not her favourites.

When I grew up, I stopped going to all family gatherings. The grannies had died and the activities of my childhood ceased. I withdrew from the family scene.

CHAPTER 3

GROWING UP…. SCHOOL AND ALL THAT

I have set the scene, the landscape of my youth in the previous chapter. There was more to the miserable lonely childhood that I have just outlined although how ever I look at it, being alone remains the core memory of my youth. I have thought about it a lot but I have forgotten so much over the years so that now I am able only to sketch a few major topics from my childhood.

Eczema plagued me from birth. The dusty dry climate of the Transvaal Highveld (now Gauteng) did not agree with me and I was always scratching and had a rash of some sort; sometimes, it was between my fingers or toes, it could be behind my knees, elbows or my neck. Special linings were sewn into my jerseys and I used an array of lotions and ointments to ease the incessant itch. Nowadays, we could ask whether tension in family relations exacerbated the condition.

Because of the eczema, I never took part in games if I could help it. Exercise made me hot and sticky which led to further itching and scratching. Sport was the key to success at school and this put me at a disadvantage throughout my schooldays. Not that we played games in the conventional sense at Observatory Girls' School, my all white, all girls' primary school. We had many team races and marched up and down quite a lot. It was quite a military type of drilling as well, I remember, on hard brown dusty earth, accompanied by marches played on a gramophone.

I retained this hatred of sports and gym right through my school days, even after I transferred to my secondary school, Barnato Park School.[•] It was the first girls' school in Johannesburg, established in 1887 a year after Johannesburg became an official city. Solly Joel presented the property to the school in 1913. The pursuit of the great outdoor life was a major feature of the school with its large swimming pool, tennis courts and playing fields. In fact, a love of sports and outdoor life was a major preoccupation of the white South African world into which I was born.

[•] Stanley Jackson (1970) "The Great Barnato" (Heinemann) describes Barney Barnato as probably the richest and one of the most powerful financiers in South Africa during the 1890's. He built Barnato Park as his home, approving plans for marble columns and rosewood panelling throughout. In the grounds, Solly Joel, his nephew, built his own mansion completed after Barney's death.

At primary school, I was quite a ‘slow’ learner although I was an avid reader with a vivid imagination at an early age. My father had taught me to read before I started school. The teachers terrorised me, and I hated that primary school with a passion. I became a withdrawn, overweight educational failure, constantly punished for something and made to stand in the corner. There were occasions when my class teacher, Miss Gorvy, with cropped hair, gave me spoonfuls of castor oil for chewing gum in school.

During the war and after there was a rationing of foodstuffs, with a lucrative black-market on the side. Some girls would bring gifts of butter or sugar to school for the teacher. At an early age I realised presents to the teacher might improve my standing at school so begged to do the same but my parents rejected such conduct as unpatriotic – my father was after all, a soldier.

I was well read. It was a form of companionship. Without siblings and disliking games, books and records entertained me. I used the local library but I also had a large collection of my own books and piano music on record. My taste developed with time, and after being addicted to the Bobsey Twins series and others of that ilk, including Enid Blyton, I began to read more widely and seriously, including the classics. Jane Austin and the Bronte’s were my favourites and I still have those childhood copies of their books. My early reading never described a life remotely the same as mine. Enid Blyton, whose books I had adored, described more upper middle class children in England who had super adventures on their holidays and usually went to boarding school. The seasons and the flowers they described were quite unknown to me – I had not seen snow at Christmas and spring was not a time when daffodils bloomed in our garden. They may have had servants as well in their lovely homes, probably did, someone to do the cooking and clean but none was recognisable as the person called ‘the girl’ in my environment who was supposed to call my mother ‘Missus and my father, ‘Baas.’

When I transferred to secondary school my schoolwork improved, and within a year, I found myself in the ‘A’ stream. At primary school, I did not have many friends. There were people in the neighbourhood I played with and now I forget them except for the one close friend. There was Ruth who joined my class at Observatory Girls, sent from Cape Town to stay with an aunt in the hope that the high altitude and dry climate of Johannesburg would improve her asthma. She lived nearby and we became close fiends. I dearly loved Ruth who was pretty, clever and

very sweet; everyone took to her. She returned to Cape Town when we were about twelve but our relationship continued into adulthood.

I only remember the more bizarre aspects of a handful of my high school friends now. Estelle was a close friend. She lived in a residential hotel in Berea, the Stephanie and her widowed mother always carried a large white handbag that matched her shoes. Estelle was clever, good at games and became a prefect. She got married at nineteen to a boy she met at the one and only party I ever had at about the age of sixteen. He had gate crashed. She went on to live in Cyrildene and I met her while I was working in the union years later. It was in John Orrs and she was meeting someone for morning tea, while I was visiting the Personnel Department on an organising mission. She already had two children and spent most of her mornings playing tennis. She was always good at tennis.

There was Joan, daughter of a well-known plastic surgeon. She and her friend Daphne both had nose jobs when they were about seventeen. The nose job enhanced Joan's appearance and she turned into a very pretty girl. Soon after, she became a Rag Princess, the badge of beauty, in our first year at Wits. Afterwards Joan became a Johannesburg socialite. My cousin Rosalind Marks never wore a bra as we grew up and had a strange adolescence. I always blamed her mother for being more concerned with her poker games than buying bras and more grown up clothes for Ros. We were very close in our early teens. In her thirties, she committed suicide by jumping through a window in Hillbrow. By then, she had married a farmer and had a couple of children.

A major part of my youth concentrated on extra mural activities. In my teenage times, I spent my afternoons taking other lessons. I suppose it was part of giving me the better things in life. My mother taught me the piano herself, as she had been a music teacher. This was quite unsuccessful because all my practice sessions had a way of turning into lessons and she interfered with my attempts at composition instead of the monotonous studies and scales on which she insisted. Eventually I gave up the piano. However, there was a long list of other lessons – elocution, tennis coaching, swimming and ballroom lessons to reach a reasonable standard. Was I consulted as to whether I wanted these lessons? I cannot remember because now I think they just happened and surprisingly, I agreed to them except for the eurhythmics that I hated. I did not do all of these at the same time in that eurthymics happened when I was young and gawky and I guess ballroom dancing was at the end of my school life.

The pity is I did not excel in any of these activities. As I was an ungainly, plump girl with a poor self-image, having to take the eurhythmics classes with talented girls there to improve their deportment, made me even less confident. Wearing a white tunic and dancing barefoot, I would have to run across the studio and pretend to be a tree, or a maiden carrying an urn while a woman on the piano thumped out the music of Delibes to accompany me. Eventually I rebelled and stopped going. In the studio next door, tap dancing classes took place – if I had to dance, could it not have been in there with a pair of red tap shoes?

The elocution lessons included play-acting and taking part in the Johannesburg Eisteddfod, which was a part of the cultural life of young middle class kids. Although I won no prizes, the buzz of the experience was enjoyable. These lessons lasted many years and I took some speech training exams. I suppose, if all else failed, I may have become an elocution teacher.

I made friends with other girls who came from other parts of town for their lessons. These took place about twice a week at the Irene Holloway Studio, accommodated in Darragh House, adjoining St. Mary's Cathedral. Miss Holloway must have been a staunch member of the Anglican Church who rented rooms in a building otherwise devoted to Church matters. In retrospect, she was obsessed by Kipling – his poems, his Jungle Book and Just So Stories. Quite appropriate given the times we lived in, and the people. We learned chunks of Kipling, recited poems or read passages aloud. Now I remember another incident with amusement, but at the time with fright, the day a man exposed himself to me in the lift of Darragh House on the way to a lesson. I told no one. I did not know how to put it. The incident was too embarrassing.

The history syllabus ended at the beginning of the First World War. The Transvaal Education Department formulated what we would be taught and rigidly oversaw this. They were particularly vigilant in the teaching of history and our inspiring history teacher, Miss Jones, omitted the Anglo Boer War and the Great Trek in our South African History component because she was of the opinion that we would be marked down if we attempted as English pupils, to answer questions on these politically sensitive topics. A consequence is that my schoolmates at any rate, and probably others as well, remained quite ignorant about these most significant periods of local history. Forty years later and I have only now grasped the scale of the Anglo Boer War but remain largely ignorant of the period of the Great Trek.

Like so many other English-speaking children of the day, Afrikaans was my worst subject at school. This aversion to the language connected with our dislike for the Afrikaners around us. In addition, for some stupid reason we used to say that we did not really need to learn Afrikaans because it was not spoken outside South Africa. It never seemed to occur to us that we needed to learn it because it was a language of South Africa.

This was how I came to be sent to Mr. Braude in Frances Street for extra Afrikaans lessons. He was a short man in his forties who gave extra lessons at a large dining table to a number of high school pupils at the same time. About six to eight boys and girls would be seated in his dining room all doing different subjects and he would correct and cajole them separately. In the mornings, Mr. Braude worked in a school and supplemented his income in the afternoons by giving a range of extra tuition. I am sure I did not benefit very much and that my marks in Afrikaans hardly improved.

An unforeseen consequence of these lessons was the unsuitable friendship I developed with Mr. Braude's stepdaughter, Adele. She was three years older than I was, about seventeen to my fourteen. This age difference was all wrong: quite simply, she was too old for me.

Considering how over protected I was, it is amazing that the relationship with Adele developed as it did. She was quite immature for her age, unloved and poorly adjusted. I expect as loners, we were drawn together. Our friendship developed in her bedroom before or after my Afrikaans lessons. She went on to introduce me to boys she knew and invited me to her parties. Later on, after she had finished school and begun a pharmacy course, she took me to nightclubs and I tried taking the slimming pills to which she had become addicted.

Adele was overweight and had found a supplier of the illegal appetite suppressant, 'preludin.' A small pharmacy in Joubert Park regularly sold her this drug and of course, she became dependent. It was highly addictive containing Dexedrine, known to give users a lift, and speed. Eventually I also became 'hooked' on these pills and as a consequence, lost a lot of weight and became very slim and extremely active, reading and working through the night as I was mostly on a 'high.'

Adele had a breakdown. Fortunately, I was able to keep my own drug taking completely to myself. I do not think that period lasted long. It

came at the time while I completed my matriculation exams and afterwards I weaned myself off the drug. I recall there were 'cold turkey' symptoms. I stayed in my room for quite a time, mostly asleep. As my parents believed me to suffering from exhaustion because of my hard work, I was able to keep the episode to myself. Adele's mother wanted me to identify the supplier of the 'preludin.' I said I did not know.

I do not think I ever saw Adele again. I heard a couple of years later that she had married and moved away.

Getting to know Adele changed my interests, and I became focused on boys and my appearance. Now with a good figure, the transformation of the gawky ugly duckling had taken place and I was pre-occupied with make up and clothes. I loved my red-checked gathered skirt with white off the shoulder blouse. I sold my hockey stick to buy a pair of silver hoop earrings to complete the look. I may have been copying the effect from a movie. Ava Gardiner was my ideal of beauty and glamour and perhaps I was trying to copy her 'look.'

Then it was over. School ended and I was technically 'grown' up and ready to face the bigger outside world and to forget what Philip Larkin called "the boredom of childhood". The school's motto, *Vincemus* "we will win through" had worked for me as I had survived those days, won through, so to speak.

CHAPTER 4

AT LIBERTY TO FIND MYSELF

"*You are free – you are responsible for your choice and for your life"*
----Simone de Beauvoir

It was bliss to be released from school, free at last from the rules of that conforming community of suburban girls in the nineteen fifties and those middle-aged unsympathetic women teachers whom we disparagingly described as 'spinsters.' This is certainly no longer a term in current use, but at that time the 'de rigueur' description of our women teachers who only got permanent tenure with the Transvaal Education Department if they were unmarried.

The liberated atmosphere at the Witwatersrand University (Wits) where I began my BA degree set the pace. There were a variety of students, people from different backgrounds and areas. From a girls' only school, it was fabulous that there were an endless number of boys …in fact a majority of boys. I noted that immediately. I set out 'to have a ball.'

Obviously, I was part of an elite group, a chosen people who could afford to be at university, where there were no grants and it meant my parents would need to continue to support me, as at school. Perhaps it was the place our parents sent us to grow up to make us ready to enter the adult world. This could be a way to describe my being there because I was unsure what I expected to achieve from those years. I never thought out what I wanted to do with a university education and at the time, there were few openings for women graduates that were not strictly vocational like teaching, social work or medicine. My father hoped I would ultimately do law but that was far from my plan. I had no serious expectations, no career plan as I selected a random mixture of subjects that interested me, with psychology as my main one.

My social life took off immediately. Young white boys and girls largely made up the student population in the arts, science and commerce faculties on that main campus. They were mostly just out of school and middle class; many lived at home around Johannesburg.

Suddenly I had endless dates with boys who would phone and pester me to go out with them. I quickly discovered I had the power to attract boys

and spent lots of time on my appearance, studied and casual. I certainly had little money to spend on clothes so I was quite inventive with what was available. I was in a state of constant romantic love with endless hours of kissing and fondling. Boys of that period did not necessarily expect to sleep with their date; they tried but it was not the inevitable conclusion to an evening out.

Girls too were careful with whom they slept. We were moving towards the sexual liberation of the sixties – but not quite there – and my student boyfriends would borrow their father's cars for a date that could have been a party, film, dinner or a club. In most cases, I preferred these relationships to be 'almost' platonic and sometimes I succeeded. It was fun to go out but as I passed from my first year, boredom with young and gauche male students set in. They were so immature, so awkward. There was no one that first year that I wanted to sleep with but I did want a deeper relationship with a man.

It was during my second year that I joined the University Players, an amateur theatrical group. They were already in rehearsal with an ambitious production of Bernard Shaw's "The Devil's Disciple". A professional actor was brought in to play the lead character. He was incredibly attractive, a veritable heartthrob and all the girls were panting after him. An academic from the English Department produced the play.

The parts were assigned by the time I arrived. I was delighted with my small walk on part and some back stage work. It was a new dimension and the whole experience eventually centred on my falling in love. I fell in love with the leading man after he had singled me out for special attention. All the other girls were green with envy and I crossed the Rubicon. The attention flattered me as the leading man was extremely handsome, described as having Hollywood matinee idol looks. He was then a man in his thirties, perhaps forties, married and known as a notorious womaniser. This was my first love affair. The rendezvous were usually secret and the relationship did not last long. I was devastated when it ended, not that it was very satisfying. It is doubtful with hindsight that it was really love, more the glamour of the liaison. In any case, it remained a bittersweet memory, an unhappy first love.

I was now stage struck. I started to study stagecraft and speech training with a formidable lady called Benni Bonnacorsi. She had set herself up as her own Royal Academy of Dramatic Art type of academy

offering a 'comprehensive' programme of acting skills. Who she was and where she came from I cannot remember, but she had a large following and only took pupils after an audition. She had a physical disability and ruled, Svengali like, from behind a desk in her Manors Mansions flat in the centre of Johannesburg.

I interested her, she said, but declared as well that I had no special talent. Nevertheless, I had weekly lessons with her where she worked over my accent and cross-examined me extensively on my life and views. She was a most controlling influence and I was in awe of her. Her manipulative talent seemed to include making all her pupils, including Janet Suzman, feel privileged that she had selected them as pupils and she did not consider Janet to have any more talent than the rest of us. I wonder how she reacted when Janet became a famous actress on the London stage.

At the same time, I was a second year student with an increasing workload and an active social life. Benni began to make increasing demands that her students study other allied subjects such as fencing, movement and when she introduced a 'method acting' class, my father intervened and refused to pay for me to continue with any of these lessons. My theatrical career, if one could call it that, came to an abrupt end.

It was a time when I met a lot of people in the theatre, professional actors in Johannesburg. I based my mode of dress on my perceived glamour of all things French. Juliette Greco and Françoise Sagan were role models. I especially loved the throaty singing of Greco and from my meagre allowance I bought the clothes that mimicked her style: tight black trousers, flat black pumps and black polo-neck sweaters. At that time black was not the universal choice of colour as it is today, so I stood out in my black attire; it was also my claim to be different. Bonnacorsi had encouraged me; my father loathed 'the look.'

During those first couple of years, the freedom went to my head. I started to drink too much and often would pass out at a party, and later, would be taken home, just about able to stand. I recall the occasion that my father had to collect me and he arrived to find me, rolled up in a corner, a miserable wreck from alcohol. I think it was the effects of a mixed drink. In any case, my father began to lecture me in earnest on the evils of over drinking and I took his advice seriously. I learned then, the hard way, my drinking capacity and to avoid any mixed cocktail. At home, I was used to drinking a whiskey with my father, always the

family's preferred drink and I tried afterwards to stick to it, pouring my own rather small tots well diluted with water.

It was then that I met Laurie Hall, an architect turned actor-manager. He and a friend had set up the Arena Theatre Company on a shoestring. Their object was to bring serious plays to Johannesburg. At the time, there were only two or three professional theatre companies performing in Johannesburg and their productions were mostly light popular plays from London and Broadway. Arena Theatres wanted to present a different type of theatre played in the round. Their plays were to be contemporary but serious and the two they staged, that I remember, were by Christopher Fry and Jean Anhouilh.

Laurie Hall became my first proper boyfriend. There were immediate difficulties. He was not Jewish and my mother made such a fuss about our friendship. I had to strike up a secret relationship in order to avoid scenes at home. I needed to construct alibis as to where I was because I needed to keep our meetings a secret. It was not a question of my mother not liking Laurie, she did. However, the Jewish boyfriend syndrome was so ingrained in her that she could not accept anyone else for her daughter. Years later when Emma brought Sean home to stay and I reminded my mother of the Laurie episode, she said: "Well times are different now."

However, it was so complicated and often tedious, to have to construct these alibis and fictitious arrangements to keep my mother knowing my real whereabouts. I was an adult who had outgrown living at home and under the protection and guidance of my parents. However, girls who came from my sort of background in Johannesburg did not readily leave home at that time, and particularly when they were students. The only way to leave home, as a student was to study in another town but this was not the norm. It did not occur to me that I could be a student at the University of Cape Town, for example. Because there were no grants or loans for students doing undergraduate degrees that I knew of, I was dependent for my keep on my parents and they called the tune, so to speak.

Laurie was sensitive to the pressures I was under and met with my father to tell him he wanted to marry me. I was unnerved to hear of Laurie's marriage goal, as I did not share his feelings I was just having a good time. This made the relationship too heavy for me. The strain of deception did not help and I began to cool it and see less of him. His theatrical venture was in the throes of financial collapse so that I was so

relieved when he decided to return to architecture and to Zambia (Northern Rhodesia then) where his family lived.

After this love affair, I turned away from the claustrophobic Jewish environment that had been my world. Laurie and his theatrical friends had introduced me to people from diverse backgrounds. There were a few gay men in Laurie's company and out of work actors struggling to live on the South African dole. Few of these people were Jewish; few had any money or fathers to help.

MY POLITICAL RENAISSANCE

The type of society in which I lived – the background of apartheid –acted as the counterpoint to my other life only to eventually overtake the others and become my dominant interest during my career at Wits University. I suddenly realised one day as though I was hit over the head with a hammer, the kind of society I was living in. It was as though I came out of a trance when the realities of apartheid fully hit me and I saw black South Africans as individually human. Before, besides Johanna and Pauline, our domestic workers, Schreiner and Theodore, in father's office, black people had passed me quite remote and identical. As with the other white people around me, I knew of the increased restrictions on black people but one day everything changed and it became my problem too.

Thirty years later I realised my father had unwittingly introduced me to the liberation struggle. Conventional enough in his day-to-day behaviour and certainly not an 'activist' of any sort, as an attorney he increasingly had a large African clientele who consulted him on a range of problems that in today's idiom would be referred to as 'civil rights' issues. These ranged from being an illegal immigrant, not having the correct documentation, namely, the 'dom pass' or living in an area not classified for your racial group. Month by month in the 1950's as I was growing up in Johannesburg, more and more legislation came onto the statute book always extending the number of restrictions on the lives of the majority of South Africans. After gaining political control in 1948, The Nationalist Government set to rolling out its apartheid programme.

I suppose that family discussion at home of the suffering and the plight of African people must have influenced me deeply at a sub-conscious level. I had grown up from early childhood with a certain unease about the

'human condition' around me: the back rooms occupied by domestic workers, the night time raids for illegal liquor that had frequently occurred in our neighbour's backyard. However, it was my father who told us of the people he met and the shocking details of some of the cases he handled. We never discussed political solutions to these issues. Ours was a reaction of despair and pity. Therefore, in all other respects my socialisation was much the same as other white middle class girls in Johannesburg at that time.

My father employed two charismatic and well-known political figures in his offices as clerks to take statements and act as interpreters in this aspect of his work. I never found out how my father met Schreiner Bhadhuza and Theodore Moses, but I knew there had been an association of many years standing.

Schreiner had become a quiet religious man, always puffing his pipe, when I met him so it was difficult to accept that this quiet retiring person had once been a militant squatter camp leader in the 1940's. Both Joe Slovo and Rusty Bernstein discuss his revolutionary role as a squatter leader of some eminence. By the time I knew him, he had left that past and moved to something else, a study of the Bible.

Joe Slovo[•] said Schreiner was *"the popular leader of the large squatter camp near the newly proclaimed Moroko Township and a prominent Party (Communist) activist. He (Schreiner) took the desperate decision to move en masse and occupy the plots of Moroko without permission when it became clear that the authorities were preparing to launch a major offensive against the squatter movement."*

Rusty Bernstein[♦] elaborated further and described Schreiner as *"middle aged, with a military bearing and a military moustache which made him like Field Marshall Kitchener in that First World War poster, 'Your country needs you!' He carried much of the Party (Communist) style of work into his Alexandra Township squatter camp that he had established on a tract of red earth."*
Bernstein continued: "*he based discipline on consensus and explanation rather than on charisma or strong arm persuasion. His camp rapidly expanded until every inch of the site was filled and the shacks were starting to encroach on the yards and gardens of surrounding houses. Something had to give. Bhaduza took a bold strategic decision to move*

[•] Slovo Joe (1995) "The unfinished autobiography" (Ravan Press)
[♦] Bernstein Rusty (1999) "Memory against forgetting" (Viking) p.105-6

his entire settlement with all its people to a better place. The preparations were kept secret and on a weekend, his community struck their shelters, shouldered their homes and made a long march to a new site in Moroko Township (now part of Soweto) miles away to occupy an estate of almost completed houses in a new municipal estate. Bhaduza had acted ahead of the Communist Party becoming involved, but his mission eventually failed as the houses had already been scheduled for allocation to people on the Council's housing waiting list. Armed police drove them back to the camp they had come from."

By the fifties, many assessed the well-known Theodore Moses as a sell-out of his cause. He did not support the policies of the ANC; rather he believed the salvation of the African people was in the creation of separate states for different people. He believed that from this policy a new enlarged state would emerge in time, which would facilitate liberation of the African people. That was his interpretation of what was the Bantustan policy. He was a Xhosa nationalist who firmly supported and espoused the cause of a separate Transkei state for the Xhosa people. Chief Kaiser Matzanzima who became a notorious Government puppet and the first "Prime Minister" of a Government created Bantustan was his leader.

By the middle fifties when I knew him, Theodore had a large following of people and he was a much-respected 'uncrowned' mayor of the Eastern Native Township, an older part of Soweto. The government was building houses for Africans on a large scale but there were no longer the rights to freehold ownership. Every householder was classified as a tenant, a temporary immigrant even if born in the area. The rasion d'être to be in the white area was to work for a white person and eventually return to the tribal area. This was the essence of apartheid.

The Government increased the rentals on these houses in an arbitrary way. They wanted to establish what they called 'economic rentals.' This was too much for the tenants who voted to take some action. They began to withhold paying their rent and decided to go to Court collectively to challenge the legality of the increases. My father acted for them, as their attorney, briefed collectively by a number of 'puppet mayors' who included Theodore Moses and Peter Lengene, a businessman from Orlando. There were others but now, I have forgotten their names.

When the Rent Case reached the Supreme Court in Pretoria, I went along with my father to find out how a Court hearing took place. I had never

been inside a Court of Law and this surprised Duma Nokwe, the young African advocate, briefed as the Junior Counsel in this case. We fetched him from his Chambers and drove together to Pretoria. He was the first African advocate in South Africa, then a very young man and quite charming to me. On the way to Pretoria as we drove past the Voortrekker Monument, just recently built and largely detested by the majority of the population, Duma asked me: "One day when the Africans win power, what should they do with this monument?" I remember my unhesitating response: "Why, pull it down of course." Duma was not sure that would be a wise move.

That vignette, a memory jolt, came back to me on 10 May 1994 when we parked our car at the foot of the Voortrekker Monument in the designated parking ground for guests to the Inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President. The time had come and the Monument, still there, had lost its importance, and I was part of an ecstatic crowd lined up beside it to board the special buses to take us across Pretoria. Power had passed away from it. Unfortunately, Duma had died at a very young age in exile.

The Rent Case was lost in the Supreme Court and on appeal in Bloemfontein. As a result, there were many prosecutions for non-payment of rent.

My father often spoke of two African lawyers with whom he had dealings. "Mandela and Tambo" was a lively criminal practice and my father had great respect for both these colleagues. One day he came home quite flattered that Nelson Mandela had visited him in his office and asked him to defend him for his non-payment of rent arising from the rent boycott.

Such was the backdrop, perhaps the reasons that at first only peripherally interacted with my ordinary white life, but helped to facilitate my changing direction and from that time onwards I actively campaigned against discrimination, whenever and wherever.

However, at that time at Wits, there were only a handful of students not classified as "white" when I began my studies. Even so, the Government was busy implementing new legislation to prevent any student other than a white one, from attending a white university and Wits was a white university. This description of people in colour terms was the language of the day in a society obsessed by colour. Everything was colour coded, white was best, black was worst and in the middle there was a range, depending on how near you were to the best and worst.

This new legislation had the ridiculous name of the "Extension of the University Act" and gave the word "extension" quite a new meaning, since it meant the opposite.

Our student politics revolved around this proposed university segregation policy. Wits prided itself on its multi-racial structure. Our protests were quite small; you needed courage to face the sustained intimidation by the police and their plain-clothes' hooligan helpers. By that time, many students were a-political or supported the Government, and others were scared of official harassment. So only, a few students would go on protest marches or stand with banners proclaiming academic freedom for all. These were quite frightening experiences because missiles could be thrown at us, obscene abuses was always hurled and on one occasion while standing at a busy traffic intersection, Clarendon Circle, a Post Office van deliberately drove at me on the pavement and I thought the driver intended to kill me.

I can emphasize the subtleties and the cruelty of the gradation of colour in my friendship with two so-called Coloured students. Clarrie Palmer was doing her BA degree while waiting for a place at Medical School where she subsequently went. She was half African and dark skinned in appearance. Although she lived in a designated Coloured area of Johannesburg, her allegiances were African and she preferred to spend time with her African grandmother in Soweto. Ronnie Jennings, also waiting for a place at Medical School could pass as white and his allegiances were white orientated. He would go to the whites-only cinemas and he eventually moved to Hillbrow, which at that time was a suburb, segregated for whites only.

They would talk openly about their activities, controlled at every turn by their skin colour. Clarrie and I could not travel on the same bus but I could with Ronnie. It was the amount of colour pigmentation that determined it. I was mortified, and my discomfiture amused them. They seemed relaxed in weaving their way through the maze of legislation that controlled their lives. For the three of us, our friendship was quite a new experience, across the colour line.

Clarrie came to our flat in the elite white suburb where we lived. I came to terms with not being personally responsible for the system. My mother always welcomed Clarrie but tried to dissuade me from inviting her on the grounds that the contrasts in lifestyles could make Clarrie dissatisfied with her own surroundings. My mother proved herself not to be a racist and I was grateful.

There was another darker side to life at Wits that emerged, the scope of which we did not fully comprehend at the time. It was the time a fellow student and one of Benni Bonnicorsi's "golden girls" was revealed as a police spy. It was a sensation. One version of events insisted the police had blackmailed her. It turned out she was the first of many police informers revealed as part of the student population. I never spoke to her again and saw her only once again when I brushed past her in the toilet…. and quickly looked the other way.

Overall, my days at Wits had been a most rewarding period in my life. I ventured out, with my degree, a free spirit.

CHAPTER 5

TRADE UNION ORGANISER - MY FIRST JOB

I

It was a strange choice that my first job was to work for a white trade union, the National Union of Distributive Workers. I did not know much about the labour movement in general or trade unionism in South Africa, but in 1959 I was looking for an interesting job, something worthwhile. These were scarce; there were few openings for women graduates, unless you had a vocational degree. Then I wanted to have a job, to do something radical and exciting; stop being a student, a decision I later regretted.

When I heard there was a vacancy in the Union, I jumped at it and began my first job as an "organiser." Forty years later, I wonder how it was that many radicals encouraged me, and we thought that white workers would one day see the light and join forces with the African labour market. The reality then was that the white working class formed the bedrock of support for the nationalist government. Influenced by ideology of the class struggle, we did not acknowledge that our work was perhaps a waste of time and history would judge those white trade unions to be expendable. This of course all changed with the birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994.

It strikes me too as I write this, how years later in Birmingham in the 1970's my daughter, Emma when she was under ten years old, knew more about trade unions, about picket lines and strikes because these were happening across Britain, impinging on all our lives. Trade unions and their activities were part of democratic society in the post-war world and my own ignorance in the 1950's tells something about South Africa. The public knew little of any industrial action that may have taken place in that period. There was hardly any press publicity and it was often necessary to describe the very basics of trade union membership and its purpose to a prospective member. I found that out immediately because many shop workers were completely ignorant about their functions.

Initially, the job with the National Union of Distributive Workers (I shall use the acronym NUDW) was principally to go around the shops talking to their members, collecting their subscriptions if they did not have a stop

order system. This was a system whereby the employer deducted Union subscriptions from members at the end of each month and sent these to the Union. The organiser would also enrol new members and attend to shop floor complaints.

I remember the first day clearly. An elderly British organiser called Winnie Campbell was showing me the ropes. We took the tram to Malvern and visited a number of small shops in that neighbourhood. My Aunt Jennie Janks' cousin, Meish Gerber who I met at family functions owned one of the first shops we went into. He immediately ordered us off his premises in a most offensive way… and then he recognised me. He changed his mind and allowed us to speak to his employees when he realised that I would probably spread the story around of his boorish behaviour. Of course, I did and he never looked me in the eye again!

The NUDW catered for mainly white women workers. Trade unions along with everything else in South Africa at that time were organised on racial lines by law. The union had a "B" Branch in Cape Town to cater for Coloured workers. This piece of racist legislation had been enshrined in the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1956, which codified the workings of unions. The Africans had quite a separate union of their own with no legal recognition.

The founding of the union took place in the 1930's, established as a national union by an outstanding group of women trade union leaders – Katie Kagan, Baila Page, Kay le Grange and Ray Alexander. They had vigorously organised shop workers in Cape Town in the early 1930's and Ray Alexander had appointed Katie Kagan to her union job.•

This radical leadership continued until the early and tragic deaths of Katie Kagan (1948) and Baila Page (1950) which co-incided with the Nationalist Government taking power. Their legacy remained and they continued, still honoured by the union at the time I came on the scene.

Katie Kagan was among the 'stars' of militant women leaders in South Africa of that period and the Union set up a fund in her memory to provide crèches for the children of working mothers. We all continued to contribute to it. The Union perpetuated the memory of Baila Page with a trophy awarded annually to the Union branch scoring the most points for organising members, attendance at meetings and the

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•Ray Alexander Simons (2004) 'All my life and all my strength' (Edited by Raymond Suttner) (STE)

submission of reports. It was rather like the system of stars at school for good work, it did encourage us in good administration.

The union also reflected the political affiliations of different regions so that the leadership was a strange coalition of some progressives to right-wing racists from certain rural areas and a mixture of both languages; English or Afrikaans were equally in use. Johannesburg, for example, had the most progressive leadership and used English; in Bloemfontein, the Free State, the secretary was a member of the Nationalist Party and Afrikaans was its language.

In the period I joined the union, the national leaders balanced on a treadmill. Effectively, there was a trio in charge, the Secretariat. They were Ray Altman, the General Secretary who lived and worked from Cape Town. Bobbie Robarts was the President operating from Johannesburg. Morris Kagan, former husband of Katie, remained a presence behind the scenes, the 'grey eminence ', who devoted all his spare time and talents to the union as an act of love and because of the power he could wield. Norman Herd,♦ in his book on the union, said of Morris "*having decided on a particular line, (he) would press it upon his colleagues with a legalistic skill, which was inborn, and with formidable persistence. His soundness on policy matters was proved repeatedly, in the result."*

Morris could have been describing his own role in the NUDW when he wrote about the union in its monthly magazine, "New Day" in March 1958:

"During the past ten years or so you not only grew considerably in size and experience; but you became one of the most important children of the trade union family. You became expert in the art of peaceful negotiation with the employers and of presenting unanswerable cases to the Wage Board…. You have come a long way since the militant days of your youth."

Morris taught everyone who worked with him some of his skills at negotiation and although I never liked him, he was an excellent teacher. He should have spent all the time he devoted to the NUDW in helping African unions but he held on to us, as though to the memory of Katie.

♦Herd Norman (1974) "Counter Attack, The story of the South African Shopworkers" (Blue Crane Books)

Ray Altman was an advocate by profession who, like me, had made a strange choice of career. He applied for the 'top job' while working in London and had his appointment confirmed without an interview. He was neither an ideologue nor a former worker so why did choose the career of a trade unionist? Bobbie and I often spoke of this but he was skilled at maintaining that necessary political balance and was a careful negotiator.

Bobbie Robarts was my first boss and she became what I also called my 'other mother.' Over the next few years, I formed attachments to a few older women, as mentors, and she was the first, who gave me the type of encouragement I had missed from my mother. Bobbie was in her mid forties when I met her. We became close fiends and colleagues from the outset. She had always been in the distributive trade having started her working life as a shop assistant, working behind the counter at John Orrs in Benoni on the East Rand, until she became a full time union official. She remained in the union until retirement. Her militancy and integrity set her apart and she was an excellent orator, fluent equally in English and Afrikaans. Looking back, she was very much part of that special group of militant white women in the trade union movement – Katie Kagan and Ray Alexandra already mentioned, and Johanna Cornelius and Anna Scheepers who campaigned fearlessly for their mainly female members. Personal tragedy in Bobbie's life prevented her achieving the prominence she deserved.

I detested canvassing in these little shops but I stuck it out for a while and it provided training. Soon the core of my job became taking up workers' complaints with the shop owners, large and small, and with the Department of Labour. The NUDW had a number of agreements with all the major stores of the day, such as the OK Bazaars, Greatermans, and Checkers, Ackermans etc. Those employers deducted members' subscriptions and sent them direct to the union. These stores had dozens of branches in and around Johannesburg, the East and West Rand. Our organisers visited their canteens to maintain regular contact, sign up new members and distributed the union's monthly journal. We maintained a reasonably good relationship with the management at local level and I would regularly have to intervene on a member's behalf on matters such as 'unfair dismissal.'

I became the Assistant Secretary of the Johannesburg Branch of the Union. It was here I learned basic skills that proved so useful later on - I formulated resolutions; mediated in negotiations; wrote up the minutes and addressed meetings.

The most stimulating part of the job was participating in the negotiations for national agreements made by the union with the head offices of the big stores. Early on, I attended these meetings and watched the excellent teamwork of Morris Kagan's tactical skills partnered by Ray Altman's legal knowledge. They would plan their negotiation strategies with attention to every detail. Morris was always so helpful in offering advice on any tricky complaint and Ray had the steadying approach away from militancy that could have been inappropriate in those times. I was there as an apprentice, I suppose …to learn the skills for the future!

The first difficult complaint I handled alone involved a young cashier of eighteen years who was dismissed for allegedly stealing £100(Approximately R1100) She was a cashier at OK Bazaars, Hillbrow Branch, and her job, as a cashier, was so different from the check out point of a local supermarket in our computer age. On that occasion, when a shortage of money was located the company simultaneously called the police and the Union. That was how it was done and as a Union representative my job became to accompany her to the Yeoville Police Station where she was charged and finger printed. I was so shocked by the harshness and speed in which the police were brought on to the scene. The Union used their Attorney to defend her and I do remember my delight when she was acquitted. Not much older than the cashier, I allowed myself to become quite emotionally involved with the case.

I initiated a campaign for shop workers to sit down behind their counters. My interest in the 'sitting down' issue began years before during a holiday job I had in the ABC Shoe Shop. I was a student then and found it exhausting to stand still for hours at a time and persuaded my co-workers that we approach the manager to allow us to sit down when we were not busy. I led the delegation at the time with everyone's support to the owners with our 'demands' and narrowly avoided the sack for my efforts. Shops nowadays are arranged quite differently as customers wonder around and select merchandise on their own. In that era the stock was stored behind polished counters and customers were 'waited upon.' In the case of the shoe shop, we climbed ladders to get down the right size box of shoes.

When I took up the issue of chairs behind the counters as a trade unionist, it was very popular with our members and I wrote letters to the press and brought the matter up at every opportunity.

Such were the bread and butter issues of trade unions among the white workers in South Africa at that time, the early 1960's. Improved working conditions are central to the existence of a trade union and my 'chairs' behind the counter issue was just that. I never succeeded but this example illustrates the lack of substantial issues while a majority of the work force in our industry remained underpaid, unrepresentative and exploited.

Joe Slovo[•] described his time as a member of the NUDW in 1942 when he unionised the workforce of Sieve Brothers and Karnovsky and when negotiations broke down, helped bring them all out on strike. He pointed out that he belonged to a union registered under the Act which excluded all Africans from the definition of 'employee'. They could neither belong to a registered union nor use the strike weapon in a dispute.

African workers formed the majority of the work force. Legislation and practice forced them to perform the most menial and unskilled jobs in any enterprise. In the shop industry, they usually worked as packers, loaders and cleaners. This grade of work was defined as a 'general worker' and its rate of pay was considerably lower than that of other grades.

During this period, 'job reservation' hit us when the job of lift operator became a job that only white people could do from a given date. Africans had mainly operated the large passenger lifts to take customers to all the floors in the big shops and Government policy now decreed white lift operators would replace them. The NUDW and the employers were powerless to do anything. They joined forces in their opposition but this was Government policy, and we were whistling in the wind!

Shortly after this announcement, I attended talks with the Managing Directors of OK Bazaars, then the largest employer of shop workers nationally. They were strongly opposed to job reservation and particularly that of the lift operator job. The new young white lift operators were unreliable and often left their lifts unattended while they had a chat or smoke, a problem they had not encountered before. Here was an irony of the times : that the union on the same side as the employers against the Government but on these political issues the employers were often more progressive than the people we represented. After all the white workers supported legislation like job reservation,

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[•] Joe Slovo op. cit.

benefited from it and perhaps with hindsight, our organisers rushed to sign on the new white lift attendants as our members!

Over the years I have asked myself why I stayed in that job. Did I think it through at the time? I thought my work useful and must have shared the view with many other radicals of the day that working in a trade union, whatever it was, contributed to fighting exploitation.

Olive Schreiner's words in "Women and Labour" could have summed up my feelings for my trade union work at that time:

"Remember it is not for yourself alone that you working. It may be a small thing for a little shop girl in Johannesburg to be asking for a few shillings more, or a room with decent air, but what each one doing is really a great thing…. it seems a small part, remember it is really large."[•]

II

I did have regular contact with the African Shop and Office Workers' Union. Their Secretary, an eccentric middle-aged man called Marks Rammitloa, moved around the town in a white coat, the kind that doctors wear in hospitals. He did this to avoid recognition, to merge into the street life of Johannesburg, to look like another 'delivery boy.'
He would often come to my office and I helped in areas where my white face or voice could be effective in helping one of his members.

When he was not doing trade union work, Marks was writing a novel, "The Maribi Dance." [♣] Once I attended a meeting of unemployed workers in an office adjoining his. The meeting ended and at the time of saying our good-byes, I stood by Marks' desk where he sat, pre-occupied, typing, and oblivious of the people around. He had not been part of our meeting. I casually looked down to see what he was doing and was amazed to read the sentence he was writing – not a document on working conditions at all, but part of his novel. He was working on the description of a beautiful breast. I was embarrassed to have read his

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[•] Norman Herd (1974) op.cit.

[♣] The Maribe Dance (1973) (Heinemann African Writer Series) The real name of the writer was Modikwe Dikobe. I have no idea why he went under the name of Marks Ramitloa at that time.

words over his shoulder, but then he seemed oblivious of my presence. He was indeed a man of many parts!

Nearly all the African Unions had affiliated to the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the white unions had associations with other co-ordinating bodies depending on their political persuasion. When I started to work for the NUDW it was not affiliated but it was an issue under consideration. Eventually, it joined up with the Trades Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), the largest of the co-ordinating bodies. Known as the TUC, it described itself as non-political, but it was virulently anti-left in orientation.

Mike Muller was the union bookkeeper. He was a banned trade unionist, which meant that in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act debarred by law from working in his former trade union, The Textile Workers' Union, or any union. He had to find another way to earn a living, which was bookkeeping. He did the books for a number of organisations; in between, he slouched in and out of Johannesburg's bars. Mike carried other burdens. One was a huge chip on his shoulder that as an Afrikaner communist, he believed himself persecuted by the 'Northern Suburbs Jewish Mafia.' Which is how referred to the white left in Johannesburg. He put himself in an increasingly isolated position by his intemperate outbursts.

I had never come across anyone like Mike before. He was quite eloquent and could recite large tracts of poetry, especially when well lubricated. The workings of the left movement were new to me and his condemnation of some of the double standards he spoke about struck a chord of agreement. Much made sense; however when he suggested I leave my home in the northern suburbs to live in the office if need be, I drew back. This was to make me proletarian - to help rid me of my own double standards. I found the idea of sleeping on my desk so absurd and realised I would still have my posh accent so that I could never be anything but bourgeois. So what! I would remain true to myself, as I was, irrespective of how others judged me. It would be their problem if they found me not up to a certain standard.

Being young and single it was obvious I would have relationships with different men in the political movement, it was impossible to avoid but I did not want to cross the colour line, because of the consequences of the Immorality Act.

My political affiliations were with the Congress Movement. I joined the Congress of Democrats (COD), which was the only radical political organisation to which white people could belong. I found The Liberal Party, another option, too insipid and middle class; at the time it still supported a qualified franchise. This changed in 1960 but I wanted to belong in a group more dedicated to decisive change.

However, it was disappointing that so many of the COD meetings were immature gatherings in someone's living room while the Special Branch, who always knew where these meetings were held, sat outside taking our car numbers and collected useful pieces of information to later use against us. Inside, nothing remarkable was being plotted because we may have been in the middle of a heated dispute with one of the members, Issy Rosenberg, who would not let COD members use his private swimming pool. I remember how he pleaded that he had built it for private use and wanted to keep it for his family and friends' use. Fair enough! The others were irritated by how he described them – 'comrades' but would not give them the same privileges as his friends. On another occasion, we spent a meeting arguing whether we should wear some sort of uniform for gatherings.

We were mostly young and earnest as the older supporters of COD were already 'banned' from attending any meetings. Even then, I felt the political risks in attending meetings outweighed their usefulness. I continued to go because however trivial, we were taking a stand, flying the flag for liberation. I kept hoping that we would find suitable ways, to express our commitment? We were after all an earnest group of young white people, eager to help to change the country.

Certainly there were people in COD who risked their freedom and I remember well the group who went to prison for six months for distributing leaflets on Bantu Education. They tried to enlist me in these activities and I resisted knowing as well that I would lose my job with the union. I decided the risks attached outweighed the usefulness of the activities. On that occasion, the police surrounded the house of Pixie and John Benjamin and arrested one group of people when they found the banned leaflets under a carpet; during the same night, they rounded up the rest of the group on the Sauer Street Bridge. I went to Mary Turok's house to say goodbye to her before she started her prison sentence and she criticised me for 'taking too few chances'. It did demonstrate that some whites really cared enough and further, that something as innocuous as leaflet distribution was illegal in South Africa…. and it held itself up to be a civilised country.

III

Instead, it was the armed struggle that attracted me. It was clear that the time for demonstrations, marches and meetings had passed because invariably the authorities banned or violently broke these up. What were the alternatives?

At different times, I associated in a very peripheral way with both the organisations working in the armed struggle. The African Resistance Movement (ARM) could never succeed; its membership was made up of mainly white middle class intellectuals who wanted to protest in a more sensational manner, when other legitimate action was blocked. They were committed, but mostly untrained and inexperienced. One by one the police picked them off and I suppose that by the time John Harris[•] was executed in 1965, they ceased to function.[♣]

With Mike Muller I became involved me in surveillance of the Pass Office at 80 Albert Street, Johannesburg. Our brief was to find out when the guards changed and at what times they did their patrols, how their routes were organised? Two of us did this observation work over a period. I never did find out whether the information gathered was useful.

The hated Pass Office was always a busy place. All Africans in the area had to report to this centre. They needed to register to have the necessary authority to reside in Johannesburg. If all was in order a 'Dom Pass' would be issued, the permit which gave the person the right to live and work in the area or not. If this was refused, the person would be 'endorsed out', which was the official jargon which excluded that African man from being in Johannesburg. A white Afrikaner official in this building in Albert Street had almost absolute power over the persons

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• John Harris, was found guilty of placing a bomb on the Concourse of the main Johannesburg Station that killed a woman. . John had been in my tutorial group in Social Anthropology, an outstandingly clever contemporary of mine at Wits. He would have been destined to have a brilliant career

♣ Hugh Lewin (1974) 'Bandiet' (Heinemann) p.16

before him. The Pass Office was therefore both the symbol and the heart of the apartheid system.

I supported the struggle of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the ANC because I came to the conclusion there was no other way. In its long struggle, MK seldom deviated from its policy of not attacking soft targets, namely civilian people. It was clearly more difficult to conduct a military campaign that targeted heavily guarded installations or symbols of the State, always heavily guarded. Struggles like this in other countries always seemed characterized by bombs exploding in public places, without care for the loss of life that may be involved but MK carefully avoided this in the main.

My involvement was minuscule; a tiny cog in the wheel, but in the middle of a night during 1961, I dug up some of the beautiful garden my mother had on her large balcony. Into the base of the troughs of pansies and daisies, I hid sheaves of military documents, well wrapped in polythene sheets and numbered. I never looked at them; I had no wish to know anything about their contents. As I supported the aims of MK, this was enough for me. I re-filled the pots with soil and returned the plants to their containers. Nothing looked different as I worked carefully and methodically and the plants continued to thrive. From time to time, I would shift them around to take something out and then one night, I removed all the documents. They were needed elsewhere.

I did not mind the risks involved in handling the 'hot documents' although I had rejected participation in the illegal leaflet action. Clearly, the consequences for my parents and me would have been considerable if caught with the 'hot documents,' but because the 'operation' was so precisely planned and quietly carried out; I did not feel panicky.

For me these simple exploits had no penalties other than a link of commitment. There could of course have been severe consequences for me. But I still have the sense that if no one took risks for their beliefs, the world would be a much darker and horrible place. Unfortunately, at that time there were just too few of us to make any real impact. Our generation were groundbreakers but the real action came more than a decade later.

The State of Emergency that followed the massacre at Sharpeville in March 1960 was the first major political trauma I observed closely. With its declaration came the outlawing of the ANC and the more militant Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). The police rounded up and arrested

hundreds of political activists from around the country while soldiers patrolled the streets in the first days, later they remained in the Union Grounds in Johannesburg. It was difficult in everyday life to understand the fuss and their presence. Everything on the surface seemed the same, as before on the streets of Johannesburg, at least. The tactics of the government always was to pre-empt any action. They were extremely heavy handed, taking if need be, a sledgehammer to the proverbial nut.

Six months later the State of Emergency was lifted; they released the detainees and those who had hidden 'abroad' in places like Swaziland, returned home. An uneasy truce returned and in 1961, the Treason Trial ended with the acquittal of the remaining twenty-nine accused.
At the beginning of the trial in 1956, I had hardly been aware of its significance, but by the time it ended, I had become completely committed to the Congress Movement. The Freedom Charter had become my blueprint for a 'New South Africa. I certainly shared in the jubilation of the large crowd at the victory party at Bram Fischer's house.

The left movement had many parties. It was a way to mix and get to know people. We danced to the music of the penny whistle and I particularly loved the 'kwela' played by Spokes Mashikane. These parties of the radicals of the time, young and old, black and white kept us all going through increasingly disturbing times. I met Joe Slovo at a party of this sort. He and Mannie Brown were so delighted to find that I worked in their former union, where Joe had started his political career and would constantly ask for updates and offer advice on different NUDW issues. I suppose he influenced my political direction but then so did Ruth First, his wife, though neither tried to recruit me into the Communist Party.

Wolfie Kodesh provided me with Marxist reading matter and I remember with amusement how he stopped me borrowing a book called 'Marxism and the individual', saying I was not ready for it – yet! These turned out to be farsighted words because I have continued to avoid reading that kind of Marxism. However, Wolfie was a great friend at that time. I probably regarded him as an uncle and I was among the countless women around, on whom he had romantic designs. He never made a pass and was a caring friend. After I had a small operation at the time, he suggested the two of us go to the Kruger National Park. I would recuperate and anyway, I had never been to the Park. At the time he was under a banning order confining him to Johannesburg, yet he took the risk to go away. I suppose he also needed a break.

While we were far north on a lonely road somewhere around the Kruger National Park, we suddenly had warning that the army was in the vicinity. There were planes flying low and armed vehicles in sight. I was petrified and it seemed clear we might be stopped. Wolfie had a moment of panic but fortunately, his army experience made him realise that while we were the targets, it was only a military exercise. It was a lovely break and I returned home quite refreshed, though the danger to Wolfie hung over me after that brief encounter.

I hovered around the fringes of the Communist Party and was included once in attending a 'high level' Marxist study weekend in theatre producer, Cecil Williams' flat. We all prepared for the seminars by reading a new theoretical work called 'The Fundamentals of Marxism Leninism'. The last section of the book dealt with the utopian future, still to come, when the State would 'wither away'. This lifted the spirits of this group of about ten to twelve who were so committed; there were no words of doubt or criticism. I was sceptical; was it obvious?

My father was anti-Communist. In the thirties, he had been a member of the Left Book Club but the Stalinist purges and the Soviet Pact with Germany had left him a non-believer. We talked a lot about alternative systems for South Africa that would incorporate the majority in to the economic system. Socialism to me seemed the only alternative but I rather favoured the Fabians. My father liked my new friends and Wolfie, for example, would have long political chats, always civilised and courteous because that was my father's style. As he was already involved in the political problems of the day by then handling cases for the Defence and Act Fund• and others based on the apartheid laws, my father had a lot to contribute in discussion. My friends filled a void as with time he recognised how starved he was of progressive company. He increasingly withdrew from mixing with his other contemporaries as he found their views increasingly abhorrent.

He did use his gentle persuasion and legal skills to dissuade me from attending the twenty -first party of my friend Clarrie Palmer in Soweto. He explained how the workings of the Immorality Act could work against me, whether guilty or not. If for example, he said the police raided the party and found me, the only white girl there, dancing with an African male, they could arrest both of us in a trumped up charge under the

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• " The Defence and Aid Fund set up at the time of the Treason Trial in 1956 provided legal assistance for numbers of Africans charged with incitement, carrying on illegal activities of a banned organisation, violence, or intimidation" -'A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1962' compiled by Muriel Horrell for the South African Institute of Race Relations.

Immorality Act. It would mean a medical test to establish whether sex had taken place and the onus of proof would be on us to prove that we had not contravened the Act. The Immorality Act prohibited all relations between men and women of different racial groups with harsh penalties and investigations to back up its deterrence aspect.

Before Nelson Mandela's arrest in 1961, he hid for some months in Wolfie Kodesh's flat in Yeoville.[••] Wolfie took me there to meet him and to act as a courier, to carry messages between him and Winnie Mandela. He was so charming, his charismatic personality and handsome appearance bowled me over. That period, so famous now, profoundly affected me. He engaged in conversation, was so interested in my views and I was taken particularly by the warm words he spoke of my father as a legal colleague.

I came to know Winnie Mandela quite independently of the political movement. She was a social work colleague of one of my old university friends, Zorah Dangor. Winnie befriended Zorah and I met her through Zorah. They were the only two social workers in the Johannesburg Child Welfare Department who were 'not white.' Zorah was having a hard time – she was rebellious because of the pressures put on her by her family to follow the traditional Muslim life they planned for her. Her one brother had fallen out with the Transvaal Indian Congress so that in that closed community, she too was ostracised on his account. Winnie befriended her, assisted from 'behind the scenes' by Nelson. They arranged for her to go to Durban to meet other like-minded people. In a way, the Mandelas gave Zorah her freedom because she would later move to England, quite far away from her background. It must have been three years afterwards that I attended her wedding to an English Jew in the Camden Registry Office in London!

In the period of the early sixties, I so admired Winnie Mandela for her fearlessness and her glamour. Here was a heroic woman in a modern tragedy. She did not come over at the time as a particularly political figure rather someone caught up in this powerful struggle in which she had to make many sacrifices to sustain herself and her two little daughters. To me she was a figure from a romantic tragedy. We remained friendly until I left South Africa…. afterwards we lost touch although I followed her struggles and later her transgressions. I never lost my admiration for the person she was and for the sacrifices imposed on her.

[••] Nelson Mandela (1994) "Long walk to freedom" (Little Brown)

At the same time, I did enjoy a quite different and lively social life. Was this a double standard? Alternatively, was it part of that peculiar schism many of us found about life in South Africa at that time? To my more conventional friends I had taken a quite dotty direction in becoming a trade unionist. I was called eccentric; a 'character' by some of the young eligible men who escorted me around the nightclubs and restaurants of Johannesburg? I was having fun. Now independent and buying elegant clothes, I argued with many people but never compromised my views; I was quite sure where I stood on all the issues of the day.

Nevertheless, I did feel increasingly more at ease with people who were committed to the same principles, to a different moral code where a human rights' culture formed the core. I met more people in the political movement who became my friends and gradually withdrew contact from the others.

CHAPTER 6

MARRIAGE

I was familiar with Leon Levy's reputation before I met him: that he was President of the South African Congress of Trade Unions and an accused on the Treason Trial. Being two 'unattached' trade unionists in Johannesburg, it was inevitable that we would meet. This happened formally at a party at Ben and Mary Turok's house in Orange Grove, and shortly afterwards we got together on the pretext of some union business we had in common. I collected the information from Leon and then we started to go out. I suppose many liaisons have started this way.

This relationship caused anxiety at my union workplace. Ray Altman was uneasy and anticipated the NUDW would become embroiled in a left wing alliance, to upset its delicate balance of sitting on the fence! Together with Morris Kagan, they concocted a new position for me; they must have been sure I would reject it and leave. They proposed that I take on "more responsibilities in the union" to extend my working area to include control of the branches that covered Vereeniging, Vanderbylpark and Carltonville. These were quite small and situated about hundred kilometres or more away from Johannesburg, in deep right-wing Afrikaner territory that meant being away for two or three days a month to hold meetings and meet with the members.

To everyone's amazement, especially theirs, I accepted this challenge and once or twice a month, would venture into the heart of 'fascist' South Africa. My working knowledge of Afrikaans was by then adequate to handle that work; often on those occasions away, one or other of the union's officials would invite me home for a meal. It was quite a bizarre experience; here I would be mixing and working with 'my' enemy. I cannot fathom out why I took this on, except to 'show' Ray and Morris that they could not that easily dispose of me.

This new area included the famous Sharpeville but of course, in my duties it was to Iscor that I would go where our members worked and lived. Their husbands, for the members were mainly women, formed the white work force of the South African State controlled steel works, Iscor, a model of the Job Reservation Act of apartheid. There were only white workers employed at Iscor, geographically part of Vanderbylpark. Job

reservation ensured that the jobs and nice modern bungalows that went with them were for whites only. I continued in this job until I left the country

The other angle to this strange episode was my own deception in that position. I did not identify the boyfriend, Leon, then husband. It is hard to fathom out years later why I chose this double life. Those country town members even bought us a wedding present – the Executive Committee collected money and gave us half a dozen blue hand towels. Ultimately the Union leadership had to take the responsibility for foisting me on those members without considering the possible consequences.

Because later on when they discovered my identity and allegiances after I left the country, the branch members were outraged. It was probably the cause of the eventual disintegration of the NUDW as the sole union for white workers.

Norman Herd (op.cit. p216) in his history of the NUDW says:

"The Blanke Distribusiewerkers, Vereeniging was newly established in Vanderbijlpark. The racialist and "purified" union was building itself up on a blatant appeal to the emotions of the white shop workers. It urged them to break away from the NUDW which was described as a mixed "kaffirboetie" organisation, belonging to the Trade Union Congress of South Africa which recognised the rights of "kaffir" workers as well."

Our marriage caused yet another conflict in our Union configuration and involved the personal feud between Ray Altman, his wife Kay of the NUDW and Phyllis Altman, ex –wife of Ray who was a Senior Official of SACTU. Both sets of Altmans were aghast at our relationship which they construed as something personal to cause them further angst and to stoke the fires by bringing our two organisations to the brink. While I had been on friendly terms with Ray and his present wife Kay until I took up with Leon, all this changed. Years before Ray had left Phyllis to marry Kay in a most acrimonious divorce and I found myself, quite innocently, caught up in their ongoing web of hatred. Kay, with whom I had good relations in the past and she always entertained me when I visited Cape Town, stopped talking to me. Phyllis, on the other hand, deeply resented my contact with her hated ex husband. That was the personal level, but there was a political one as well. One thing all the Altmans shared: they no longer trusted me and Ray ordered that all

Trade Union Council papers be locked away in a filing cabinet to which I would not have access!

Ray, a mild man picked nasty domineering wives. I think Phyllis was an embittered woman who ran the administration of SACTU effectively and kept its international machinery alive with screeds of material. She eventually had an important position in London with the Defence and Aid Fund organising and sending of money to needy political prisoners and their families in South Africa.

Kay Altman (formerly Kay le Grange) was the trade unionist who came up through the ranks but when her love affair with Ray became public in the union she lost her position and was 'demoted' to run the Coloured Branch in Cape Town! Appropriately called the 'B' Branch, it had been set up to comply with the discrimination legislation in trade unions in 1956. Although Kay was militant in her youth by the time I knew her, she was hesitant and veering towards acceptance of the constraints of the day, without much fuss. She tried to prevent me from starting a 'B' Branch in Johannesburg but I did anyway before my departure.

The legal restrictions that controlled Leon's life affected our courtship. With a high political profile, he had been one of the 29 people who remained in the Treason Trial for its full duration of four and a half years. His acquittal came only in 1961 along with such illustrious leaders as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Lillian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph. During that period, he was often in prison, including the entire five-month period of the State of Emergency in 1960.

At the time we got together, he was struggling to survive the restrictions of a 'banning notice' from the Minister of Justice. Difficult indeed, a trade unionist prohibited from attending meetings, later extended to also include social gatherings and it confined him to Johannesburg. What was a meeting or social gathering? The popular interpretation was the coming together of three or more people. It was a common restriction at the time for political activists and once served in this arbitrary fashion, the restricted person had no recourse to law to challenge it. If banned, you observed its terms, or took the consequences. As an effective negotiator, Leon's work in the busy offices of SACTU was somewhat hazardous. When was he in a meeting, what constituted a meeting – these were questions he and others often had to answer in a Court of Law?

One Sunday afternoon we had planned to go out swimming somewhere, a frequent summer pastime in Johannesburg, and Leon did not turn up nor did he phone with an apology or explanation. I was quite puzzled by this and laughingly suggested to my father:
"He must have been arrested." The next morning, the 'Rand Daily Mail' announced just that on the front page.

The case against Leon, defended and played out as pure theatre fortunately had a happy ending when the Magistrate found him 'not guilty.' To me, it had a surreal feel as I sat in the public gallery. Here was a serious slice of life acted out in a drab brown Magistrate's Courtroom as pure farce.

The case revolved around the activities in Leon's office on a Sunday morning while he was there working. During that morning, a meeting of unemployed workers was scheduled to take place in the SACTU Headquarters in Pritchard Street. Leon was not part of that meeting but he helped to arrange the seating beforehand. He carried chairs from his office to assist seating in the office where people had gathered for the meeting. Obviously, he could not have been aware of it, but the Special Branch peered into this office from the corridor outside, standing on chairs to see through the glass fanlights above the doors. When they saw him in the room where the meeting was to happen, the police immediately entered and arrested him for contravening his 'banning order.' At the time, he was dressed for our swimming date later in the day, in white short trousers, open shirt and sandals, hardly the sort of clothes appropriate for a serious meeting!

Joe Slovo, as Leon's defence advocate, prepared a careful strategy. I watched the slow motion of the defence unroll – every word quietly spoken, precise and considered. It reminded me of Ionesco's play, "The Chairs", staged in Johannesburg a few years before and I wondered whether Joe borrowed anything from the surreal effects of the play. Both the play and his defence strategy involved the frequent movement and re-arrangement of chairs, only this time it was in the well of the Court before the presiding magistrate. Joe got the agreement of the magistrate to use chairs to demonstrate the defence of the accused. Joe and Leon then went through the action, moved the chairs around the Court, and re-arranged them as need be. It was a demonstration accompanied by questions and answers as to the number and manner of carrying them from the one room to the other, their arrangement. Was it reasonable for Leon to offer some chairs from the office where he was working on his own to the meeting in an adjoining room where there was a shortage of

chairs? Moreover, if so, could he talk while he carried the chairs and did that constitute a meeting? It was a close run thing. I am not sure the Magistrate believed Leon, but gave him the benefit of the doubt and acquitted him. The onus had been on him to prove he was not at a meeting. No one challenged the Special Branch for spying through a fanlight. At that time, it was their right.

When we decided to get married our immediate families met and if my parents disapproved, they said nothing. My mother's only comment was our choice of a civil ceremony - "only divorcees get married in Court," she said. She must have long resigned herself that I was far away from the Johannesburg Jewish bourgeois scene. I suppose they worried about our future given Leon's political allegiances and profile in the present political climate with his poor financial prospects.

At that time, I thought my choice of May Day as our wedding day an inspired one, given that we were both trade unionists. Although not a holiday in South Africa at that time, the Court Ceremony would take place in the morning, followed by a family lunch in a city restaurant. For the evening we arranged a large and informal party for 'everybody' – Michael Harmel lent his house for this great gathering of our friends and political colleagues.

We gathered at the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court on 1st May 1962 for the ceremony. African colleagues of Leon who came to the Court were not allowed in but had to remain on the steps outside: here was apartheid at work. It did put a dampener on the proceedings that in any case only lasted a few minutes with the magistrate reading out the marriage certificate. In less than five minutes, it was over. The Dutch Reformed Church, official church of the land, frowned on civil marriages and unlike Britain, where special courts were set aside for wedding ceremonies; this was as bleak as possible in an ordinary drab courtroom whose principal function was quite different. You could easily visualise families gathering in that courtroom for different reasons, more likely to hear the sentencing of a loved one to six months' imprisonment.

The lunch that followed was strictly for family. This had its comical side when we found that the proprietor of the venue, the Crystal Palace, a client of my father, had arranged a special room with everything in it in pink – the flowers, table cloths and decorations – we both always remember it as our pink lunch. Not our taste but then we did not participate but left it to the caterers, and nowadays some couples use

professional wedding planners to oversee those details. However, the food was good, both Leon and my father made speeches and there were about sixty people present, about forty from my side, many of whom I never saw again.

The evening party was completely different, a crush of people that made it difficult to move across the rooms. The Special Branch maintained a presence in the street all evening but did not come into the house. All the leading figures of the Congress movement were present such as Walter Sisulu, Moses Kotane, Winne Mandela came but Nelson was already in prison. I did not enjoy that party at all; it turned more into a happening rather than my wedding party. My father had ordered the food and drinks and our immediate family attended -my parents, Leon's mother and sister and brother in law, Goldie and Robbie Abrahams. They looked uneasy in this throng. I felt like a guest at one of those parties you want to leave early. I never forgave Michael Harmel for not referring to me when he proposed the toast: a banned person, he used the occasion more as a rare opportunity to make a speech. There were also the badly timed remarks by Marks Shope, the General Secretary of SACTU, to my father; in my presence where he assured us that, Leon was really married to the political movement!

We did not have a 'honeymoon' as Leon did not have permission to leave the Magisterial District of Johannesburg. We rather fancied a time away, perhaps at the seaside but it was not to be. Well in advance, Leon applied to the Minister of Justice, John Vorster for permission to leave the city. However, we did get the letter of refusal but it arrived three weeks after we were married. What we did do was to go to a country like hotel called the 'Balalaika' in the suburb of Morningside, now part of Sandton, but then quite rural and within the city limits. We only stayed a couple of days and then went home. It has always seemed one of the more unnecessarily vindictive examples of State behaviour at the time.

CHAPTER 7

1962 – THE END OF MY BEGINNING

Those words Charles Dickens used in 'A tale of Two Cities' about the worst of times could have summed up our lives as we entered 1962 in South Africa. This was to be our last year before exile. In a life that was then dominated by political activism, *we did have nothing before us*…and this became clearer day-by-day.

Gillian Slovo [•] described the fifties as being the Halcyon Days in her parents' lives (Joe Slovo and Ruth First) where they worked and played hard and "*where people fought to get an invitation to their parties*." By 1962, that period had ended. Our wedding party proved to be the last big party where all races danced together to the penny whistle 'kwela'[♣] we all so loved, ate and drank, joked and talked, black and white together.

It was in this framework of increasing police pressure that Leon and I started our married life. We spent the first couple of months living in Helen Joseph's house while she toured the country visiting banished people. She was free at that moment of any banning notice and we stayed to feed her unforgettable cat, Siti, tend her garden and organise our own home. We rented a flat in Berea where we then lived until we left the country. We furnished this in what I thought was the 'bohemian style' of the day, books arranged on planks with bricks to separate the homemade shelves. There was a sofa covered in a dark blue fabric piled high with colourful and interesting cushions. We employed Mary Thulo, sister of Stephen who worked in my office, as a part-time domestic worker, which legitimised her stay in Johannesburg as well as providing her with a 'pied de terre' in Hillbrow to conduct her 'other activities'. It was an arrangement that suited us all.

Our flat was under constant surveillance by the Special Branch. Barbara C lived across the road with James H, a 'mixed race' couple. She called one day to enquire whether we thought the police parked outside were watching them or us. Was the pair in the Volkswagen Beetle from the "vice squad" looking to see whether they could make an arrest under the

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[•] Gillian Slovo (1997) "Every secret thing, my family, my country (Abacus)

[♣] Kwela – an African township dance popular at the time.

notorious Immorality Act, or were they from the Special Branch and watching us? We never worked that one out.

I do recall the evening we were entertaining my aunt and uncle, Jennie and Bern Janks, and we had a raid by the police. Molly Anderson, a friend and colleague of Leon's, was also visiting. Leon answered the knock and then came back inside, with a funny look on his face, closed the door and told my relations and Molly to leave because the police had a warrant to search our flat. Undaunted, the three said they would stay to give us support. In the few minutes' grace that this gave us, I removed a document, gave it to Molly who put it in her bra, went to the toilet where she tore it into strips and flushed it down the toilet.

It was my only experience of a police raid and they looked through everything – my underwear, our books and papers of course, they even went through our canisters of flour and sugar in the kitchen. One stayed observing us in the sitting room while Leon accompanied the others on the raid. It took a couple of hours and such an infringement of our dignity. Years later when our house was burgled in London I thought back to that night. It was the same sort of experience except that in the case of the police raid we watched strange hands touch and search all our belongings. Nothing was private; we looked on as men from the Special Branch had the right to decide what they wanted to look at and then discard or remove the article.

I continued to go to Congress of Democrats meetings, becoming more a symbolic gesture for fellow talkers and travellers. Then Leon urged me to join the Peace Council and I just could not understand the purpose of that organisation which seemed a long way away from our scene.

Anyway, because he was so keen that I go I did and found myself in the sitting room one evening of a Mr. Schur[♣] in Bellevue. About five to ten people attended these meetings, some of them banned. They were all much older than me and talked about things that did not interest me. Hilda Bernstein may have been the secretary. Certainly, she played a major role in the meetings I attended. Bram Fischer also came but spent a lot of time peering out of the closed curtains. This made me conscious – and edgy – that we were a gathering of 'banned people' that could carry heavy penalties for some. Now years later, I still look back on those meetings as a pointless exercise, irrelevant but dangerous for people like

[♣] Everybody called him Mr. Schur. I do not even know his first name- he always remained Mr. Schur.

Bram and others to attend, yet other than me, the members placed such importance on the organisation.

Of course that formation was important for the others because the Peace Council was a key element of the International Communist Movement and as such taken very seriously by its members. The literature handed around, came from somewhere 'overseas.' We would discuss international issues, distant gestures to me. Once it was about the Pug Wash Conference and peace always. It was about disarmament really because that was the time of the Bay of Pigs' invasion and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in England that rallied around the 'ban the bomb' issue.

What I do remember is that on one occasion there was a discussion about sending a delegate to an overseas conference. Hilda recommended a young man called Gerald Ludi whom she knew and described in very positive terms. The committee revered Hilda in a rather sycophantic way and immediately agreed with her nomination. I kept quiet. There was no vote so that I did not have to say anything because I would not have known what to do, not knowing this Gerald Ludi. As it happens, Mr. Schur had reservations too. While he handed around long glasses of lemon tea with strawberry jam that he always served, he articulated them: "Well Hilda, if you say so, we will have to take your recommendation because none of us knows this man. But we respect you and your judgment."

These turned out to be prophetic words because Ludi later revealed himself as a Special Branch detective who penetrated the Communist Party. He gave damming evidence in a case in 1966 that led to the conviction of fourteen members of the Communist Party to fairly lengthy sentences. Among the accused was my brother-in-law Norman and Bram Fischer who was charged in that case but jumped bail, went underground to be caught later and sentenced to life imprisonment.

I detested Peace Council meetings. Later I found it was probably the circuitous route to join the Communist Party. This was not so for me, because no one asked me to join. With time I found out that this could have been more an oversight as everything was starting to crack under the pressure of the police.

Because there were numerous banned people around, they had to be somewhat furtive members of any committee or organisation. Rusty

Bernstein[•] made the point that "conscience dictated that banned people break their bans as necessary, and continue whatever political work could be done without endangering others." In reality, there were so many things that they could not do which meant that people, like me, not banned, were exposed to a collection of demands to put us in an increasingly frightening firing line.

Until 1962 there had been reams of new legislation enacted to govern us more tightly depending on the colour of one's skin. The normal process of law and order still applied and then suddenly during that year the Government introduced the far-reaching Sabotage Act. This defined sabotage and gave arbitrary powers of arrest to the police.

It was during Helen Suzman's first session as a solitary Member of Parliament, no longer sitting on the benches of the Official Opposition, that she organised a protest meetings and large march in Johannesburg to protest against the proposed Sabotage Act. I attended both. I joined Winnie Mandela and we formed part of the huge crowd that snaked through the streets of central Johannesburg during that lunch hour early in 1963. Missiles came pelting down from windows of office blocks that lined our route as we walked down Plein Street towards the City Hall. A crowd of thugs emerged from the direction of the station in Eloff Street and attacked the front of the march. We suspected them to be off duty police! It was quite a violent experience.

At the time, I attended a large meeting in the City Hall addressed by Helen Suzman[♦]. Her party was not one I could support because of its qualified franchise. Her prophetic words on that occasion made me realise it was only a matter of time before our time would be up.

"The far reaching Sabotage Act…gave arbitrary powers to the government to place people under arrest…and powers to circumvent the courts and remove habeas corpus. The thin red line that separates lawful dissent and subversion becomes ever fainter."

Of course, there was another side of life but forty years later it is not that I remember so vividly. That time too in 1962 was the first year that Leon and I kept home together and we did things together as a couple. There were many other new things for me. Leon's experiences and upbringing had been different from mine. In so many ways, I had

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[•] Bernstein Rusty (1999) op.cit. p. 153

[♦] Suzman Helen (1993) "In no uncertain terms" (Jonathan Ball)

moved into new times, such as when he introduced me to Christmas Day. Helen Joseph always had an 'at home' on Christmas Day and Leon always marked Christmas. It was novel for me because mine was a secular family, with hardly a remaining token of religion after the death of Little Granny, but Christmas, no, it was not a festival in which we ever participated.

It did seem strange that Jews who had rejected their own religion, Communists among them, should take to Christmas. Was there a strange yearning for the 'other?' An explanation could have been the closeness of the radical political movement to clergymen like Rev. Michael Scott, Father Trevor Huddleston and Bishop Ambrose Reeves who played such a significant role in the liberation struggle.

Early in 1963 it was decided that I would go overseas to attend two Conferences, the CGT one in Paris (Confédération General du Travail) in May and a Women's Trade Union Congress in Rumania a couple of months later. I had a passport, which would expire about six weeks later and at that time could legitimately travel on it and apply for an extension of the passport in London. It seemed unlikely that I would have been able to keep the passport if I renewed it locally so we thought it easier to try in London. What a chance! However, it worked and no one showed any interest in the dates of expiry as I left Johannesburg and entered London.

At the London end they were more interested in whether I had a valid return ticket and we had figured that if the passport application failed in London I would come straight back.

I asked the NUDW for extended unpaid leave of about three to four months. I think we all knew I would not return to work there. Shortly before my departure, Ruth First arrived at my office one day and asked me to join her at 'New Age' (the radical weekly newspaper). She wanted to train me to replace her as Johannesburg Editor as she anticipated a banning notice, which would disqualify her from working on the paper. I had already planned my trip but agreed to write some articles about my travels for publication, a good training exercise. In fact, I did not send anything and she was right –her banning took place, which was followed by her lengthy detention in prison.

Had circumstances not changed, I probably would have returned to take the job she offered and perhaps followed her route to prison. I was sick of the world of work at the NUDW and had become quite depressed. In

addition, around that time, Leon had his banning order extended to include 'social gatherings' and no one was precisely certain what this included.

Now so many years later I write about this period of gathering isolation and trepidation. James T. Campbell♦ succinctly point out:

"*Most Jews felt threatened by families like the Slovos (or like ours) whose conspicuous radicalism seemed to confirm anti-Semitic stereotypes and invite reprisals.*

While most Jewish leftists were by now inured by the importuning of the Board of Deputies, the shunning by neighbours, friends and even family Members, was often much harder to bear."

Much later, we found out how much our families had to bear from that time onwards, the ostracism and loneliness that punished them for our radical politics.

I left Johannesburg on the 15th March 1963. Leon could not take me to the Airport; it was outside the Magisterial District of Johannesburg. My parents took me instead, and as we drove away from Auden Court in Berea with Leon waving from the balcony, I began to cry hysterically. Some sixth sense told me I would never return to that home.

There was limited planning of the details of the trip but I knew certain parts of my itinerary - I would be in Paris during May. SACTU also briefed me on a mission they wanted me to organise to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in Prague. Later in the year a Women's Trade Union Conference would take place in Rumania and in between, as a member of the Peace Council, I had been asked to be their delegate to the Women's Peace Conference in Moscow in July. They could only have selected me as their representative because I had valid travel documents. The rest of my itinerary, the times in between, was vague as I set out for London.

In case I was searched I carried no letters of introduction or credentials on me. I would make the necessary contact with the organisations and

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♦ James T Campbell's essay entitled in "Beyond the Pale, Jewish living and the South African left" in 'Memories, Realities and Dreams, Aspects of the South African Experience (2000) ed. Shain & Mendelsohn.

people concerned from London, to get them to provide the onward travel arrangements and tickets. I was also instructed to liaise with as many trade unions as possible in London to inform them of SACTU'S difficulties and problems and ask for their support, financially and morally. As a trade unionist, I had first hand experience of this.

SACTU sent a letter onto me in London that stated I was an "accredited representative". It went on to say:

"We have sent her overseas to enlist support for the cause of the non-white workers and their trade unions in South Africa and also to appeal to sympathetic trade unions for financial support for SACTU for the purpose of employing organisers and issuing trade union material."

I certainly did not have much money but had friends in London and I was keen to have the break from South Africa. Both Leon and I were aware then that the repressive changes planned by the Government at that time would affect us, and preventative detention would finally change the political process, and our lives.

CHAPTER 8

LEON LEVY'S ACTIVISM

When I left our flat in Berea that Friday afternoon in March 1963 with Leon waving to me from the balcony, it was not just the premonition that I would never came back that overcame me. It was also the fear for Leon as I remember his smiling face, waving and shouting words of encouragement to me.

Leon's generosity and modesty have always been evident; clearly so that fateful afternoon as I left, he encouraged me to take trips he never had - though he deserved far more than most people, and certainly more than I did. He stayed behind to carry on the struggle and face whatever the Security Police may mete out for him.

Through a number of formally constructed interviews I have put together my account of Leon's political activities before I knew him. At that time in early 1963 he was pivotal in giving SACTU its direction and leadership from the front as President. He was also involved in the Laundry Workers' Union and the Transvaal Branch of the Food and Canning Workers' Union. His political work flowed from this trade union work, and he served on the Congress Consultative Committee and was an official of the banned Communist Party.

Leon has described himself as having 'walk on' parts in many of the biographies and histories of the period, including Nelson Mandela's 'A long walk to freedom.' Be that as it may; by the time he left South Africa in his early thirties he had certainly given it a go – been to jail several times; banned for about ten years; in the Treason Trial, detained in the State of Emergency in 1960 and finally under 90 day detention. There was nothing ever proven against him.
In that time he had reached the highest positions in the Congress Movement.

Leon does not describe his background as conventionally Jewish, although he and his brothers did follow the Jewish rites of passage with barmitzvahs at thirteen years old and he joined a Jewish youth movement. It was more that the family was not observantly Jewish. His

membership of the youth movement, Hashomer Hatzair happened accidentally when his friend Natie Maister took him to a meeting, when he was about eleven or twelve, and he enjoyed it. Hashomer was Marxist in orientation but of course Zionist, and when immigration to Israel became an issue, Leon really left it to become active in the Communist Party.

Mary Levy played a strong role in the politicisation of her sons. She took them with her to political meetings where speakers like Hilda Bernstein (then Hilda Watts) talked about issues of the day. Theirs was a poor family after the premature death of their father and this influenced Leon's assessment of his youth. His mother did introduce them to the works of Dickens and Zola and their sister, Goldie, took them to meetings of the Left Book Club. A strong development of a left social awareness came from this home and the youth movement.

Leon was a first generation South African, his parents having emigrated from Lithuania when they were young. His mother received her secondary schooling in District 6 in Cape Town and described herself as a pioneer of Johannesburg, remembered the Rand Revolt and the Act of Union of the country in 1910. Of course, she talked also of her Lithuanian childhood and this helped us in the 1990's when we visited the village in Lithuania, Krekanava, from where she came. Leon was able to piece lots of places together from those distant stories.

When he started secondary school, he had to write an essay on what he would like to do/be when he finished school. He wanted to be a councillor, a person who takes up issues, he answered. Perhaps like Hilda Bernstein. He fixed his focus from an early age on doing something political, being in a revolutionary situation of some kind. There was scope out there and the liberation movement duly beckoned, to do battle with opponents.

He was 24 years old when he became a full time trade unionist on May Day 1954. The progressive trade unions were experiencing the same severe harassment as the congress movement because of the Suppression of Communism Act. Its leaders were served with banning notices which prevented their participation in the movement and required them to effectively cut their ties with the people and organisations they had served for most of their adult lives.

Formidable and talented activists like Solly Sachs, Eli Weinberg, Ray Alexander, Betty du Toit and others had made many sacrifices in organising unions in large and small areas of the country. From small beginnings, they had led their members to win significant improvements in pay and working conditions, medical benefit schemes and provident funds. Those veterans created powerful unions and industrial councils and had large followings of workers of all races. Their removal from the trade union and political scene was essential to the Nationalist Government's requirements to smash organised and informed resistance to its apartheid objectives. It was in that setting that Leon took office soon after the National Union of Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union lost its leader, Betty du Toit, to the Suppression of Communism Act.

Leon certainly did not share the view expressed by Ruth First who reputedly said: "I don't feel especially South African. It was just where one happened to meet the issues."• The Russian Revolution had influenced him and he hoped then that one day South Africa would become a socialist state, but his identification was entirely with this country.

Police repression and harassment meant that new officials like Leon did not have the luxury of a period of initiation and training – they needed to jump in at the deep end. The survival of the organisation depended on how quickly that new group of leaders adjusted to these circumstances. Leon was committed and keen from the beginning to emulate the best traditions established by the previous generation of trade unionists.

The political situation worsened year by year. A defining moment in the 1950's was when new labour legislation separated white workers from participation in 'mixed' unions of White, Coloured and Indian workers. African women would have to carry 'passes' which conferred on them the same status as African male workers which meant they no longer had the right to membership of registered trade unions.

It was the critical moment of change when the majority of organised unions affiliated to the South African Trades and Labour Council (SA&TL) accepted that apartheid philosophy of the legislation. Only fourteen unions of the original federation rejected this. They embarked on a new, different and fateful course. This included the Laundry and

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• Asmal, Asmal & Roberts (1996) "Reconciliation through truth" (David Philips)
The quote by First was taken from the 'Manchester Guardian' –30 October 1970

Dry Cleaning Workers' Union and Leon had only been an official for ten months.

The group of fourteen unions convened a conference on 5th March 1955 and formed the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Leon was initially elected national treasurer and shortly afterwards, aged 26, national president – a position he held for eight years. Few of the members of the new organisation had experience in running a trade union federation.

It was Leon's generation who formed SACTU ; they were young and had few dealings with the now defunct structure. Muriel Horell• listed the leaders of SACTU as "Leon Levy, Mark Shope, Moses Mabhida, Leslie Massina, Stephen Dhlamini, Lillian Diedericks and Liz Abrahams."

They set up local committees in the major towns and cities followed by the establishment of a National Management Committee. Their emphasis was recruiting the unorganised work force into industrial unions. They tried hard to prevent the formation of general unions, very difficult to administer. The experience in the 1930's by Clement Kadalie, founder of African trade unions, showed that unless there were adequate resources to compartmentalise members from the different employment sectors, neglect and disillusion were sure to follow.

Leon learned a lot about trade union structure and methods of organisation from those adopted by the American Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) in their work on the railroad, meat and steel industries.

Leon saw this as an ideal opportunity to draw on the expertise of banned trade unionists and individuals from the liberation movement willing to work secretly in national committees and assist these new trade unionists. People like Michael Harmel and Moses Kotane helped extensively in the setting up of the new organisation, particularly in key industries like mining, railways and harbours, iron and steel. Membership continued to grow enormously so that by the time it was a year old, SACTU was a recognised force.

SACTU supported a formal alliance with the Congress Movement and under the slogan of "every trade unionist an ANC member and every

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• Horrell Muriel (1961) "South African Trade Unionism" (Lawrence & Wishardt)

ANC member a trade union member" a considerable number of new trade unions were created and the membership of the older unions

Many house meetings took place at night in SOWETO to organise and Leon recalls these small gatherings of people who came together by candlelight, to plan, talk and listen. Life long relationships formed in the intimacy of those tight packed meetings and memories of their warmth remain a vivid memory. These meetings had a dual purpose: they were ANC meetings and at the same, workers from one factory organised those from others as union members.

Leon had a close association with Leslie Massina, SACTU's General Secretary, as a colleague and friend. They would frequently go for supper to the Doll's House, a well-known restaurant of the times that served customers in their cars. In this way, they could be eating out together. Since there were no public places where black and white people could go together, this was a smart way to overcome that restriction. It also gave them the privacy to plan policies together.

SACTU formally aligned to the ANC and there was a lot of hostility from opponents but it worked. They rejected the principles of "no politics in the trade union movement"[•] and participated enthusiastically in the campaign for the Congress of the People. Subsequently, SACTU became a signatory to the Freedom Charter and as President, Leon signed it on its behalf and then they became a part of all formal Congress Alliance structures.

Chief Albert Lutuli's signature for the ANC is among the others. There was not a formal signing ceremony but we still have hanging in our home that signed copy of the Freedom Charter. In 1962, I gave this copy and a few other documents to a visiting young British actor, Guy Slater, to keep safely for us in England. It turned out to be a wise move because as events unfolded we lost most of our possessions, but later reclaimed that signed copy in London.

Fifty years later, on June 26th 2005, we were there at Kliptown when President Thabo Mbeki led the country's commemorations of that event where the Freedom Charter was adopted. He described the Congress of the People:[♠]

[•] Luckhardt & Wall (1980) "Organise….or Starve" (Lawrence & Wishardt)

[♠] "New Agenda" Issue 18, (2005) SA Journal of Social and Economic Policy – "The Freedom Charter: The next fifty years."

"*…It was one of those truly historic events in the annals of our past…. perhaps the single most emphatic statement by the oppressed of their aspirations, one which asserted an alternative vision of a future of a truly liberated South Africa – a country that, truly belongs to all – against the inhumane and irrational ideology of apartheid.*

We were inspired by the Charter as we took our first steps as a nation and a democratic government…and drew directly from it in the Constitution."

Leon's first ban was in 1956. Simply, the Special Branch came to his office and served a document, framed under the Suppression of Communism Act), which prohibited him from attending meetings. Overall, there were three bans. When the first ban expired, there followed a second one and the third one had wider terms. All of them prohibited him from leaving Johannesburg, attending meetings and the final one, extended the meetings prohibition to include attending a social gathering. Rusty Bernstein♦described a banned person as becoming a "somewhat furtive member of any organisation or committee. There were only so many things you could do and others you couldn't." I asked whether these bans led to a noticeable change in his personality but Leon says now, with hindsight, that he does not think he was creative enough, more that he just adapted to this new inconvenient life; but he needed always to monitor his activities to prevent arrest. He just continued, not even finding confinement to Johannesburg too oppressive. However, increasingly he did consider whether it would be possible to continue this modus operandi indefinitely or whether it would drive him underground or into exile.

The Treason Trial

Looking back, the Treason Trial had to happen. Considering the activities of the Special Branch at the time, the raids and confiscation of documents, their presence at meetings and outside them, the banning of people and the statements that came from the Government, Mr. John Vorster, then Minister of Justice needed this, the big gesture to kill off political resistance.

♦Bernstein Rusty (1999) – op.cit.

Very early one morning in December 1956, Leon and Norman were arrested. They both lived, as single men with their mother. It is impossible for me now to visualise the emotional trauma of Mary Levy when her twin sons left their flat to face a charge of treason.

The Special Branch rounded up 156 men and women from around the country, brought them to the Johannesburg Fort where they laid a charge of 'High Treason' against them. It was Leon's first experience of prison although not the first charge he had faced. Earlier, there was a charge on a minor technical offence connected with putting up a Peace Council poster.

The Treason Trial is well documented - Leon refers to it as a learning experience for the liberation movement. It became as well a momentous chapter in his life as it brought together from the beginning the leadership of the radical political movements throughout the country, to breathe new life into them. The Trial in fact provided an opportunity for these men and women to plan and to theorise so in some ways, each day's events were more exciting than the previous one. It inspired people.

The South African apartheid regime in its many facets revealed itself in the Treason Trial. In Britain, for example, people became aware of the awfulness of the country, by finding there was to be a huge trial of political activists, including a couple of clergymen. It resembled the trials at the time normally associated with the then Soviet Union. Although I must say that for myself, an ordinary white student in Johannesburg at the time, I remember the day clearly as I picked up the 'Rand Daily Mail' on the breakfast table and read the headline of the 156 arrests. I was mystified, but I put the newspaper aside to continue some last minute revision for the exam I would be writing that morning. However, there must have been some sixth sense, some premonition of its future importance to me, that I remember that morning very clearly. It resonates with the memory that people old enough to remember, recall what they were doing at the time they heard that President John Kennedy was dead.

The Trial had far reaching consequences because efforts made internationally to raise money for the defence of the accused led later to the birth of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Canon John Collins of Christian Action in London set up meetings to raise money for the defence of the accused early in 1957 and this action continued after the trial had ended in 1961.

In the Central Hall in London on 4th February Gerald Gardiner QC, eminent barrister and Chairperson of the British Bar Council and later to become a member of Harold Wilson's Cabinet described being present at the opening of the Treason Trial. It so succinctly explained the confused and rather ad hoc manner that brought together such a large group of people, framed a charge against them -this conspiracy. They published this address as a pamphlet and extracts follow:

"Treason in South Africa means something quite different and is much wider than what the British understand it. According to a leading text book on Roman Dutch Law, "High Treason" is committed by those who with a hostile intention disturb, impair or endanger the independence or safety of the State or attempt or prepare to do so.

The initial proceedings (of the Trial) will take place before a Magistrate and could take up to three months because there are 10,000 documents to be produced. How is this possible? Well, one of the provisions of the Act is that any document found on the premises of any organisation of which you are alleged to have been a member or active supporter can be used as evidence against you. That is to say, if you were a member of an organisation ten years ago and resigned from it, any document found on the premises of such an organisation can still be used as evidence against you.

I have heard the opening speech of the Counsel for the prosecution and what comes to is this. That while the accused may not have met one or other they are all in some form or another supported a public meeting held in the summer of 1955 called the Congress of the People. The public meeting adopted a document called the Freedom Charter. This advocates universal adult suffrage, nationalisation of the mines and a good many other things like maternity benefits, holidays with pay etc. In fairness to the accused, I should make it plain that there is nothing whatever in the document which in any way suggests that it was intended to achieve any of its objects by other than peaceful means.

On behalf of Christian Action, I attended the opening days but it was a muddle. There was no Court big enough for all the accused so the preliminary hearing was held in the Drill Hall. By the second day the accused had been put into a large cage of tubular scaffolding and wire netting on which some of he accused had already hung notices saying: "Do not feed."

I do not regard it as accidental that this is first time in the history of the Church of England that it has openly assisted in the organisation of a Fund to defend men and women charged with High Treason in a foreign country. It is the first time in the history of the Bar Council that they have been represented at a foreign trial.

In the last quarter of a century, we have seen communism and fascism at work in different countries abroad, and we are well aware of the factors which form such a leading part in states of that kind. There comes a point at which I think it is immoral to be disinterested if one sees the development of these factors in another Country. The Church and the Bar have always been the last bulwarks for civil liberty.

I do not regret Christian Action and the Bar Council sent me. These are matters from which no one is interested in civil liberties can afford to disassociate himself; and if the result of the meeting tonight is to send a message of encouragement and perhaps financial help to those who are concerned in these Trials, then I am sure we shall be right in thus helping them."

They raised large amounts of money for the Trial. Sponsors of the Appeal for money included distinguished people like Bertrand Russell, Harold Wilson, Max Gluckman, Henry Moore, Laurens van der Post, Victor Gollancz and others.

Similarly, in April 1957 a South African Defence Fund was established. This included those sections of the white community who in past years had been reluctant to be associated with political issues.[♦]

In any event, Sam Jaff, large clothing manufacturer and owner of the Delswa label, paid the bail for some of the accused, including Leon (Accused Number 20) and two weeks later, they were all released. This formed part of the local concerned initiative.

Anthony Sampson[*] also said of the Treason Trial:

"T*he authority of leaders without votes of politicians without power had always been precarious. The Drill Hall gave them the recognition they needed and it assumed a new significance. It became a symbol of African*

♦ Forman & Sachs (1957) "The South African Treason Trial (Calder)

* Sampson Anthony (1957) "The Treason Cage) (Heinemann)

recognition, having associations and the mystique of Westminster or the Kremlin"

He continued: "…for the outside world also visited it…a German barrister, an American from the State Department, a British journalist – to find the whole African opposition assembled in one place. The multi-racial assembly of 156 came to be recognised as the counterpart of the white assembly of 159 in Parliament in Cape Town."

Later in October 1959, the State withdrew the indictment against more than one hundred of the original number; a balance of thirty people would stand trial. Leon was among them. It defined him as among the elite of the struggle, the only white man with Helen Joseph the only white woman. They joined famous figures of the liberation movement such ads Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada. Leon admits to a feeling of elation when he found he was among this group. On the day of the publication of the names of the accused, he phoned the newsroom of 'The Star' in advance to get the list. When told that, indeed, he was among them, he felt a certain triumph that his contribution had been big enough to justify this 'selection,' bizarre as that sentiment may now appear.

Sampson said that the accused became celebrities and during the trial were *"feted among the liberals in South Africa at that time and it became the fashion to invite one or two of the most respectable drawing room Congress leaders to tea or dinner, which previously had been impossible."*

Helen Joseph said of Leon (now Accused Number 4): "*he had devoted his life to his work with a passionate concentration. He was utterly single-minded in his devotion to the struggle and worked day and night, trial or no trial, on union matters.*[*]

To follow on, the Trial became a routine in the lives of the accused. They would gather at a meeting point in Johannesburg and a special bus would take them to the Court in Pretoria held in what used to be the Old Synagogue.

On that journey which took forty minutes each way, every day, the accused would sing, work, tell stories and play games. Leon said he was part of a group who played word games and this included Nelson, Kathy

[*] Joseph Helen (1963) "If this be treason" (Contra Edition)

and Duma Nokwe. At the end of the journey, they would announce the winner and everyone clapped.

Leon said in an article entitled "The Jewish Accused in the South African Treason Trial, "[♣] "*our evidence to the court was the history and policies of our movement of which we were proud. In the end we were certain that we would win more than the Treason Trial."*

It was difficult to work out the strategy of the Prosecution or whether most of their case was just a big jumble. There were almost 20,000 documents before the Court and it gave the impression as well, as wanting to keep the accused tied up in a case for as long as possible, to take them away from their activities. The prosecution appeared to be looking for a plot to join the accused in a conspiracy; the accused remained unsure what would next come about although they had a brilliant team of advocates led by Issy Maisels and including Sydney Kentridge, Vernon Berrange and Bram Fischer. The thrust of the defence strategy was two fold and concentrated on the rebuttal of all allegations that the political activities of the accused were violent or that their actions could be interpreted as communist.

Why was Leon an accused? The evidence produced aimed to prove he had played a leading role in the trade union movement from 1954. The Special Branch had him linked with the Peace Council, the Congress of Democrats, SACTU, and the State's case needed to show a grand design to prove the link of these organisations to overthrow it with force and violence and replace it with a communist state. They failed in the end, four and a half years later.

In March 1960, The Government declared a State of Emergency after the Sharpeville shootings and the banning of the ANC. All the accused in the Treason Trial were immediately arrested and Leon remained locked up for the next five months, the full term of the emergency. First, he was in solitary confinement and then he joined the other 'white men' who had been detained, only to go back into solitary confinement when the others were released.

There is a revealing counterpoint in the colour and gender coding played out when Leon, a white man is a detained accused who needed to consult with the other accused. Warders would take Leon each evening to the African male section to confer with the other accused. Helen Joseph, a

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[♣] David Saks "The Jewish Accused in the SA Treason Trial" Jewish Affairs, Autumn 1977

white woman needed to be brought from the white women's section and Lilian Ngoyi from the African women's section. Apartheid played itself out here so poignantly and A. Kathrada (Kathy) observed in his Memoirs• that the *"accused sat next to one another every day in court, with no undue restriction on (their) personal interaction, but inside the prison, apartheid was religiously adhered to."*

Leon did not spend much time with his co-detainees because he went to Court every day as the Treason Trial continued. He thinks there were about forty men in his dormitory and they labelled him the 'breadwinner' as he was the one to go off to work every day, to Court, carrying with him the sandwiches the other detainees prepared for him and with messages wrapped in cigarettes. This group of talented men of different persuasions and ages devised various activities to pass the time as pleasantly as possible given they were locked up together, in enforced idleness. They organised themselves into bridge clubs, theatrical productions happened, the cooks prepared delicious meals and many debates took place. They had among them experts in all these spheres and because they were detainees, they could get food sent in from the outside.

The State of Emergency ended and Leon, on his release, found a new political situation. With the ANC now banned, they needed to adapt their activities to cope with its illegal status. The Consultative Committee continued to operate, but the modus operandi changed.

By the end of 1960, the nature of the struggle, hitherto peaceful, changed to incorporate a new wing, with the formation of Umkonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation). It would move resistance to a new more dangerous level, an armed struggle. Force and violence was the answer to years of peaceful protest that seemed to be going nowhere, so a new strategy seemed to be a necessity. In the trade unions, their bread and butter campaigns continued and ONE POUND A DAY was an important and popular one.

SACTU began to successfully market itself and got some press coverage every week. Leon saw to this – there was always something worthy to give the local press. He edited and brought out a monthly trade union newspaper, "Workers' Unity". I helped him a couple of times with the layout and articles.

• Kathrada Ahmed (2004) "Memoirs" (Zebra)

The organisation also communicated regularly with international trade union organisations, and not only the World Federation of Trade Unions. (WFTU) That was the international co-ordinating body, situated in Prague, and its only affiliates by this time came from the communist world. It was the time of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban crisis so that the Cold War was at its height. SACTU had affiliated secretly to the WFTU but they wanted also to have stronger links with other trade union structures. At that time, the African Garment Workers' Union split from SACTU on ideological grounds to form its own opposing federation to SACTU. It showed how the cold war played itself out in South Africa as well.

During the four and half years of the Treason Trial Leon had carried on his life as normally as possible during the long adjournments and put in extra hours at night during the days he was required to spend in Pretoria. Throughout the trial, he had not thought about whether he would be sentenced or not, he just lived from day to day.

THE DISCUSSION CLUB

An account of Leon's political activity during this period would be incomplete without a description of his involvement with a group known as The Discussion Club. Over the years so many people referred to it with nostalgia, for some it was the highlight of their political lives and they never forgot their participation in it. Bernie and Molly Arendstein[♦] said it was a focal point of their lives and nearly fifty years later they still meet people who refer to those meetings that took place at their house in Johannesburg. As a memento, they had a framed notice on the wall of their London house of the meeting notice where Trevor Huddleston was to speak on the "History of the Squatter Movement". Leon, as Secretary of the Club, signed that typewritten letter.

Bernie was Chairperson of the Discussion Club throughout the period while Leon as Secretary, he said, "was the driving force, a formidable organiser who arranged the speakers, sent out the notices and where necessary, organised lifts for people to attend."

It was Mannie Brown's idea and they formed the Club in early 1953 to fill a void, to revitalise people who had been frightened of meeting other

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♦ Interview with Molly and Bernie Arenstein, London , August 2004

like-minded people on a multi-racial basis after the banning of the Communist Party. After that, they held about forty-nine meetings a year until about 1959 when they disbanded because of police harassment.

This was not a political party and their speakers covered a wide range of issues, sometimes political, other times on the arts and cultural events. The Arensteins recalled the night the Manhattan Brothers gave a concert. Over 150 people attended, some of them domestic workers from adjoining streets to hear their exhilarating music. Nadine Gordimer spoke on the work of Olive Schreiner and each Friday night, there was another topic and a good attendance. Many speakers, like the Curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery asked to come again.

Cecil Williams, a well known theatrical producer of the times and progressive, would regularly stage a special performance of one of his plays for Discussion Club members and follow the performance with a question and answer session with the cast. This was a very popular event.

Many who attended the Discussion Club were persuaded to believe it was political because of the increasing presence of the Special Branch who sat outside and took details of car numbers. The direction was certainly left wing but communists were not encouraged as speakers. Local candidates before an election would ask if they could speak at one of the Friday night meetings and lively discussions always took place. However, as the Government became increasingly bellicose in their pronouncements and the actions about political views they did not share, the Discussion Club was bound to be a victim of harassment.

The Special Branch techniques of intimidation included visiting people at 2a.m. and saying they had details about a car involved in an accident. They would then produce the car number of the person who had attended a meeting. Their strange visit would create the tension they desired. More crudely, in a visit to the house of a student still living at home, they would warn the parents that their children were involved in subversive activities that may prevent them getting a passport.

Their scare techniques ultimately worked. This was towards the end of the fifties, and alas, the Discussion Club folded.

I have sketched Leon's life and activities before I knew him. That background became part of my future and interweaves in my life to follow. It would be true to say that by the time I left South Africa in 1963, I had become a 'new me.'

PART TWO

CHAPTER 9

SET FOR EXILE

It did cheer me up on the bleak Sunday afternoon that I arrived in London that South Africa was headline news. It was 17th March 1963 and a huge Anti-Apartheid Movement Rally was taking place in Trafalgar Square. This may have been the first of the many rallies in the decades ahead. It was a Sharpeville Memorial Rally and the main speaker was the new leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson. Barbara Castle MP presided as Chairperson of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The messages from that rally were "no arms for apartheid" and "Support the UN Boycott of South African goods."

It was too late for me to attend the rally but in any case, I was quite pre-occupied in finding accommodation. I had arrived with no definite plans but expected to find one of my friends able to put me up. However, no one was at home that afternoon to respond to my telephone calls from the Airport so that I booked into a little hotel in Baker Street where I remained until I found something more long-term, and cheaper.

Some days later my friend Marna Shapiro arranged that I could move into the unoccupied flat of Jimmy Vaughan in Swiss Cottage that she had rented some time before and there I remained for some months.

Al Alvarez, well known poet and critic with 'The Observer' described this set up in his Autobiography•:

"Jimmy Vaughan who lived around the corner from my Merton Rise Studio was a hustler, half Scot, half Nigerian, charming and utterly unreliable. He worked on the fringes of the movie business, in the grey area between art films and pornography, and played poker on Friday nights with our group, an assortment of other literary types…. old lefties who had quit the Party after the 1956 uprisings but were still political enough to be embarrassed by doing well in the capitalist system we all despised so made a point of throwing our dirty money away at the poker table.

• Al Alvarez (1999 & 2002) "Where did it all go right?" Bloomsbury Press

Jimmy had been out of London that autumn, hustling some obscure deal in China, and rented his flat to a South African divorcee called Marna. Being a schoolteacher and short of money, Marna was sharing the place with her friend, Anne Adams…" (Al later married Anne)

Al described Marna as *"small and combative and troublesome, a woman who made a point of always knowing better than everyone else. She reminded him of some of the friends of his sister. …bullies who kept her in her place*" – and he didn't much like her.

But at that time Marna and I were close friends and she lived nearby with her mother who helped to take care of her little girl, Jackie. She had only recently arrived from Johannesburg as a single mother after a failed marriage. Later we drifted apart and she died very young before we ever came together again. But in those early months in London, Marna and her mother, Bessie Greenstein provided the comradeship that I needed so much after I arrived quite alone and slightly bewildered.

As for Jimmy, it was from Moscow and not China, that he agreed on the telephone that I stay rent-free in his flat. It was one of those grand gestures made with effusive words of support for the cause. He provided me with the base I needed – I had a place to live. So while Jimmy carried on doing research in Moscow for a film for Lionel Rogosin on 'peace,' a film that was never made, I set myself up to map out a programme of activity from his flat in Swiss Cottage. Being young probably gave me the confidence I needed to set up a campaign of sorts that might have deterred wiser and older people.

My first move was to make contact with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) office in London. I had planned that together with Leon. Tom McWhinnie, who ran the office, had no idea I was coming or who I was for that matter. I arrived, unannounced; rushed in where angels would fear to tread and my reception was less than cordial. He was a naturally suspicious person, as I was to find out with time and on that first occasion he had me wait in the General Office while he had me checked. Of course, I did not understand then the status of the WFTU in Britain at the time and the tight rope McWhinnie himself trod at the height of the cold war. I accepted that my credentials would need scrutiny and after a while, Vella Pillay, an acknowledged and exiled South African activist, arrived. He took me out to lunch where he cross-examined me thoroughly.

The outcome being satisfactory, I continued to meet with McWhinnie. He intimidated me and I never liked him. I found him a dour Scot, sinister too, and he always talked to me, sitting with his feet on his desk which I found disrespectful. He probably thought my presence a waste of time but after meeting him a few times and when he knew of other meetings I had set up, through the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Movement for Colonial Freedom, he thawed. This is not to say that he was ever friendly, just more constructive.

It took me time to realise that McWhinnie had few contacts with British trade unions at an official level, or even at branch level because of their anti-communist viewpoint at that time. Cold War politics dominated the trade union scene, and as he represented an organisation of the communist block with its headquarters in Prague, he was not that useful to me in helping to set up contacts in Britain. He did network with individuals, some powerful ones, and suddenly one day about six weeks after my arrival, out of the blue, he suggested I attend the Annual Conference of the Scottish Trade Union Congress, to take place on the Scottish isle, Dunoon. His assistant, Dave Goodman would be going to the Conference and I should go along with him. Slightly bewildered by this, I wrote to the General Secretary, George Middleton, and asked for observer status. Tom was so enthusiastic about his suggestion as a wonderful opportunity for me to meet trade union delegates. Mine was a last minute request and by the time we were due to leave, I had not received a response from George Middleton, which needed to come by post from Glasgow. I was quite apprehensive about going in this way, taking such a chance, but I seemed locked into the arrangement.

In the long car journey northwards, the only point of connection with Dave Goodman was to question him incessantly on his involvement in the Spanish Civil War when he fought in the International Brigade. Otherwise he was unfriendly and unspeaking, my idea of a fully-fledged *apparatchik"*[•], immersed in the Communist Party, an unquestioning and loyal man with little human compassion.

He had arranged to stay with friends in Glasgow but I needed a hotel room for the night. He drove me to a row of cheap hotels in Central Glasgow and I booked into one and had to pay in advance. The following day we would go to Dunoon for the Conference, take the boat and cross to the island. Later on that afternoon, his host, Phil Stein

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[•]"apparactchik" defined as the Party's homely slang-name for its agents:" Arthur Koestler (1954) "The Invisible Writing" (Collins)

phoned and insisted that I spend the evening at his home. The Steins were shocked to find that I was staying in some brothel-type hotel where Dave had dumped me. I spent the evening with them and on my return from Dunoon stayed with them for about a week. A life long friendship with Phil began on that trip. Later he moved to London.

When we arrived at Dunoon the next day I had to find the 'boss', the General Secretary to get my credentials sorted out. I remember that moment very well. I needed to have him pointed out to me in the very large hall where the conference would be starting some hours later. George Middleton was a large, very fat man and he was shouting at people around him. With tremendous trepidation, I approached him and waited to introduce myself. His demeanour changed immediately and he was quite charming. Yes, he had received my letter but it had been too late to reply in time. I could certainly have observer status and would be most welcome to join Conference social activities as well. Perhaps being a young woman helped!

But that combination of being a young and a woman also had its drawbacks. I suppose we now have a proper term for this: sexual harassment. Because at the Scottish TUC most of the delegates and officials were men, there were hardly any women present, and certainly none under thirty.

We stayed in a little hotel in Dunoon together with the visiting Soviet delegates and a fat little man who represented the Soviet newspaper "New Times." These were the first Soviet Russians I had ever met. Phil was the Scottish representative of the "Daily Worker" (the then daily newspaper of the British Communist Party) and he stayed with us. How interesting this must have been to British security for the town of Dunoon was itself a Polaris missile base at the time and often the focus of anti-nuclear demonstrations. All the guests in that hotel for the Conference were known to have strong Soviet Connections…. and I too was part of this group.

All these years later I remember hazily two or three Russians frozen into a stereotype but I remember the small jolly journalist, Lev and I think that was his first name. He was also a friend of Phil's, a Jewish Communist who managed to survive the War and Stalin, keep his job, get permission to travel and to enjoy life. Lev always ate with us during those days in Dunoon, and I think he drank quite a lot as well.

It was then that I decided to have another name. Quite a demonstration of naivety when I suddenly decided I needed to protect my South African identity. What would happen after I returned to South Africa and the authorities got wind of my association with this group of people? I picked a new one and called myself "Margaret Hill" at that time. I chose Margaret because I liked the name and Hill, well it seemed that figuratively I was always climbing up one.

My first occasion in using this new name was at the opening session of the Conference. I found myself seated next to the American Industrial Counsellor from the Embassy in London. He asked me many questions about myself, about South Africa, about Betty du Toit whom he said, he knew and I gave very guarded and evasive replies. I tried to avoid him on other occasions.

It was awkward for me in Dunoon with the role of networking in the tearooms, functions and corridors of the Conference. I felt in some ways like a salesperson, trying to apprehend people, to sell something. On this occasion, it was not me or a product, but my cause.

Dave Goodman and Phil Stein did not really provide the opportunity to meet a cross section of delegates as their contacts were only those from the Communist Party. On my own, I got an invitation to speak at the Glasgow Trades' Council, but Phil get me invitations to a number of Scottish trade union branch meetings.

It was a risky for me to attend a 'social' given by the Scottish Miners in Dunoon, a major social gathering of the Conference. Clearly there were few women in such an industry so that I was hassled most of the evening and I recall how problematic it was for me to get home alone at the end. It was difficult then for women to achieve equality on committees and in organisations. I learned quickly, to try to be as tough, to project my voice - I was not prepared to be relegated to the status of an ornament, to be touched up or ignored.

That Conference introduced me to the politics of Britain. For a week, I listened to debates on major concerns of the day and controversial issues on the workers' agenda. Although its focus was Scottish, a number of issues applied to the whole country and national leaders from London attended and spoke at the Conference.

After Dunoon, I stayed with the Steins in Glasgow to carry out that programme of meetings I had arranged. Contrary to the tight-fisted way

the Scots are always described, I found the contrary to be true and there was always a meal at the end of every arrangement. There would always be an invitation to someone's home and the atmosphere was so friendly, unlike the English.

At that time Phil was the Scottish correspondent of the 'Daily Worker", the Communist Party newspaper. Phil was quite disillusioned with Communism and the 'party line.' His wife Di, whom he later divorced, was the niece of Willie Gallagher, the first Communist British MP. On a walk in Dunoon Phil introduced me to the old man. Although Phil had impeccable communist credentials, he was looking for a way out. He came to London and started a Public Relations Company, which prospered. I well remember how dismissive I was of his first client, a Spanish Sherry Company because it operated in the Franco Regime. I compared it with the boycott of South African fruit at that time and was quite high handed in my comments.

At that time in Scotland, I established a friendship with Cecil Williams whom I had only known slightly in Johannesburg. He had settled in Glasgow and he and his partner took me around a lot and showed me sights in and around the city. We liaised also together with local members of Actors' Equity, some I had met at the Conference, and talked about an actors' boycott of South Africa. Cecil, of course, having been a theatrical producer in Johannesburg continued to remain active in that campaign.

It was the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) that provided the contacts for me with British trade unions. They arranged for me to speak to a number trade union branches around London and the Home Counties where I would explain the plight of African trade unions and the conditions of black workers. Increasingly, I became more confident and absorbed by these efforts.

Under the name of Margaret Hill I wrote in MCF's bulletin, "Solidarity" in May 1963 appealing for funds:

"We lack such equipment as typewriters and one duplicating machine is available. SACTU for organising purposes requires 12 scooters (four each for Johannesburg and Durban, two each for Cape Town and Port Elizabeth) as well as one jeep. The workers of South Africa appeal to the workers of Britain
HELP US IN OUR SGTRUGGLE FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS, CIVIL LIBERTIES AND THE DIGNITY OF MAN."

The MCF was an interesting organisation with a long history of supporting colonial countries gain liberation. These included countries such as India, Ghana and now South Africa. A number of Labour Members of Parliament and other eminent figures supported it and over the years many of the 'great and the good' were involved in its struggle against colonialism. Numbers of organisations affiliated to MCF , including trade unions at national and branch level, the Labour party etc. Part of its work was to keep information flowing about countries in its remit and they would organise speakers as a useful way of doing just that.

The saintly Fenner Brockway MP was its President and he was a much admired figure in Britain and internationally. He had tirelessly headed many delegations, fought so many battles on behalf of the oppressed. In his obituary later, it was said that when he entered Parliament in the twenties he had been advised to specialise, to become an expert in a single issues to further his career. He chose British colonies. Whatever that original motivation, his was truly a remarkable contribution to the cause of human freedom.

I became friendly with the full time functionaries of the MCF, who worked from an untidy set of offices near King Cross, and we often dined out together. There was Barbara Haq, an English woman whose Pakistani communist husband was at that time in jail in Pakistan. She was the efficient secretary and quite dedicated to the organisation. John Eber, a refugee from Singapore, rather upper class and English educated was the Chairperson. His Chinese wife Liam also worked in the office. Their politics were very left wing, but they were not members of any political party. Perhaps they were following the Chinese Communist Party but at that time, I did not know those finer points. Once when we went out to dinner, a young Chinese man joined us and closely questioned me about the struggle in South Africa. He said our tactics must be wrong because we seemed still so far from liberation. Had the South Africans not studied the Chinese struggle, the Long March?

I got stage fright and dried up was when I spoke at the MCF Annual Conference in Coventry. I arrived at that conference ill prepared and without adequate back up notes and spoke for a few minutes, became conscious of some of the famous faces in the audience facing me. My attention wondered, I lost my train of thought and went into a panic. Fenner Brockway in the Chair rescued me but I had failed, and my speech ended. It was so humiliating.

Mazisi Kunene represented the ANC in London and worked from the Africa Centre in Earl's Court. Known then as Raymond, he was in London from Durban to do post-graduate studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) but had been persuaded to give up his course to work full time for the ANC. Raymond was not a politician; he was a writer, a poet and student of Zulu history and culture. He read some of his poems to me and they had a musical resonance in Zulu but because I could not speak a word of any African language they needed translation for me

Raymond ran his office in a disorganised fashion but interacted with the other organisations that were British based and focused on the South African scene. The most important of these was the Anti Apartment Movement, then in its infancy. He served on all the major committees of the day and many of the major figures to dominate the South African scene later like Kader Asmal and Abdul Minty, then students, were already leading personalities of the day. Rosalynde Ainslee was also a major player of the time. A growing group of British volunteers and full time officials slowly emerged who became the core of a nucleus of British people who carried the Anti Apartheid movement through the next forty years.

Yusef Dadoo, Vella Pillay and Julius Baker formed another political trio, and I suppose they represented the Communist Party from their office near Charing Cross station. Their activities were far more secretive – they saw to the distribution of illegal literature to selected South Africans within the country and I think, with the distribution of money. I liaised with all these groupings that were the driving force in highlighting and publicising the conditions in South Africa in the early sixties.

Certain political friction was clear in the work we all did in British organisations and this reflected the main political thrust of the times. Those British non-communists on Anti Apartheid committees were always trying to smoke out the communists, among the South Africans. I well remember Sonia Clements, a prominent do-gooder who served on the main Anti Apartheid committee, deliberately placing herself next to me at a conference to try to make me divulge my political allegiances and those of others.

This is a chronicle of my times in 1963. Strange though it seems now, I was never a committed communist although I flirted with the ideology and strangely knew so many communists internationally. But I never

made a statement about anyone's affiliations, not anything anti communist. My real position only became clearer to me later and I never took part in any discussion on the political position of any person in the struggle of those days.

What I was aware of was the intensely anti communist attitudes of the International Department of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) and International Department of the Labour Party. They perceived SACTU as a Communist organisation and would have nothing to do with us at a national level. The main trade union leaders of the time, George Woodcock, General Secretary of the TUC, Frank Cousins, leader of the Transport and General Workers Union and Bill Carron of the Engineering Workers Union likewise gave us the cold shoulder. All this remained until the leadership changed. Other unions, like the Print workers, the Mineworkers, the Fire brigades and others recognised and supported us.

But the unions were de-centralised in structure and had the autonomy to make their own decisions at a regional and local level as to which organisations they would affiliate, invite and associate. So that many affiliated to the Anti Apartheid Movement, MCF, and so on and this forms the basis, I believe, for the growth of the enormous anti apartheid movement. Because in the early days the speaking programme of numbers of people started. It began at the grass roots and went on over the decades to help to lay the foundation of the mass support.

There were other scenes too, other activities and my life was certainly not all politics. Are these still of any interest because now I have forgotten the details and I did not record them? There was that other part of me that was living through a changing scene in 1963, and there were the overflowing delights that London offered – the places to visit, the films, exhibitions, theatres, bookshops and new people.

It was the beginning of the Swinging Sixties in London. Quite a lot of what is now characterised as the sixties passed me by and I cannot remember who said, "If you clearly remember the sixties, then you weren't part of it". Perhaps that is what it was. Of course, the fashions of the day influenced the way I dressed and I still love fashion and stylish clothes. I always spent time on my appearance but and did regret at that time that I did not have straight blond hair to wear shoulder length in the stylish Mary Quant look of the day. I was careful, however, to dress appropriately for the occasion, neither too frivolously, nor over stated. It depended. … I learned that from working in the union, to try to look a bit older, to be taken seriously. I needed to cultivate a certain 'gravitas.'

Life in that flat in Fellows Road, Swiss Cottage was quite basic. There was scarcely any heating, certainly no central heating. We would sit around the small gas fire and getting into the bath meant stripping while standing in the hot water and getting out the same way, in reverse order. Central heating came about gradually and there were certainly many people around who still believed we were likely to be healthier without artificial heating that clogged the air. There was no fridge in that flat so that I bought very little after I experienced rancid butter and sour milk. Most of the time, I must have eaten elsewhere.

Marna and I would often go out together at the weekend, often in the evenings as well. There were two concerts at the Festival Hall that stand out for me. Vladimir Ashkenhazy had defected from the Soviet Union we were fortunate enough to get tickets to hear his inaugural recital. Then there was the unforgettable Jacqueline du Pre who played Elgar's Cello Concerto. She sat on a raised plinth and her long loose hair flowed around her. I was concerned that her hair could become entangled in her bow.

Like all South Africans, I was isolated from world politics. South Africa did not yet have television and speedy international communication was years away. So that although I had subscribed to 'The New Statesman' for some years and carefully read it week by week, my involvement with world political issues was slightly removed, particularly as we were so absorbed with our own day to day political issues. I remember the Cuban Crisis in 1962 and how we discussed the possible consequences, but even then, I found it remote. Like all sane people, I abhorred war but confused pacifism and the peace movement. As I said in a previous chapter, the concept of peace seemed such a long way away to me who then believed that armed insurrection would end apartheid. So that when I attended the Peace Council meetings in Johannesburg, I only did so to please Leon.

Once in London I quickly realised the significance of the Disarmament Movement. The Aldermaston March was the unique highlight of the Easter weekend as tens of thousands of people, men, women and children took part in their peace procession, which started at Aldermaston and four days later arrived in London. These marches lasted for more than six years. Canon Collins with figures like Bertrand Russell and veteran Labour politician Michael Foot would lead the march. That first Easter weekend I planned to take part in the march but instead ran a high

temperature with a bad dose of flu and watched it instead on television. It was quite inspiring.

Doris Lessing[•] described the Aldermaston March as a "unique phenomenon in British life. She went on to say:

"*…It was where scientists and artists, writers and teachers and gardeners, politicians, every kind of person met, walked together,* More than that, I do not know *and talked – often remained friends afterwards."*[*]

It was also the time of the Profumo Scandal, with the imminent end of Harold McMillan and the Tory Government that had been in power since 1951. The satirical programme, 'That was the week that was', successfully lampooned the powerful of the times, and I became one of the millions who found it compulsive viewing on television every week. Such was my introduction to the intricacies of British politics, not necessarily made up of large gutsy, blood and thunder issues. Parliament and the subtle workings of Whitehall well illustrated in this Profumo-Christine Keeler scandal and beautifully 'sent up' on television. In political terms, the knives were drawn, but in a very British way. It is said that John Profumo, the Minister of War at the heart of the crisis, could lie before Christine Keeler, but never to Parliament. Certainly, in South Africa at that time, an issue like this was unthinkable, impossible even to fanaticise when drunk! At the time, CP Snow described the period so well in books like "The Corridors of Power." It was Karl Marx or was it Engels, who said how impossible it was change British politics!

Because of the difficulties in communicating freely with Leon and SACTU, I would send reports circuitously of my activities and the meetings I had with different people. The police surely tampered with our mail and tapped into regular telephone numbers, so that easy communication at that time was impossible. I was working on my own in London without a set agenda, but with a mandate to campaign as much as I could for material assistance and support for SACTU.

I did not speak all that often to Leon on the phone: calls were difficult to make and through an operator, they needed to be booked in advance.

[•] Lessing Doris (1998) "Walking in the Shade" Vol. 2 of 'My Autobiography' (Flamingo)

[*] Later one could describe the Anti-Apartheid marches over the next three decades in London as similar occasions.

The line, on one side or the other was usually bad so those precious minutes taken up in asking: "can you hear me?" Therefore, we wrote letters that took ages to arrive. I knew that the South African Parliament was debating the '90 day detention law' at that time and tension was building. I was very worried about Leon's safety and our future. He was always able to present a calm façade and would try to reassure me on the phone that things were going smoothly. I wanted to believe him, but there were times when panic seized me.

I was somewhere in-between, busy and absorbed by my present life in London with an ever-present dread of something awful that could happen. I kept my focus on the things I had to do, to plan, to speak and to write. I just lived for the moment.

CHAPTER 10

PARIS 1963

During May, as arranged, I went as SACTU's delegate to Paris for the 34th Congress of the CGT (Confédération General du Travail). This was a landmark occasion , being the Communist Trade Union Federation's first major international conference since the Second World War and it was also the first time that a post-War French government allowed an international delegation into France that included the Head of the Soviet Trade Unions.

In the following decades there were many Conferences on a variety of issues that I attended but those conferences in 1963 were special for me and worthy of recording. It was not only because of the individual impression they made on me, but in that era, they had particular significance.

The CGT made every effort to impress with a lavish and massive show of their power in France, quite considerable at that time.• About two thousand delegates were present at the Palais des Sport in Saint Denis, a working class area in the suburbs of Paris where the Communists held the Mayoralty and local power.

There were about thirty of us in the international delegation and we stayed at the Hotel du Nord, across the road from the Gare du Nord. Each morning a coach would transport us to the conference centre and it was my first serious introduction to the joys of French cuisine where mealtimes were extensive with course after course accompanied by the appropriate wine. While feasting we had the opportunity to get to know each other and senior French trade union officials who joined us at lunch and dinner. The language barrier made informal contacts difficult for the foreign delegates who spoke a wide range of languages. Unlike present times, few understood English and at that time and even the French needed to communicate through an interpreter. So that I remember my main contacts were the representatives from Ghana and Cyprus because we were the Anglophones in the group.

• Beevor & Cooper (2004) "Paris: After the liberation" (1944-9)
In 1944 Benoit Frachon, General Secretary of the CGT claimed over 5.5 million members. The figure was probably inflated but the French Communist Party through the CGT influenced the working class of France. With time, and by 1963, this power had waned considerably.

Most of the foreign delegates knew each other; they were part of a circuit of delegates who went from one conference to another, bringing fraternal greetings. This was my second trade union conference, but the first communist led one. Later I was to go to Moscow for a Women's Peace Conference. There was something quite stylised and sterile being a foreign 'fraternal' delegate. I played a role, made the speech SACTU would have expected from me. It seemed though that I was part of some larger propaganda machine. The experiences were memorable and I learned a lot about the countries I visited. There is a possibility too that my input might actually have helped my cause. Although exhilarating with great personal opportunities for me to travel and interact with many exciting people, an underlying cynicism about these events took hold almost from the beginning.

The opening ceremony was on a Saturday evening. It seemed as though there were thousands of people present in the vast hall of the Palais des Sports. The international delegation was seated on the stage and were all introduced to the Conference which opened with the singing of 'The Internationale', the first time I had ever heard it sung 'live'. It is a rousing anthem and around me, people sang it in their own language, although the Conference delegates sang it in French. The singing was moving, and expressed for me at the time the essence of international solidarity. Freedom songs have always been a part of the political left, but as I did not grow up in an era where we could sing these revolutionary songs, I knew them only from listening to records.

In my collection of papers from that time, I have 'The Opening Report by the General Secretary, Benoit Frachon,' who stressed that since their past conference two years before, France had finally withdrawn from Algeria so that it was the first time since 1939 that France was no longer at war. This had produced a new climate of progress and hope within the country.

He said that trade unions were growing and was delighted to announce that the workers of Renault motors had just obtained a four-week annual holiday, which was a cause for celebration. He then outlined the programme for discussion over the next few days. This would concentrate on the need for increased wages, a shorter working week and four weeks paid leave per year for all workers of France.

The format of the conference was quite different from the Scottish one I had recently attended. The British model worked on speakers presenting resolutions in favour or against a particular topic with amendments tabled

to the substantive motions. Resolutions committees worked out these behind the scenes so that a proper debate on an issue followed. The French, on the other hand, made speeches on issues; theirs was more like a political rally. Once again, it was a remarkable education for me on French political and economic issues of that period. Maurice Thorez,[•] the legendary French communist leader, then a very old man, briefly appeared on a balcony to wave to the loud cheering delegates.

A very dramatic moment was the emotional speech by Angela Grimau,widow of a Spanish Republican leader who had recently been arrested and then garrotted[♣] by the Franco Government. As she went to the rostrum, the response to her galvanised me as a very emotional crowd packed with delegates clapped the Maquis tap-tap of the French Resistance. Clearly well known to this crowd, she was dressed, in traditional Spanish style, in black that included a black mantilla. The Spanish Civil War always had special significance for the French left as many had fought in the International Brigade. There were also among the delegates those who were originally Spanish refugees themselves from the anti-Franco Republican side who had lived in France since 1938.

The Russians presented a head of Lenin to the Conference as a gift and someone whispered in my ear that it would no doubt join the dozens of others they already stored in the basement. SACTU did not make any presentation; there had been no briefing on this, nor would we have had the money to give something appropriate.

It was probably on the third day in Paris when I opened the London 'Times' as I settled in the coach about to set off for the Conference. There was a small piece on an inside page that announced that Leon Levy had been arrested the previous day in Johannesburg under the 90-day Detention Act. I expect my response was probably a hysterical outburst, because I do remember that everyone crowded around me, and then, in shock, I got off the coach. Back inside the hotel, I drank a large glass of cognac, to calm me. There were people around to comfort me, experienced resistance fighters who remembered their war experiences; they seemed familiar with my sort of anguish.

[•] Beevor & Cooper (2004) op cit. "Thorez was a man of impressive talents. His enemies may have seen his muscular rubbery face as a mask of deceit, but as a devout Stalinist, he believed in the necessity of lies. A miner by birth and by trade, he overcame his lack of education by sheer force of will. Acclaimed by the French Communist Party as 'the son of the people' it almost made him sound like the Christ of the proletariat."

[♣] "garrotted" is defined in the Collins Dictionary as "Spanish method of execution by strangling

A few hours later, I had composed myself and set off by taxi with the interpreter for the Conference. In the administrative section at the back, I telephoned my parents who sounded devastated. Of course, the telephone line kept breaking up, but my mother kept repeating, "Don't come back here" over and over just in case I had not heard her the previous time.

That afternoon the CGT sent a delegation to the South African Embassy in Paris to protest at Leon's detention. The organisers decided that I give my speech that afternoon and there were amendments to the original I had handed in for translation to include details of Leon's detention. I had continued to use the name Margaret Hill and omitted in my speech any reference to the fact that Leon was my husband, although the International Department knew.

My speech attracted widespread media attention and I got a standing ovation at the end. When I recently examined the photographs of that occasion and which appeared in the French press, it was a funny co-incidence to recognise that I wore my wedding suit to give that speech. I am sure I chose it as the most appropriate outfit I owned for such an occasion, rather than for any deep-seated psychological reason.

My life turned around on that day in Paris. I expected that the activities I had developed in London and the other trips planned, would always end with my eventual return home. Now this seemed less likely to happen. Everything at that moment was blurred and vague. The arrest was an event that I half knew would happen, but when it did, it seemed so sudden and I was too dazed and upset at the time to fully comprehend the personal significance. Its probability had been on my mind but the reality was something different. What would this mean for Leon and in solitary confinement, was there any likelihood that he would be tortured?

In any event, encouraged by my hosts and knowing nothing to the contrary, I decided to remain in Paris for the final days of the Conference. Everyone made a tremendous fuss of me; too much. The French at that time were quite ignorant about 'apartheid' and the political set up in South Africa, part of the Anglophone world. After my speech, groups of delegates at the Conference made contact with me and invited me to their regions or branches to speak to their members. It was similar to the invitations I got in Scotland and I considered a further trip to France at a later stage.

The translated French version of my Conference speech was amended to include slogans and exhortations not contained in the English version I had handed in. I battled with the interpreter to remove the slogans, but she felt the audience expected that sort of speech and calls for international solidarity was part of the culture. I was only partly successful in having it changed as a lot of 'Party speak' remained in the French version distributed to the Conference:

My speech ended:

"*I take this opportunity of thanking you and through you, all Trade Union Centres here represented, for the consistent and powerful solidarity you have been giving to the hard struggle for rights and liberty waged by South African workers, and specifically to the help given to them by the Committee for Solidarity to South Africa, set up with the support of the WFTU.*

We are confident that by consolidating such activity and with the ever-increasing help of international working class solidarity we shall finally reach victory to our just struggle.

Long live working class solidarity.

IN THE NAME OF SACTU, I salute the workers of France and their great organisation, the CGT. The workers of South Africa salute this Conference in their customary way:

'Amandla Awetu'. Power to the People."

These slogans did not only feature in speeches but in all the writings of that period. In contact with people, particularly from the Communist bloc, on a political level, the 'correct formulations' were essential in discussion. The use of slogans acted as a code, shorthand, to define who you were. If you did not open up with one of the 'lines', you were clearly 'not one of us.' This was the Marxist equivalent, it seemed to me, of the secret handshake, the Freemasons allegedly use.

Louis Saillant, General Secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions, (WFTU) told me that campaigns in the west were a waste of time: here was the voice of the other side of the Cold War divide. Our discussion took place at one of the lengthy dinners in the centre of Paris when I sat next to him. Saillant was a gourmet and talked a lot about the preparation of the different dishes we ate. He and other leading

figures from the French political movement would hold forth nightly on the merits of various dishes and wines. Saillant certainly seemed to me to be more interested in his food at that time than he was in political issues. He seemed played out. It was an intriguing insight into the radical French as I had associated such a passionate interest in food to belong to the bourgeois and elite, not a topic the left would talk about at length and with such enthusiasm.

From that time, I have visited France almost annually and when there always, at some moment, I recall with nostalgia those first gargantuan feasts when I acquired my love for French cuisine!

When the Conference ended, I returned to London and there was something changed about that arrival. I was uncertain now about my status and whether this was a homecoming as I met Marna at Heathrow who had, in the new circumstances, especially come to meet me.

CHAPTER 11

A MONTH IN PRAGUE

In London, I carried on speaking at meetings. The Movement for Colonial Freedom organised speaking arrangements for me, sometimes three a week but the focus had now changed. It was about Leon's detention. At the time there were ten people held under the new Act, Leon was the only trade unionist.

There was concern about his arrest and the lack of habeas corpus. It was also a new aspect of political repression in South Africa and we were unsure of its scope or how it would develop. Once again, trade unions filed protests but these were selective as the larger unions had their Cold War perspective on international trade union solidarity with South Africa. SACTU was seen aligned with the World Federation of Trade Unions, and George Woodcock of the British Trades Union Congress would not protest on the 90 days detention of one of its leaders. The hostile Polish Mrs Kolarz ran their International Department; she was quite dismissive and I felt she viewed me as a sort of she-devil. Likewise, we got scant recognition from Frank Cousins and Bill Carron, leaders of Britain's two largest unions. David Ennals, Head of the International Department of the Labour Party and a member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement Executive was also selective in those he approved for public support. They all 'of course' opposed apartheid, but focused more on choosing which 'desirable' organisations' representatives to recognise.

At that level, Louis Saillant's analysis was correct. However, there was that other special feature in Britain. The awfulness of the South African racist system and its oppression of opponents caught the wider public imagination. At the regional and local level of autonomous unions and trades councils, Labour Party Branches and students' organisations, they invited speakers and established links of friendship and support. The boycott of South African goods began in the 1960's and many people did not buy South African fruit for the next thirty years.

Those decisions made at grass roots level grew regardless of the major power politics of the day, whether this was the trade union divide of the two international federations, the WFTU-ICFTU or Margaret Thatcher's condemnation years later that the ANC was a terrorist organisation. Many British leaders had their first political experiences in the struggle against apartheid from that period onwards.

John Gaetsewe, Acting General Secretary of SACTU wrote to the Secretariat of the WFTU in Prague:

"*This is to introduce Sister Lorna Borkum (in private life, Mrs Leon Levy, wife of our National President.) She is a trade unionist and ..... we hope that she will be able to meet you to give you first hand information of our extremely serious and critical position. This morning, for example, banning orders were served on Lawrence Ndzanga•, Secretary of the South African Railways and Harbours Workers Union. This is the tenth official banning within the last two months.*

We will appreciate it if arrangements can be made for her to visit Prague for discussions with the Secretariat.

Tom WcWhinne arranged my trip to Prague. Moses Mabhida then SACTU representative at the WFTU, would meet me at the Airport. But when I arrived he was not there and I stood waiting with my luggage the sole passenger in that building feeling anonymous and increasingly uneasy in a country known for its paranoia about enemy infiltration. I did not even have papers or addresses to indicate where I was going nor could anyone speak English. The journey too had been different from other ones because officials collected the passengers' passports before we landed. Then we queued to disembark, each passenger identifying his/her passport and an official scrutinised the photograph and owner of the passport. I passed this inspection but by then, my photograph, taken years before, bore little resemblance to me. Thankfully, Moses arrived more than an hour late just as the Airport officials decided to get outside help.

He was a lovely man, fatherly and kind, a quiet skilled diplomat. He had the ability to make everyone like him, with a well-chosen word or smile, and this was so important in the minefield of the political establishment in Prague. Over the following weeks, he tried to teach me some of his techniques. Well trained in Party Schools, he knew exactly how to approach people whom he always addressed as 'tavarish' (i.e. comrade). After we had met a senior official of the WFTU, I asked Moses whether my input was adequate. He hesitated and then gently recommended points for me to include in future meetings. He was training me in Party-speak. I always needed to say as an

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• Lawrence Ndzanga died a violent death while in police custody.

introduction that "I brought greetings from the South African workers", and use other catch phrases and clichés of the sort which I found quite alien. I then tried his technique when we had a meeting with a senior Chinese official but I could tell he was unimpressed by me, perhaps because I was a woman, and white!

A large foreign contingent of people worked at the WFTU. I think we all stayed at the Atlantic Hotel about ten minutes walk away. We ate at the restaurant next door to the hotel and others joined us, probably local employees from the WFTU or other organisations. Both these establishments were 'official'. It would not have been possible to just wonder off the street to get a room at the hotel or a meal in the restaurant. This was because there was an elaborate checking system to gain entry to the hotel, like a Check Point Charlie Crossing. You would need to identify yourself and your business to 'Big Brother' at the entry desk; no one came in or out without proper validation.

My room was across the landing from Mary Glass, a Londoner who worked as a secretary in the typing pool at the WFTU. She had come to work in Prague to get over the death of her husband and as a communist, she chose something she considered useful work at the same time. She was a close friend of Moses and they ate together every night in Mary's room. She prepared the evening meal and they avoided the restaurant for dinner although Moses and I ate lunch there. What I only discovered later was that they were lovers. At the time such a relationship did not occur to me– I suppose because they were considerably older than me, the idea never crossed my mind.

Mary was a warm motherly sort; from the time I was invited to eat with them she and I would go shopping for fresh food every day. I forget how we prepared the food – she must have had a hotplate because we did eat proper meals. However, we were always looking for something fresh to buy – a near impossibility in Prague at that time. Some days we could find nothing but bread and salted meat, no vegetables at all. If we were lucky, we could come upon a peasant sitting on the pavement with a newly opened box of fresh vegetables. We would immediately join the queue and buy whatever was going. Often food departments in shops would close early and there was no stock inside; or they would have notices up saying 'stock taking'. We understood the sign but behind the sign, in a wacky Kafkaesque way, we looked at bare shelves quite without stock.

We kept within a small area of Prague; it seemed quite contained. Every morning I went with Moses to the office. The WFTU occupied a large imposing building. Inside, it was always very quiet with little bustle and few people around its wide marble staircase and corridors. It gave me the creeps. Moses shared his office with a French speaking African representative. We always read the mail in the morning and the 'Daily Worker', the only freely available newspaper. An Englishman, Harry Evans, who had once visited South Africa, had his office in the basement. I never did find out exactly what his job was but he, unlike anybody else, had a copy of 'The Times' (London) that he received every day. On my first day there, he came to the office to talk to me about South Africa. It could have been an interrogation of sorts, maybe not; but in any event, he said I could read 'The Times' in his office but as it was not generally available, I could not take it away. After that, as a ritual I went downstairs to his bare basement office at the back of the building and read' The Times,' my only other contact with the world outside.

An unseen 'someone' sent requests for me to write some articles and gave me others to correct the language. I was occupied through the days although the pace of was slow, like things moved in slow motion. The morning session of the working day ended promptly at 12p.m for the long lunch break until 2p.m. and because the service was so slow in the restaurant it often took the full two hours to get our lunch. We would return to the office at 2pm and then again finish at 4.30pm. No one was in a hurry, there was time enough to consider and re-consider anything you were doing, and there were seemingly no deadlines to meet. Moses organised appointments for me to meet with various officials in the WFTU and with the Czech trade unions, and an interview with Czech Radio. These were spaced over a long period. One of my briefs given in Johannesburg was to ask for further funding for SACTU unions.

After I had been in Prague for more than a week it became clear that this visit had no fixed time. Although McWhinnie had hinted I could stay in Prague to work for a few months until there was a clearer indication about Leon's imprisonment, I had not given his suggestion any serious consideration. Instead I had concentrated on going to Prague to ask for more assistance for SACTU. It was never my intention to stay more than a couple of weeks before going back to London. I began to get anxious when I realised it was taking me such a long time to get around to meeting the people I needed to see. Increasingly I began to feel homesick, as there were no direct links with South Africa and I received no phone calls or letters from anyone and only had the 'Daily Worker' and 'The Times' for any outside information.

It did then come as a nasty shock when there was a request made that I remain in Prague until October for six months to work on preparations for a Women's Trade Union Congress in Rumania. I think it came to me more as an instruction than a request. A short time before in London I happened to be travelling in the same car as Michael Harmel who was then on his way to play bridge, and he asked me my plans. He told me quite calmly he expected Leon to remain in jail for years because the police would never make him talk. At the time, I fought back tears and told him that McWhinnie had mentioned I might be able to get work in Prague but would turn that down because it would sever my link of news from South Africa. He replied that I must go wherever I was sent. It was all right for some free to play bridge, and I fumed at his presumption that I should be subject to that Stalinist directive. As it turned out years later, Michael Harmel eventually died in Prague, perhaps because someone sent him sent there - and see what happened to him!

Increasingly I became preoccupied in scheming how I could leave without displeasing anyone. It was quite difficult because so much happened secretly. I did not have a return ticket either so that I worried how it could be arranged for me to leave. Whoever made these decisions was invisible and I kept badgering Moses to help me ease myself out of Czechoslovakia – he was quite sympathetic as he also wanted to leave.

This was the era of Novodny, the days before Alexander Dubcek and the Prague Spring of 1968 that swept away the grey oppression for a short time to bring light and freedom. However, in 1963, it was impossible I think, to be unaware of the deadening atmosphere in Prague, its grey drabness. Colour seemed removed from the urban landscape I had always known. There were no bright lights to illuminate the city, ugly in parts while dilapidated and crumbling in the older parts.

I had looked forward, with some excitement, to a visit to a communist country with no exploitation and cheap commercialism. But the deeper something else I found was disturbing and that lack of freedom was overwhelming. You could not escape the feeling always that big brother was somewhere near, watching you. It made the atmosphere quite oppressive so that gradually I began to wonder whether the critics of Communism had been right after all. We would go the park to a have private conversations or in the street, not in a room that could be bugged. That seemed taken for granted and these were private conversations, on subjects unrelated to Czechoslovakia. With sign language, usually,

Moses would indicate that we continue our conversation later, outdoors somewhere not enclosed.

Delegations would come from South Africa and Moses handled them. That was probably his real job. There were people undergoing training in Czechoslovakia in a range of skills at the time, particularly military ones. A high-ranking delegation, including Raymond Mashlaba stayed at the unmarked building, which I found out was the 'Party Hotel'. Oddly, we passed this building every day but only the favoured few would have been able to identify it. Mary, who lived in Prague for a couple of years at that time, did not know of its existence. Moses took me there one night and it was indeed another world from its drab exterior. This was a 'high class' establishment, discrete, luxurious and sedate; nothing like the Atlantic Hotel and naturally, the surveillance was tighter.

By 1991, the 'Party Hotel' became a leading five star hotel, the Praha, one of the favoured luxury hotels in Prague and for £350 a night you could sleep in a room once occupied by Mickhail Gorbachev. The Cadogan Guide to Prague in 1991 pointed out that "the Party had built itself unembellished but extraordinarily comfortable rooms, half come with terraces that look over rolling lawns and the best panorama of Prague that you'll ever see."

Moses and I were included as guests in the more lavish entertainment laid on for that visiting VIP delegation from South Africa. In this way, I managed to go to the opera and to see the brilliant black and white traditional puppets. In a nightclub, we caused a stir on the dance floor by our departure from the sedate foxtrot to the kwela dances we so loved in South Africa in the sixties.

Mary was unaware of all these activities; everything operated in an 'underground' way, as though a secret enemy was out there, ready to invade and conquer. Who was this force and where would it come? The Czech Spring Revolution in 1968 gave credibility to my own feelings five years before of the stifling political oppression, the drabness and the shortages of necessities. After Prague, I always travelled with my own soap – their thin white square did not lather, hardly resembled an ordinary supermarket cake of soap.

The spirit of Stalin still ruled in Czechoslovakia in the regime of Novodny in that period, although symbolically his vast statue, built in 1955 to dominate and overlook the city, just across from the WFTU building, had only been demolished six months before I went there. The

mortar and concrete remained; enormous slabs of it still lay around the plinth and one could just make out parts of Stalin's arms and legs, lying around. The revelations and denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in 1956 made the destruction of the statue inevitable. At a stroke, his changed status led to obliterating his name, reputation and face in the Communist World.

I wonder how I would have reacted to Prague had I been an ordinary tourist. Were there any? The sombre grey environment would have struck me and certainly, I would have found few souvenirs to buy given the lack of consumer goods. There was the Intercontinental Hotel, a replica of the Moscow University building, clearly built with visitors in mind. We sometimes went there to eat. The Czechs had also shipped back the whole structure they created at the Brussels World Fair in 1958 so that the Brussels Restaurant was the principal place to eat, if you had hard currency.

My contact with the WFTU as its guest and the people around me, gave me different insights. The World Marxist Review had its headquarters in Prague and I attended several dinner parties given by some of its English-speaking employees. Those in senior positions lived in beautiful apartments but I also visited a couple of other WFTU employees in low ranking jobs who lived in the equivalent of a poor British Council Estate of that period. The elite system was working here as well, only the criteria were different; a party functionary at a senior level had many privileges.

There was a different old boy system, not the public school method as in Britain, but membership of the Party was the route to success. Children joined the Young Pioneers, without this you would not get on; you would probably not be able to get a place at university. Moses introduced me to a South African woman living in Prague, around the corner from the Atlantic Hotel, with her Czech husband and family. We went there to afternoon tea and she regaled us with tales of the hardships she had suffered from the time of her arrival at the end of Second World War. She had personal insights of the need to belong to the Young Pioneers and how her children's' progress had been blocked because they were not members. Moses was uneasy and warned me afterwards to discount most of what she said. She was a dissident and I should take care not to cultivate a friendship with her. I never met her again.

I wonder now as I write this whether I would ever have been able to put ideology before the awful realities. Had I been a committed member of

the Communist Party would I have put those considerations aside, not noticed them as others I knew? Later, I was too timid to voice my objections to that socialist state as I found it in Czechoslovakia. I wrote it all up in my diaries but largely kept my disillusionment to myself. I was too young and inexperienced for the 'elders' of the South African political movement to want to hear my views – they would have interpreted what I said as flimsy and superficial. Perhaps so; but I knew always that what I found was scandalous and history vindicated the views I formed in the early sixties, when I was still in my twenties.

Over the years when confronted with their blindness to the conditions in the countries that made up the Socialist bloc in Europe, communists used their own terminology to explain away what they called the 'excesses.' Stalin got much of the blame, the war and of course, the imperialists. There was another reason too; for many it was good for business as well to go along with 'the line'. Hilda Bernstein•, a prominent member of the liberation movement made the point that criticism would have placed her outside the magic circle. Just a few years ago in Cape Town she explained how, when she elaborated her disillusionment with the socialist world in the 1960's, Joe Slovo took to her to lunch to tell her that open dissention would mean she would cease to have a role in the struggle – certainly not in the magic circle. So it was, that leading personalities like Hilda and Ruth First never really went public on their views. They may have withdrawn, less vocal but how important it would have been for others, younger people like me, to have heard them express their views openly. For the others, whom I call the 'bitter enders', their belief in the means justifying the ends remained unswerving, that glorious hope of utopia just around the corner. Alternatively, they just did not notice!

Czechoslovakia retained a special meaning for me. My experiences there were brief, a long time ago but provided a microcosm of socialist society in that period. It acted as my laboratory, a term Eva Hoffman• uses in these contexts. Each country obviously has its own personality but there was a special collective one, which I met again in visits to Moscow and much later, to East Berlin. The novels Milan Kundera set in Czechoslovakia, as an intellectual exile, introduced me to the concepts of the 'internal emigration' required to survive.

Apart from the apparatchiks who formed my daily contact with the Czechs, I remember Rudi whose surname I have now forgotten. He

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• Hilda Bernstein (2002) " A life of one's own" (Jacana)

•Eva Hoffman (1993) "Exit into history" (Minerva)

worked in the travel section of the WFTU and spoke English fluently. A Jewish survivor he was sceptical about many things. We became friends and he took me on sightseeing tours of the city and to concerts. However, it was only in 1992 when I returned to the new Czech Republic under Havel, as a curious tourist, that I realised that nearly twenty years before the part of Prague I had stayed in was a special enclave of the city, called Letna. Because everything we did at that time or the places we visited were in close walking distance. I now freely explored the Jewish area, the Synagogues, the ancient cemetery, the Town Hall, the principal sights in every tourist's itinerary.

Prague bustled with tourists. The Art Nouveau architecture, the beauty of the Castle, the Charles Bridge and the old Town Square looked and felt different. Had restoration already taken place or did they just look different because of the new atmosphere? Nobody wanted to talk about the past and the street names of central Prague were in the process of being changed. This again added a Kafkaesque feel to the place because no one was willing to help you with directions: they did not know the new names, nor did they want to remember the old ones.

CHAPTER 12

CONFERENCE - MOSCOW

When I arrived back in London from Prague, there was news about Leon. The Special Branch had agreed to grant Leon an exit visa,• which meant a conditional release from prison into exile. In taking this one-way ticket, Leon agreed to leave South Africa permanently. From his little cell in detention, it must have been weird to make such a momentous decision in isolation – to decide to leave on those absolute terms, so final, to go away, into heaven or hell. Discussions were taking place about the exit visa and from the family's view and his own, there was no option to his imprisonment than for him to leave the country permanently.

As a precaution in case the British refused him entry without a passport, Leon's brother-in-law, Robbie Abrahams, organised the Israeli Embassy to stamp an entry visa on the back of the exit visa. In a crisis with immigration at Heathrow, Leon would have been able to use the 'right of return' law enshrined in the Jewish State.

This decision meant for my parents that their only child would not return. My father, with a brave face, could welcome this as a new beginning for me, but my mother never recovered. With the liberation of South Africa, I realised that my parents too were in some peculiar way, victims of the apartheid system. They suffered the ostracism by their neighbours and family – tainted in some way because of us, and avoided. My parents never again felt the same about the people around them and I remember how surprised I was when some years later in London my father confessed that he no longer enjoyed seeing his sister too often; he found her views objectionable.

For my father, it was also a crucial moment in another way: as a lawyer he recognised the legal system, the rule of law, as he knew and practised it, and in which he believed, had disappeared.
But at that time in 1963, when the arrangements for Leon's departure were expected to take some time I was persuaded to go to the Women's Peace Congress in Moscow, as had been arranged; I even got a message

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•The Departure from the Union Regulations Act No.34 of 1955 states that the Secretary for The Interior may issue … a permit for a South African citizen to leave provided he is satisfied that the person intends to leave permanently and the permit will be endorsed accordingly. It further states that should that person return to the country he/she will be deemed to have left without a permit or a passport and charged accordingly. The specified penalty was imprisonment without the option of a fine for a period not less than 3 months and not exceeding 2 years.

from Leon urging me to go but I cannot remember how this came. I was not keen because I wanted to be in regular touch with the developments taking place in Johannesburg and the idea of a women's conference did not appeal to me. Personally, I never enjoyed separate women's organisations although these are very useful and help to politicise many women.

My political journey was not typical in many respects. For one thing, I did not neatly fit in a political category at that time; the nearest description would call me a 'fellow traveller'. Nevertheless, here I was going from one communist event or country to another although I was never formally a member of the Communist Party. Probably, in the chaos of South Africa after the State of Emergency in 1960 and the necessary secrecy of the times, no one knew that I was not a member. Initially I would have joined the Party if formally invited but by the time of the Moscow Conference, I already had serious doubts about communism but I reluctantly went to the Conference. I had gained some experience of large conferences and this was a challenge - I enjoyed those. Moscow would be my third large international conference, the last of that type I would attend.

That year, 1963•, was such a special year in my life. Each month seems now as though it was a year in length, packed with events, people, and momentous episodes not just in my life but other historical landmarks too. Personally, I was fortunate to witness the unfolding of these changing world scenes and the playing out of certain episodes of the Cold War.

The Women's Peace Conference in Moscow was concerned with all the major issues of the times: peace, nuclear disarmament and its Cold War overtones, but more importantly at that time the Sino-Soviet rift. This came into the public domain for the first time at that Conference. The Soviet foreign policy strategy of that time favoured peaceful co-existence with other countries irrespective of their political system. The Chinese interpreted this as the Soviet Union with the East European bloc countries reneging on their commitment to revolution while the Chinese entered that period of history, known as the 'Cultural Revolution.'

These large Peace Conferences started a few years after the Second World War and went on in one form or another until the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union in 1990. The grim facade of Moscow

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• Thirty years later, in 1993, I would say the same of that year, again a momentous year in my life.

struck me immediately but there were so many delegates and we were organised in great groups, so that it was easy to avoid any contact with the city or its peoples.51 There were always smiling hoards of Russians, but they were apart from us and waved as we were taken to sessions of the Congress, held in the Kremlin.

I was part of the World Peace Council delegation and this meant we functioned apart from the other delegations. The interpreters referred to our superior status as a group, fifteen of us from different parts of the world. It appeared that our facilities were better too and although we all stayed in the same hotel, our delegation had its own dining room with different food from the others and I was given pocket money! There were chauffeurs laid on to take us around; we did not need to use the busses as the other delegates.

Yusuf Dadoo, the exiled Indian Congress leader and Nan Berger, British member of the Peace Council, and a newly made friend at that time, organised my ticket, visa and credentials. The World Peace Council had sent a letter to me in London before the Congress, which said:

"*The agenda of the congress will cover the main problems of the moment, i.e. complete universal disarmament; peace, sovereignty, national independence and democratic freedom; human dignity. It would also address the winning guarantee and protection of women's rights as mothers, workers and citizens and the safeguarding of the right of every child to life, health and education."*

Our delegation prepared the Peace Council speech during the Conference. With this special status, we had the chief of the Soviet Peace Council to lead our delegation; clearly, a very important person because all the other Russians deferred to him in awe and the interpreters would blush and stammer when they had to translate for him. At meal times, he would toast us all, making hollow speeches and drinking a lot. It went on all around the table, toast after toast, making it quite difficult to eat and invariably our food got cold. He would begin his toast in Russian, and good manners meant we all put down our knives and forks, picked up the glass in front of us ready for some empty 'viva' or 'salut' or its Russian equivalent to this or that cause or comrade at the table.

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[51] Ray Alexander Simons (2004) "All my life and all my strength" (STE Publishers)

She quotes an interview she gave "The Labour Bulletin" (1990) in which she explained that "she did not see" what was happening in the socialist countries. "This was because I was put up in a posh hotel and went from one meeting to another."

Activists in left wing organisations loved going on trips like this. They were also rewards and made humdrum activities worthwhile. In a letter sent to me afterwards by Ann Synge, a fellow delegate from Scotland with whom I became friendly, said:

"*I know from past experiences that such congresses really have a stimulating effect on those who take part in them and on the movement as a whole but I must say I found this one a bit frustrating and, so far as the peace side of things is concerned, lacking in ideas. However, it has led to a lot of thinking and reading about the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute so that it has not been without its positive side, even so far as I am concerned*."

The Sino-Soviet dispute, in its public manifestation, remains the most important part of this Conference. However, the most striking feature for me of that Conference was something quite different but a personal landmark event. It changed my own perceptions and attitudes for decades.

An ANC delegation attended the Conference led by Maggie Resha. She was the wife of Robert Resha whom I knew from Johannesburg and he was an accused in the Treason Trial with Leon. At that time, the Reshas lived in exile in Algeria. Also present was an unofficial delegation from the Pan-African Congress (PAC). The ANC and Maggie particularly, were embarrassed by my presence, or more particularly by my white skin. At that time, there was a struggle between the ANC and PAC for international recognition and with an inexperienced and unskilled leader as Maggie was then, any integration or recognition of me in the ANC group was not clearly, what she wanted.

It was indeed a bitter and humiliating exclusion, one I was unable to accept, and it took place while Leon was still in detention. There were many attempts made to incorporate me into the South African delegation for some events or for them to meet with the Peace Council delegation to discuss this problem, but to no avail. Later, this became one of the key issues that led me to distance myself from the South African struggle for the next twenty years.

In her autobiography,"51 Maggie Resha described how it took her two weeks to draft the speech she made in Moscow. Interestingly, she goes on to say:

"In Moscow, it was wonderful to see and meet women of different races, colours and creeds working as equals in great harmony…"

These were extraordinary words indeed in the context of how I fared …and to read them decades later in the 1990's. The paradoxical twist is that in the eighties in London, Maggie and I became friendly in our branch of the ANC. I do not know why I never referred to that trip and probably, she had forgotten she ever met me in the sixties in Moscow. Now, too late because she is dead, I will never be able to raise that issue with her, but when we were 'comrades' together in the eighties, I too was in another phase and chose to ignore that past. Therefore, it was ironical, at her farewell party in London in 1994, that she singled me out in a speech as having always been one of her darlings, a special person she would always love. I think she really believed it at that moment. However, in the context of my life in Moscow 1963, with Leon in solitary confinement and imminent exile, it was hard to bear this rejection. I was also embarrassed that the Peace Council delegation was aware of these problems as they tried to help sort them out on my behalf. There were delegates in Moscow who remembered similar difficulties other white women from South Africa had at international conferences – I jotted down some names in my diary at the time.

Fortunately, I was quite resilient, and decided to make the most of the experience in Moscow. I met my landlord, Jimmy Vaughan for the first time; at that time, he was in Moscow doing research for that Lionel Rogosin film, I mentioned that never materialised. Our first meeting took place in a hotel lounge in Moscow. His opening remark was a friendly rebuke: "How could you have come to Moscow without bringing me any soap or tea." That was the start of a round of fun. He was a wonderful raconteur, the correct antidote for my Moscow experience. He showed me the nightlife of Moscow; such as it was, when I was not involved with Conference commitments. The Russians were so earnest, they had much to make them dour and Jimmy had an endless supply of funny Russian stories.

The Conference itself was stage managed to promote an image of women as peace lovers, it projected the problems of women living under

[51] Maggie Resha (1991) "My life in the struggle" (COSAW SA Writers)

capitalism while other liberated women enjoyed the advantages of socialism. Put another way, they presented a picture of the Americans with their imperialist allies as warmongers, while in the Communist world peace was their only goal. Hundreds of Young Pioneers came running through the hall one morning carrying flowers; at the same time, doves flew above us.

Speeches in the Plenary Sessions were interspersed with commissions on different topics. I attended the one on 'National Independence' held at Moscow University. The suggested topics for discussion included titles like 'aspects of all forms of imperialist aggression, oppression and discrimination.' Speeches were militant set pieces and the Chinese presence dominated. There was something so unyielding, unsmiling and intense about this Chinese delegation. It was a large one, over a hundred people including men, although this was a Women's Conference and all the other delegates were women. Men and women all dressed in the same blue suits which in the context of the colourful clothes of many other delegates, gave the impression of a unisex uniform.
I think this poem by Mao Tse Zong, called 'Militia Women' (1961) aptly described them:

"*How bright and brave they look, shouldering five foot rifles*
On the parade ground lit up by the first gleams of day.
China's daughters have high aspiring minds,
They love their uniforms, not silks and satins."

It was during a Plenary Session that the Chinese delegation circulated a paper outlining their perspective. Their spokesperson then went to the podium to present a long convoluted speech, which in essence denounced the Soviet Union and its foreign policy of peaceful co-existence. The Gallery upstairs was full of Russian visitors for this session and they booed the speaker. Such a display was unknown at that time: public divisions in the monolithic world of Marxist Leninism were not seen. Pandemonium broke out and the veteran leader of the Spanish Civil War, La Passionara, quite an old woman by then, came to the rostrum with an emotional offering aimed to restore harmony to the proceedings.

A further clash with the Chinese occurred later over allegations by the Indians that China was violating their frontier. Here too, there was a rapid distribution of position papers circulated to everyone in the hall.

I kept all the documents from the Conference, the turn of phrase of a departed age. This extract from the "Statement of the Chinese Women's Delegation" illustrates that fierce uncompromising position:

"At this World women's Congress held in Moscow, some people have been brandishing their baton, trying their utmost to enforce in the world women's movement the line of not opposing imperialism themselves and forbidding others to oppose it.

These people have also taken advantage of the Congress to carry out anti-China manoeuvres. They violate democratic principles of International organisations, put the Congress under their control, manipulation, restrict and deprive Chinese delegates of the right to speak. They have been assailing the Chinese Women's delegation by name or by insinuation and maliciously spreading all kinds of slanderous stories about the Chinese people and distorting their views. Their purpose is to hit at the steadfast, anti-imperialist stand of the Chinese people and women in a premeditated attempt to disrupt and split unity in the world women's movement. This exposes once again their ugly feature of serving imperialism."

This was an historic moment in the Communist world. It broke the previous monolithic view of communism by the two major communist states publicly taking different ideological positions; and this rift continued to deepen with time. It was the era in China of the Red Guard, the Cultural Revolution, and the blind adulation of Chairman Mao. In the Soviet Union, Nkita Kruschev was moving towards signing the Test Ban Treaty and trying to initiate a period of peaceful co-existence with the West. At that time, there was a slight thaw in the Soviet regime, a minor liberalisation so that certain banned books, by writers such as Solzhenitsyn, were available. I recall reading his revelations of Soviet life in the Gulags, the camps that swallowed up any dissident, real or imaginary during the era of Stalin.

Valentina Tereshokova had just completed her space mission, the first woman in space. She addressed the conference and her words moved me. Sadly, today decades later what dominate that speech are the false claims of the system she then promoted. But going into space was a great act of courage and when she stood there, certainly a heroic figure at the rostrum in the Palace of Congresses in the Kremlin on that day, I cheered with everybody else.

"...My friends, all of you sitting in this hall! From whatever

land you come, my terrestrial sisters, from whatever continent -when flying over your countries I delighted in the beauty of each, and knew that in all, millions of hearts throb with the longing for peace and progress.

…when I looked at our earth, I thought of my mother. Please do not be offended, those of you who are mothers, if I say as a loving and grateful daughter that my mother was the best in the world. Mum was only 27 when she became a widow. But as great as her loss was, she was strong enough to fight down her grief, to bring up us three children, and give us a good education.

Now, when I myself am nearly as old as Mum was when she was widowed, I can really understand and appreciate the difficulty of her achievement. But I would not have said everything if I did not speak of the mighty achievement of my mother country, the great land of socialism, which helped the millions of widows and orphans after that dreadful war to get to their feet. Mum often told us: your father died in battle for his country, died a hero's death. You must be proud of your father. And the best way to honour his memory is to do your part in the Soviet people's efforts against the threat of a new war. People must defend peace, so that there should never again be widows and orphans.

I shall remember my mother's words all my life. I took them with me into space. That was why the news of preparations for this World Congress meant so particularly much to me – a Congress at which women from the many countries of our globe were to discuss the most urgent problem of our time – how to uphold peace and ensure a firm friendship among peoples.

Musing over terrestrial matters while flying through space, I felt with special keenness what a splendid, proud thing it is to be a daughter of the Soviet people, a citizen of the Soviet State created by the genius of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and by the heroic efforts of our people. From the first day of its existence, the Soviet land has followed a resolute persistent peace policy. It has striven for peaceful co-existence, for a world without wars and armaments. Soviet women, one and all, want peace. They want happiness for their children; they want clear skies over the earth. I can say this with all assurance because I too am a most ordinary Soviet woman. And from my knowledge of my own life and those of other women – of that I can speak, for I grew up among the workers of the 'Krasny Perekop' textile mills of whom 95% are women. .I

know absolutely that Soviet women and girls want peace and friendship among all peoples and they strive for it…"

The Moscow visit had its high moments. I had witnessed the public enactment of the political wrangle between the Soviets and the Chinese, which changed forever the one-fit communist ideology. As an inveterate 'tourist', I managed a couple of sightseeing trips, including one to a 'collective farm', at my request. When I mentioned how much I would like to see the ballet, miraculously I got a ticket to see the great Ulanovo dance "Giselle" at the Bolshoi Theatre one Sunday morning.

At the end of the Conference, I turned down the invitations to tour the Soviet Union and to visit Rumania travelling through the German Democratic Republic. My main concern was to get back to London as quickly as possible to get an update on the information from South Africa. What was the news of Leon? I realised there was hardly any way of making contact with South Africa from Moscow or Prague – telephone connections seemed to be out of the question and I had even found difficulty in making an internal telephone call. It was too isolating, dependent on the British 'Daily Worker' for contact and it provided only a few pages of skewed international news.

That Conference forced me to stand back and examine my involvement in the South African political struggle. It was hard afterwards to think of myself continuing as an active participant. I knew I would not be returning to South Africa, all that had changed and I was now an exile. In my middle twenties, I would need to plan a new life. What would I do to earn a living? I anticipated that it would be impossible to discuss rationally with anyone the implications of my Moscow experience. No one would understand or more likely, want to hear what I had to say – my message from Moscow would not be a popular one. I could both swallow what had happened and with time, pretend it did not occur at all. An alternative course is what I eventually chose: to get out and use the occasion of exile to create a new beginning.

PART 3

CHAPTER 13

EXILE

(i) Isolation from the family

I returned to London to find that Leon had already arrived from South Africa some hours before. His release from custody came only as he boarded the plane for London, and exile. The exit was particularly malicious as not having charged him with any offence and having held him incommunicado in a police cell, the Special Branch then bundled him out of the country as one would expect a 'big time crook' wanted in his home country to answer for a major offence.

When Leon left Marshall Square Police Station he was taken to say goodbye to my mother who seemed too shattered to be present at the Airport, for the farewells. The rest of the families gathered in a VIP lounge, sealed off, to avoid contact with any demonstrators who may have come to the Airport. This meeting was to be Leon's last face-to-face contact with his mother. Afterwards, at the steps of the plane, his escort, Captain Johan Coetzee,• told him: "You are free now Mr. Levy. Good luck."

Leon had been in solitary confinement in Marshall Square Police station. Wolfie Kodesh, Mosie Moola and Abdullah Jassat were detained as well in adjoining cells. Over the weeks Mosie and Jassat developed a good relationship with a warder, who would open their doors in the evening to allow the four of them to talk. After some time, Wolfie suggested they apply for exit visas; over the next decades, he repeatedly told me that story: they would have rotted in those cells, he said. Leon had already decided that his future in South African politics was over, so he asked the Special Branch for an exit visa which was eventually granted. It meant that he would leave permanently without any legal right of return. Mosie and Abdullah remained in detention and later 'the friendly warder' assisted them in a dramatic break out from prison together with Arthur

• As General Coetzee, he later became head of the Special Branch of the Police

Goldreich and Harold Wolpe for which I think the warder received a prison sentence.

In an article, Leon wrote in the London 'Guardian' (3/9/1963) he said:

"*I arrived in London under the strangest circumstances, unwashed, dishevelled, and completely bewildered by an atmosphere of freedom. I had come straight from a South African jail cell.*

The immigration officials at London Airport seemed puzzled when I said that I did not know why I had been detained for fifty days in terms of the South African 'No Trial Act'. "But surely" they asked, "there must be a reason for these bans and restrictions that were imposed on you over the years and for the periods of prison. I told them that I was a trade unionist and organised non-white workers into trade unions and that the Verwoerd Government has ruthlessly opposed the development of African trade unions – my arrest was the final act to eliminate me from the trade union movement.

In the end, permission was given for me to enter Britain for one month, and was advised to apply to the Home Office for political asylum. This has now been granted."

Someone had packed a battered old suitcase for Leon, one he could not identify, as he had not seen it before. With only a few untidily assembled possessions and his haggard and dishevelled appearance, thin and bearded, Leon looked like a refugee. His appearance shocked me when we met at Julius Baker's house in Hampstead later that day. Julius had been at Heathrow earlier that day with others to guarantee Leon's entry into Britain. After he bathed and shaved off his beard, he looked a lot better.

Those first days together in London were quite hectic. Many people wanted to see Leon and there was a Press Conference on Wednesday, 10 July 1963 at the House of Commons, chaired by Bob Edwards MP.

The 'Daily Worker' (11/7/63) reported this, pointing out

"*Mr. Levy claims that the South African Government is trying to smash trade unions catering for black South Africans…The average wage for Africans is £14 a month whereas at least £35 is required to keep a family. The average wage for Europeans is between £64 and £80."*

Leon was bewildered and in shock. It was his first trip outside of South Africa because he had never had a passport. Refusing a passport was one of the first devices the Government used to hassle people who had stepped out of line. I do remember trying to show Leon the sights of Central London on those first days. We were at the top of a bus and I was pointing out the sights along Regent Street but he was far from ready to sightsee and his mind was somewhere else.

At the same time, there were invitations for him to speak at countless meetings. That abrupt departure from South Africa scarred him. He had spent the past decade immersed in building up a non-racial trade union structure and now that chapter of his life was over: his detention changed that. A trade unionist needs to be on the ground, present and available, to represent and negotiate, in a sphere that is essentially practical and pragmatic. As an exile, that role ends. The exiled trade unionist has to become a propagandist and campaigner with its own limited shelf life. There is a certain 'sell-by' date that eventually passes, as the conditions you describe become an increasingly distant memory.

Two weeks after Leon's arrival, the 'Rivonia arrests' took place. The police swooped on a property in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia and arrested the most prominent leaders of the political movement. They stated at the time that their action smashed the ANC's principal underground headquarters. They removed Nelson Mandela from Robben Island, where he was already serving another sentence, to join the other detainees and he became Accused Number 1 in the famous Rivonia trial.

My father wrote to me as follows on the 18 July 1963:

"Unfortunately, although there is so much going on here at the moment that I would like to write and tell you all about it, I don't think I can tell very much more relating to the people who you know, than what is reported in the papers. It is frustrating that one cannot even communicate as freely as one would like to, although there isn't anything particularly secretive that I know? It is just that I would like to talk about the many people and friends of yours by name. Just in case I might say something that I am not allowed to, I have to keep my mouth shut. This cloak and dagger type of writing makes one's writing stilted and sometimes meaningless – when I re-read what I have written I can't make out my own meaning. So what must it be like for others reading it?" I hope that once you've settled down, it won't be necessary to be so circumspect…"

It was a bleak time for us too. We had to adjust to so many new things. With only a few possessions we started afresh together in this new milieu in our new adopted country.

Eventually I found a charming furnished flat in Chalcot Square, Primrose Hill. We rented it for a year because it was clean, freshly painted in white, comfortable and charming. I had examined dozens of dark, ugly and dirty flats in the area. Every evening I would look through the 'Evening Standard' and then visit those vacant flats that sounded possible. Mostly they were awful. So that is was so easy to finally move into 20 Chalcot Square with a couple of suitcases each, and a growing accumulation of papers and books stacked in a few boxes. The rental was £10 a week and it was our first home in London.

Leon started his first job with the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). It tidied him over his settling in period and gave him the time and space to decide on a more permanent direction. His temporary position was to co-ordinate and plan a major campaign to culminate in a mass march through London on 3 November 1963 calling for the release of the Rivonia accused. Barbara Castle MP was the President of the AAM at that time and she planned the rally's strategy.

It involved him travelling around the country speaking at dozens of trade union meetings, something that I had done earlier. The Movement for Colonial Freedom recorded his conscientious record in their Annual Conference Report and Leon received an ovation.

Leon attended the TUC Conference and was also present at the Labour Party Conference along with Arthur Goldreich and Harold Wolpe. There they were placed on the podium behind Harold Wilson, as a means of honouring their presence.

Afterwards, Leon went to Prague as well to meet Moses Mabhida and had formal meetings with the WFTU and later joined the SACTU delegation, made up of Marks Shope, JB Marks, and Betty du Toit in Ghana for the All African Trade Union Conference. The reports in the Ghanaian press in Accra of the Conference did not reflect the proceedings as they happened and Leon returned to London to describe a strange atmosphere in Accra; he was puzzled, not sure what, but something was amiss. Not long afterwards, a coup in Ghana overthrew Kwame Nkrumah, the President. Another feature of the visit was Leon's discomfiture as a white representative in the Africanist atmosphere of that Conference,

although he was a speaker. Was this a spectre of my experiences in Moscow? In Accra too, there was a delegation from PAC and I wondered whether they too were an inhibiting influence.

It was an extremely difficult period for me. At one level, it was a time of joy, of freedom, the overturning of fear. The focus was obviously on Leon, for him to find his feet and a new orientation. I was unhappy but it was only years later that I identified my own deep trauma at the time, when I too became an exile. I had left South Africa on a temporary basis and all my possessions remained behind. My departure happened quietly, in very secretive way without any goodbyes, no closures. I had not been in jail or banned so that no one, including me, acknowledged my own pain at that time. After all, I had been spared: no jail or bans so that I repressed any feelings when my status changed…but I too became an instant exile when I returned from Moscow and Marna told me that Leon had arrived in London a few hours before.

The door of the past that closed on me abruptly cut me off from my father whose company had provided me with one of my greatest pleasures. Those regular long chats we had together, often over a whisky. We enjoyed each other's company and as he had a similar relationship with his mother, perhaps we just continued a family tradition. Letter writing was hardly a substitute and at that time, the technology of international telephone calls was unlike the ease of today's direct dialling system. It was quite frustrating and a halting means of communication.

My parents too suffered badly at the time from the loss and their new state of isolation. My mother tried to be brave when she wrote on 6 July 1963:

> *"These last few months have been so unreal that I want to pinch myself hoping that it is all a dream and that any moment you will walk in…. The break is going to be very hard for us…. I hope now that all your troubles will be at an end and the last few months a closed episode in your lives…. You now have freedom, which is the great thing in one's life."*
>
> My father wrote at the same time:
>
> "*Anyhow darling, we are overwhelmingly happy for your sakes. To say that we have not pangs of sadness would be childish, we will certainly miss both of you a lot but will*

always be consoled by the fact that we can see each other within 48 hours if we have to. Your happiness is paramount and always will be."

My parents were isolated because of our politics, a fact I did not realise at that time. They were quite a solitary pair but from 1963, they continued quite alone except for the friendship of my mother's brother, Bern Janks and his wife, Jennie. My father referred to this in May 1963, a sentiment he could have written at any time until his death:

"I must tell you that Bern and Jennie have really been tops as far as we are concerned. They have not missed an opportunity of visiting us in rain or cold and have been very comforting…"

The significance of those words only struck me much later.
My father's own family avoided him - he who had done much to support them over the years with advice and money. In both Leon and my families, many of our relatives prospered under the apartheid system. Notwithstanding that today, in the new dispensation, most people claim that they opposed apartheid and the Nationalist Government, these opponents certainly did not include some of our relatives! They certainly disapproved of us at that time and extended this to our immediate families•. When I fully realised this, I would rant and rave about the injustice and duplicity of people. It was *une idée fixe*, my obsession about the past.

Leon's mother, Mary wrote to me:

"*I do want you to know one thing: that you are very dear to me and I am very happy that you married my son. And I hope that we will become great friends through letters, which I hope you will write frequently."*

It was when Mary died suddenly on 1 September 1965 that I understood the significance of exile. It was our personal family tragedy that neither of her twin sons attended their mother's funeral in Johannesburg: both forbidden. Leon was in London, locked out while Norman, in Pretoria Local Prison, was locked in to serve a two and a half year's imprisonment that began on April 13 of that year.

At the time of Mary's death, no one even considered that Leon could attend her funeral – he had signed away his right of return. I remember

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• Over the next years in exile, when we exchanged stories about this cold rejection by our relations, our African friends did not share the same disconnection. Seemingly, it was a 'white' phenomenon.

the day I found the telegram lying under the door when I came home from work. It was marked ‘urgent’ and addressed to Leon. I opened it and it came from my father with the awful news of her sudden death. In a state of shock and knowing that Leon was on his way home, I went downstairs and sat on the wall near Chalk Farm Tube Station to wait for him to break the ghastly news.

Norman was arrested in early July 1964, a year after Leon had arrived in London and was detained for several months under the ’90 day detention’ clause of the General Law Amendment Act. This arrest finally shattered the health of my mother-in-law. She had assumed, quite wrongly, that with Leon gone this was the end of the political involvement of her twin sons. She said this to me, the day Norman was arrested, when we spoke for the last time. She had not realised that he was still involved in politics.

All twelve ’white’ accused in his case pleaded not guilty to a trial centred on the discussion of a document called “A time for re-assessment”. When Norman’s trial opened in November 1964 a number of trials were taking place around the country. Each day the liberal ‘Rand Daily Mail”, the Johannesburg English daily newspaper of those times, devoted a page to Court cases currently being held in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. All the trials had certain points in common though the charges were different: most of the accused were white. There was an act of betrayal in each and informers played a role; all the accused in these different cases had been subject to long periods of detention and interrogation in solitary confinement.

In another case, a fellow student at Wits with me, John Harris received the death sentence for a bomb explosion that killed a woman at the Johannesburg Railway Station in 1964. I remembered him well from Social Anthropology lectures and seminars, brilliant with a glittering academic future ahead of him.

Thirty years later, in the Periodical Room of the British Library in London I paged through the English language newspapers over this period. On the day of the judgment that sentenced him to death, there was a page of family photographs of John Harris. I wondered how the predominantly ‘white’ readership that would have seen those pictures reacted to them at the time. How did they feel as they read accounts of cases such as his and of Norman’s for that matter, at the savage way in which some of the flower of white youth were handled by the law? Did they protest - were they shocked? You glean nothing from reading

through one of the most liberal newspapers of the day, The Rand Daily Mail.

One by one, the Special Branch plucked out the few white people, committed to the liberation struggle * at that time. They were a token, made an important statement, but decimated by infiltration and betrayal. Many served long sentences; nearly all of them went into exile after their release. They received no remission on their sentences.
Those white radicals before the Court were probably a generation too early to get real support, committed as they were to one person, one vote. Their only option was to quit; later, another generation of new white young radicals grew up dedicated to fighting apartheid to join the struggle after the Soweto uprisings in June 1976.

(ii) **The exhilaration of life in London – in the sixties**

Notwithstanding the sadness that overcame us a lot of the time, there was an excitement at living in London. Being young must have made it easier to adjust to the daily changes. Some of the newness was part of a grand adventure such as using the National Health System, rather than having a private dentist or doctor.

We never considered living anywhere else but London. It was an extension of our culture and language and anyway, we had grown up with a part of England in us through the books and magazines we read. Much of our childhood values belonged more to Britain than to South Africa. Even our schools had imitated the elite British schools system, separate boys and girls, with uniforms and a prefect system.

I am not sure that in the early sixties I was over aware of the great social revolution in England at that time: the swinging sixties. It was for me, another freedom too from the terrible constraints of restrictions in South Africa. Apart from the tightening noose of the right wing constrictions of the Government I grew up with, society was also much more provincial and conforming. In London not only could you go anywhere and do and meet with whomever you wished, there was nobody overly

* They belonged principally to the Congress of Democrats, the banned Communist Party and the Liberal Party. Many of the trials involved acts of sabotage, mostly with members associated with the African Resistance Movement (ARM)

interested in what you did. This was metropolitan life and the British always respected individual liberties.

I cannot remember who put me in touch with The British Cuba Friendship Society. They wanted a short-term organiser to run a fund-raising campaign following a devastating hurricane in Cuba – Hurricane Flora. I was desperate for something and indicated my interest. Eric Hobsbawm• the eminent historian invited me to his flat in Bloomsbury for an interview on behalf of the Society and then appointed me. For the next six months, I became a fundraiser and operated from the offices of the Cuban Press Association, Prensa Latina, in Fleet Street.

I needed the break at that moment. It introduced me to another world, a new issue from another part of the world and quickly, I was absorbed in it. We collected money to buy medical supplies and anti-biotics, to supply food and clothing to help that part of Cuba devastated by the hurricane.

I would puff on the Cuban cigars I quickly acquired a taste for in the privacy of the office as I worked at sending out official appeals to all businesses with trading links with Cuba, and to other organisations. I had to smoke alone because apparently I looked comical chomping on a fat cigar! I wrote the necessary letters, met people and waited for the response. Sugar brokers donated large sums of money – in those days, £5,000 was a lot of money, and old age pensioners sometimes sent £1. I learned then how generous the British are in a crisis.

A high powered and efficient committee ran the appeal. We called it The Cuba Hurricane Relief Committee and it included Eric Hobsbawm, George Jerrom of the Print Workers Union, Robin Blackburn, a student leader at the London School of Economics who later became the Editor of the 'New Left Review.' Kenneth Tynan, eminent theatre critic, afterwards Literary Manager of the National Theatre, was the Treasurer. Graham Greene, Harold Pinter, John Osborne and even Bertrand Russell were among the celebrities known to members of the committee who would ask them to undertake tasks on our behalf, such as sign letters or lead delegations. Just as well that I did not know that the committee members were celebrities themselves, as I may have been in awe of them; instead I thought they just showed off when they 'dropped' these famous names. It made it easier for me to be bossy when necessary, and they all described me as a successful organiser.

• He was then an academic at Birkbeck College, London and had not yet achieved fame.

We raised about £135,000, considered a fortune and decided to spend some of the money buying ambulances from Leyland Trucks. We bought a number of trucks and had them converted by specification into ambulances. I visited the Truck Company a few times. Disaster struck when Leyland had an accident with the ambulances en route for shipment – the consignment sank in the Thames and they had to start again!

We collected old clothing and blankets – this was the other side of our appeal donated to help the people caught up in the disaster. The British were generous with their assistance. I rented a disused shop in Kentish Town to store the jumble, where we would sort and crate it for dispatch to Cuba. The shop was vandalised twice by local kids. There was nothing worth stealing but clearly, that was not their motive; they just created chaos with our sorted clothes on the one occasion. The second time they broke into our wooden packing cases that had taken about twelve of us a whole weekend to assemble, smashed them, dirtied their contents and threw them everywhere. I cried with frustration and anger on that occasion. Nevertheless, we repacked the things and finally got them away.

The packing and sorting sessions were something I had not done before. I arranged for groups of people to gather in this filthy little vacant shop on their free Saturdays and Sundays over a few weekends. They brought hammers, saws and screwdrivers with them, rolled up their sleeves, and set to work. I gave the orders, not that I really understood what to do. I made up the rules as we went along. In between, we went to the local pub for refreshment but the comradeship of the job in hand, dirty and physical, provided the scenario for new and lasting friendships.

It could be that the seeds of a new identity began during my time with the Cuba Relief Fund. During that winter of 1964, it was the start of a new phase of life for me. I had a new interest, a new life and a new focus.

It was a time too of meeting lots of new and interesting people. We were widely entertained, invited to peoples' homes for dinners, parties and weekends away in the country. We made life long friendships at that time while working for the Cubans and in the Anti- Apartheid Movement. People reacted quite differently from the icy hostility experienced in South Africa. We left as outcasts, pariahs in the white community from where we came; an atmosphere brilliantly captured in Shawn Slovo's film called "A world apart." In England, there was mostly a welcome, admiration for having taken a stand against apartheid.

A branch of my Heydenreich family had settled in England in the 1890's. Alexander Bernstein was my Grandma Ella's first cousin and it was with him that she stayed in Ilford after the brutal death of her husband when my father was an infant. Alexander had founded the Granada Cinema Empire, later extended and expanded by his sons, Cecil and Sidney Bernstein to become Granada Television. On my first visit to London, I had met their sister, Beryl Stone and liked her enormously.

Now my father wrote to Beryl and told her I was living in London and how it had come about. Immediately she received his letter, she responded by inviting us to a Friday night dinner.

A large crowd gathered in a beautifully appointed dining room in Hampstead. Conversation was interesting and we were welcomed at the Stone's house with great warmth. They were so different from our relations in South Africa! For a start, they were all members or supporters of the Labour Party and other radical causes. The older members of the family had supported the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, their support of causes promoting civil rights went back to the thirties.

From that first evening, we felt that Beryl and Joe Stone (who was later ennobled as Harold Wilson's doctor and became Lord Stone) and their children, Richard Stone and Adrienne and Clive Marks adopted us. Beryl became one of my 'other mothers' who gave me advice on any number of things, mostly practical and to do with daily living. I was clueless about running a home and needed all sorts of advice and help. Household books which I continued to use for years "The I hate to cook book" and the "The Small Garden" were presents from her and guided me in the presentation of edible meals and sent me on my way to becoming a keen and lifelong gardener.

The Bernsteins helped us get onto our feet and gave us many lovely antique pieces of furniture from their homes to help us set up our first proper home in Chalk Farm.

This was our first introduction to English Jewish life, but I soon realised that this was not a typical family in many different ways, politically, socially and financially for that matter. We met many other people through Adrienne and Richard who were our age and got into the swing of being invited to their friends for parties and dinners. Actually, we

were probably too unusual to enjoy the ordinariness of these occasions, but we did try. At the time, we so much wanted to belong.

When I think back we both needed the warm family life taken from us and the Bernsteins filled this void. They provided a connection for us, but essentially were quite different. They were upper class English Jews, privileged too, but theirs were different from the privileges granted to us by virtue of the colour of our skin in race-obsessed South Africa.

In that first year in Britain, the international campaign against apartheid was growing and intensifying. Even Lord Home, Foreign Secretary in Harold McMillan's Tory Government, said in August 1963 that although Britain would continue to see South African 'legitimate weapons' for defence against external aggression it would not sell it any weapons 'which could further the policy of apartheid.'

The United Nations Security Council called on all nations in August 1963 to impose a complete embargo on arms shipments to South Africa. The vote against South Africa was 9-0 with the United States supporting the resolution, but Britain and France abstained. South Africa did not attend because the issue was an internal one, namely its policy of apartheid was not within the Council's jurisdiction.

By March 1964 South Africa had walked out of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation WHO) as it had been deprived of its voting rights. The country was forced out of the Olympic Games and International Association Football. The period of its world isolation was gathering momentum.

Prominent playwrights such as Sean O'Casey and Samuel Beckett refused the right to perform their plays in South Africa. Marlon Brando was among the first film stars to forbid his films be shown in segregated cinemas. The Rolling Stones pulled out of the South African tour to comply with the ban imposed by the Musicians' Union. It was the beginning of the cultural boycott.

The Rivonia Trial began in October 1963. The charge stated that the ten defendants 'plotted' to start a guerrilla war in South Africa as a prelude to an armed invasion by an outside force and that they planned, ordered or carried out 221 acts of sabotage over a 21-month period.

The focus of the Anti-Apartheid campaign was the release of the Rivonia accused. There was great concern that the accused could receive the

death sentence. Protesters waving banners picketed South Africa House with wording such as "Verwoerd supported Hitler, do you support Verwoerd?" "Stop the Reichstag Trial in South Africa."

The South African English press of the times reflected a tranquil peaceful life, disturbed only by reports, at times, of cases of sabotage and such incidents which suggested something else, clandestine and violent. It seemed as though they had not grasped nor did they reflect at all the deep and growing abhorrence of their system by the world outside.

For example, an editorial in the South African "Sunday Times" dated 14 July 1963 said:

"*Since the British Labour Party's practically certain to win the next election, we hope that the South African Government will feel disposed to take prompt action to dispel some of Labour's deep seated hostility to South Africa.*

…Part of Labour's attitude can be attributed to ignorance of South Africa. Much could be done therefore if leading Labour Members were persuaded to visit South Africa to see the country for themselves. They would be guests of the government' and it is hardly necessary to say that they would be able to go where they pleased and see what they wanted.

If such a visit could be arranged, it would do a power of good for South Africa…. and also for the Labour Party, which seems in need of a little education about the facts of life in South Africa.

November 1963 was designated the Anti-Apartheid month and Leon co-ordinated its activities. There were many events planned during that period to focus on the Rivonia Trial and the continuing imprisonment of hundreds of political activists. Glasgow University appointed Chief Luthuli as their Rector and when prohibited by the South African authorities from attending his installation, students boycotted the event.

The focal point, however, was the march from Hyde Park to a rally in Trafalgar Square on the 4th November. There was an impressive turn out from around the country. Representatives attended from all the main political parties, trade unions, church groups and the arts. Barbara Castle MP as the Chairperson spoke to a square full of people holding banners aloft, the main one proclaimed "Anti-Apartheid Movement demands the release of South African political prisoners.' She made one of those impassioned and brilliant speeches for which she was renowned. Over

the years, I heard her speak a number of times on a range of subjects, always committed and moving. Kwame Nkrumah sent a recorded message from Ghana and Jeddi Jagan, Premier of Guyana in the Caribbean was a speaker. Among the British speakers was actress Vanessa Redgrave, Lady Violet Bonham Carter for the Liberal Party and Humphrey Berkeley MP, a Tory and the Bishop of Southwark. A special song was composed for the occasion and sung by Peggy Seger, famous folk singer of the time.

Leon received a scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford, for two years where he studied politics and economics and for the next two years, he spent part of each week in Oxford while we continued to live in London. It was a very important period for Leon and gave him the important space from South African political activities to assess his views and future.

I needed a job but my decision to become a teacher was a mistake. There was an acute shortage of teachers in London at that time and South African graduates wanting to teach needed only apply to the London County Council for registration. However, I did not receive a reply to my application until I met Marjorie McIntosh at a party at Barbara Castle's flat in Highgate. They were sisters and during the evening in conversation with Marjorie McIntosh, I was able to explain my predicament about wanting to become a teacher, and my difficulties. To my amazement, she revealed that I was talking to the right person and she was the Chairperson of the Education Committee of the London County Council. It was a case of 'unknowing networking' because she immediately helped me and within a week, I had an appointment for the required interview.

In the Summer Term of 1964, which begins after the Easter holidays, I began an Induction Course at County Hall for graduates coming into teaching. I chose primary teaching after hearing so many horror stories of discipline problems in secondary education. The course was a concentrated version of the one-year post-graduate Diploma for Teachers and provided an intense training period of lectures, visits and observation for three months. By September 1964, I was deemed 'qualified' and appointed to Fleet Primary School, then a dilapidated Victorian building in Camden by the Inner London Education Authority.

The school, barely two miles from Trafalgar Square, was an amazing revelation for me in many respects. Firstly, many of the pupils had never seen Trafalgar Square, 'been up west' as they put it. They were local in the narrowest sense of the word; Camden Town was their milieu.

Their London did not extend beyond it unless the school arranged journeys and outings to expand their horizons.

That job was hell from day one. The head teacher, as she was called, Miss Kahn, resented my appointment, it was wished on her, a political placement and she took it out on me. She disliked me on sight, and bullied and harried me until eventually I pleaded with the Authority to move me to another school. No one helped me in this job; I was left to sink or survive and I nearly went under. Even ordinary chores like finding the correct size exercise book in the stock room was a major undertaking for me. If I chose the wrong size book, which I recall happening, I was reprimanded by the Head. Miss Kahn was a bully and she flattened me.

I started as a class teacher with First Year Juniors, that is, seven year olds. In that class, they expected me to teach English, mathematics, history, geography, science, scripture, art and games. I should not stand in front of the class and teach by rote in the way I was taught; rather my pupils should work in groups doing projects. The pupils were of mixed ability, which in reality meant that some of my class could not read at all, although they had already been at school for two to three years. A subject called 'new mathematics had replaced the arithmetic of my childhood, when we learned to add and recite our multiplication tables. Instead of learning numbers by rote, the emphasis was on understanding concepts. I had always hated ball games yet in that job I had to learn the rules of 'rounders', a new game for me, so that I could oversee my class in the games lessons.

I was out of my depth and loathed every moment of days as a classroom teacher. With time, thankfully, I switched to remedial teaching which suited me better temperamentally and for which I developed skills over the years, with lengthy training courses and experience.

An interesting insight into the education system in England of that period is how little supervision or encouragement there was for a new teacher like me. It remained for me alone to find my feet, almost set up for failure and for Miss Kahn perhaps to score a point on teacher selection. Decisions on what to teach were quite arbitrary and it took nearly twenty years of political haggling for changes when Parliament eventually agreed to a defined national curriculum.

However, in the sixties there were no clear guidelines for the class teacher. Miss Kahn once 'decreed' after a visit to a neighbouring school

where there had been a poetry display that every pupil in our school too was to write verse, which would then be displayed and read aloud in the school assembly. I was, however, clueless with no idea how to begin the process and unable to get that seven-year old class to write anything resembling a poem. To me most of their free creative writing was gibberish• and did not realise that a judicious line or two by me passed off as the work of my pupils, would not have been amiss. It would have saved me considerable pain. In any event, at some point during that year of hell, there was an inspection of my teaching skills. Amazingly, the Inspector judged my teaching as competent, my period of probation was over and I became a permanent teacher!

(iii) **Distance: the move to a new identity**

At the time, in 1964, it did not seem as though anything would ever change in South Africa for years to come, for the rest of my life, perhaps! In spite of the condemnation and growing isolation, the arrests and trials, their economy began to boom again in 1964 so that the Budget at the end of that year predicted a growth rate of 5½% over a five-year plan. This provided the comfort and impetus the Nationalist Government needed.

Our occupations took us increasingly away from the South African orbit. My working environment transformed me and forced me to repress much of the person I had been. Nobody at work was interested in my background unlike other people I met who were politically involved. The more foreign I was the harder life was for me. In that school environment and staff room where I needed to retreat for some quiet time during the day, for coffee and a cigarette, there was no room or sympathy for the likes of me. Survival at work made me focus on the 'here and now.' I was so tired and dispirited after a 'teaching day' that I had little time or inclination to do anything else. I became terribly depressed.

Leon was away a lot; he spent a few days each week in Oxford. He too widened his focus from South Africa, although there was interest in his background and sympathy for his predicament. I think he only encountered indifference when he started to work in the Research

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• Contemporary educational theory in the sixties encouraged a free creative flow on the premise that correct usage would come at a later stage. We therefore did not correct spelling or grammatical errors. Later, spelling lists and a more formal approach to writing replaced that experimental period, judged a failure.

Department of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Then it was indeed necessary to absorb as many new ways of life as possible.

There was a time and place for us to be 'foreign' and it clearly was not at work. We both realised there was a cut-off point in talking about our home and background to foreigners. We named it the 'Malta factor' after Leon's tutorial partner in Oxford who was Maltese and talked endlessly about Malta. "Not Malta again' we would think and switch off; and of course, the Malta factor could be applied to our talking about South Africa.

There was of course our nucleus of friends, who were South African or politically radical 'Brits', but we needed to integrate into the work scene in Britain and success was a major motivating factor. Leon had to reduce his commitment to South African based activities because he was away so much in Oxford and he needed to extend his career into British Labour Relations. When he was at home his disappearance to meetings caused great conflict between us because I now spent a lot of time alone. I was very low, unhappy in my job, tired and homesick.

I was no longer active in the South African political scene, uneasy about our role as 'whites' in the South African liberation struggle after my Moscow experience. At that time, no one would have wanted to hear my views. Leon too made soothing noises when I tried to talk seriously about it and interpreted that incident as perhaps a one-off 'happening', more about the personality of the person, Maggie Resha, than something endemic. Perhaps he was right; at the time, I was not reassured.

Most of the exile community I knew in London were communists and after visiting the Socialist countries I developed a deep hostility to their system, so devoid of human rights. Communists were completely subordinate to the Soviet system and by 1964 I was not one of them. I never expressed any contrary views; I was not confident enough to voice any opinions and mostly kept quiet in that company. I chose instead to no longer be included in their activities. Only twenty years later I discovered that others had taken the same course, Ruth First and Hilda Bernstein, for example. What a pity they kept this within the inner circle!

In that transitional period, certain defining moments stand out. Take the cold Sunday afternoon in winter when a number of us gathered for tea at Julius Baker's spacious Hampstead home. Rica and Jack Hodgson had just arrived in London. At one point, a number of people left the room

and had a private meeting elsewhere. It was however, in the wider conversation, those reminiscences of the past that worried me –events and incidents that happened when I was only a child. "Do you remember the demonstrations on the City Hall steps?" someone asked. The event in question took place when I was still in primary school. An age check of the people there revealed a group of middle aged or elderly men and women, with most of their lives behind them. It filled me with dread that I could become like that and spend the rest of my lift talking about the past. This was how exiles behave the world over – they talk about long ago. I was only twenty-five at the time and wanted to have a here and now, a present of which I could be part. •

I was the principal reason that Leon withdrew increasingly from his political commitments at that time. It is such a long time ago to hardly matter. Then he was pressurised by me for us to spend more time together and he was already away in Oxford a lot of the time. It meant too that he was not readily available at a moment's notice to participate in various political activities. There were people around us who did not need to work; they were free of family responsibilities, with private incomes and were eager to entrench their positions. Phyllis Altman had run the administration of SACTU in South Africa where she was the Assistant General Secretary. Now in London, she was available with the time to devote to a more prominent position.

Leon turned to the wider British Trade Union movement to further his interest in political and trade union affairs. He reduced his involvement in SACTU after that meeting in the country mansion outside Prague in April 1965 – a fitting setting to take important decisions! This had been the Headquarters of the SS during the war. The furnishing and decorations were old, clearly pre-dating the Nazi period so that the whole place felt overwhelmingly eerie. In the dining room, we would try to visualise the scene twenty years earlier, the uniforms, and the horrors. I also went to Prague at that time. John Gaetsewe met us in Prague but he and I did not attend the main meetings but explored the surrounding countryside together

From Prague Phyllis, Leon and I flew to Moscow for the May Day Parade. Marks Shope had arranged this trip for us as a surprise and was quite excited to tell us about it when we arrived in Prague. By then,

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• Milan Kundera (2002) "Ignorance" (Faber & Faber) reflected how I felt when he wrote so succinctly "émigrés gathered together in compatriot colonies, keep retelling to the point of nausea the same stories which thereby become unforgettable (p33)

he had taken over Moses Mabhida's former position in the WFTU. The trip to Moscow was brief and tense.

The March Past in Red Square took place on a freezing day and we copied the Russians who stuffed newspapers into their shoes to keep them dry in the sudden snowstorm. We saw Yuri Gagarin the first Cosmonaut at close quarters. I recall the visit to the headquarters of the Soviet Trade Unions to see a special film on the Early Life of Lenin. I do recall that Phyllis and I needed to go to the back of the building, a rather seedy part of a grand edifice to the ladies' toilet. There we found an old woman whose job seemed especially to cut old newspapers into small squares, and she counted out a few sections to give to us, as we visited those rooms. It made Phyllis and I laugh together. Otherwise, we locked ourselves in thought, we in our separate world of heartache, much unspoken, because that trip ended an era of our lives.

It was with delight that I welcomed the visit of my parents to our first proper home in Eton Place, Chalk Farm. It was a lovely time in other respects; where we developed a network of friends living around us, new friends who always remained close to us. It helped to ease a lot of the strain and tension of the new life, and by 1965, we were having other fun.

Margie Colbeck was very definitely one of my 'other mothers.' I would frequently visit her on my way home from school for a cup of tea and she provided all the sympathy I needed without ever having to explain. She was a tax officer by day and a talented painter and raconteur for the rest of the time. She introduced us to abstract art and a lifelong love of painting. Leon became involved in regular visits to galleries, started his collection of art books and as someone with an excellent visual memory, he developed a tremendous knowledge of painting, particularly 20th century art. I bought Margie's "Desert City" an abstract gold painting made up of blocks and based on her life in Cairo. Over the months, I would gaze at this painting on the wall in her sitting room, seeing more in it each time and then eventually, it became mine. Since then 'Desert City' has always occupied a prominent place in our home, for its intrinsic worth as a painting but also as a tribute to our devotion to Margie.

Margie's son Andrew lived with her. He was a caricature of the eccentric Englishman, in his bowler hat and proper manners as he went off to work as an Articled Clerk in the City. But his passion was exploring ancient buildings, and he made a wonderful guide as in time

explored with him and Margie the churches and castles of the City of London and then further a field around East Anglia, Suffolk and Norfolk. Margie always claimed that she anglicised us – she probably did. She also made me tolerate people with political views that differed from mine – theirs were eccentric old-fashioned Tory views, somehow inoffensive.

When Leon finished his studies at Ruskin he went to work in the Research Department of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. There he wrote speeches for officials and represented the union on Government bodies setting wages and working conditions in the electronics industry. His colleagues were a young group, all remained friends, and it provided the springboard for a better career.

Those first few years in England were quite a testing time for us. There was exhilaration and sadness, the fun and entertainment of new friends and mourning the loss of the old. Willy-nilly, we felt swept up into London of the sixties, trying to forget the pain of the lost life.

Looking back, by then I would have wanted a British identity, a proper new start. Many of the South Africans from the political movement never changed much over the following decades and South Africa remained their home in every sense, they just found themselves in England. My responses were different and I needed to disconnect myself from the pain of exile. It was my personal loss and I wanted to put it behind me, and forget.

With time, we were in the fortunate position of having the opportunities to increasingly connect with the great world out there and it was welcoming us.

CHAPTER 14

BEING BRITISH!

By 1970, life had changed radically for me.

I was now a suburbanite with a house and garden on the outskirts of London, in Arkley, a baby and I was secretary of the local Labour Party branch.

Emma was born in 1968; she changed our lives and brought a wonderful contentment. We wanted a child and parenthood provided us with such happiness and fun; we both doted on her, a very pretty baby, clever and contented too.

Just after Emma's birth I got an unexpected gift of money from my cousin Sidney Bernstein. His letter to me said the gift came "because I feel so well and have decided to give it to you at this time rather than leave it in my will." The timing was perfect; as the lease on the flat in Chalk Farm was ending and we were discussing the options of moving. It enabled us to buy the house, "Cherry Tree Cottage" at the end of beyond, from a transport point of view – but pretty in a beautiful setting.

Sidney was rich, a famous media tycoon and well-known supporter of good causes. He features in many biographies and histories of Britain from the war years onwards, renowned for his philanthropy and extensive contacts with the powerful and famous of the twentieth century. His political leanings were always leftwards. Granada Television in those days was a sponsor of radical causes[•], and in this case, people like me. He opposed apartheid and the Bernstein family admired the position we had taken in South Africa. The details now of our relationship have become hazy, with only memory of scraps of meetings and conversations. However, in those first years of exile we needed the support and endorsement that we received from my Bernstein family and it had a powerful effect on us, sustained us in a spiritual sense as well. It contrasted vividly with my South African first cousins who visited

[•] Doris Lessing (1998) "Walking in the shade" Vol. 2 of her Autobiography (Flamingo) says that "Bernstein set out to raise the level of television programmes and he did. None of our present television moguls have it in them to be as adventurous and courageous as Granada Television was then.

London from Johannesburg and never made contact with me: and that did upset my father!

But the new family relationship had another part to play. With hindsight I realised it helped to remove the feeling of anonymous exile, made us rather part of a well-known and established British family. It certainly helped in cementing the new life in England.

In the late sixties, the Labour Party was my natural political home. It advocated the form of European socialism I have always supported. The ANC did not function in Britain as a membership organisation and as an exile, the only political grouping at the time was the South African Communist Party.

I wanted a political home and found it in the Labour Party. The Arkley Ward, my local one, met monthly in a ramshackle hut, a property which it owned but lacked the funds to modernise. The Labour Party often met in the most uncomfortable of places. It was often quite an endurance test, surely the mark of commitment, to leave your warm living room on a cold winter evening to huddle together in a cold draughty hut.

First, we would plough through boring but necessary business before we followed with a political discussion of the day. Most branches, including ours, supported all the worthwhile causes of the sixties, and had the power to individually affiliate to organisations such as the Anti-Apartheid Movement. But our main function was to promote the Party in elections.

Afterwards a group would adjourn to the local pub where the 'real' political discussions and arguments took place. I was usually part of that group. I am not sure when I became the Secretary of the Ward, later called branch. Everyone there knew I was South African but I never talked about my past. Of course, I supported Anti-Apartheid campaigns through the Labour Party but kept personal issues out of any discussion. My credentials in the British political movement seemed to be impeccable; I never needed to spell out anything of the past, as the word appeared to have passed around without any explanation by me.

The Labour Government was in power, Harold Wilson was Prime Minister and we were very critical of his policies at that time. I would join groups of Party workers on canvassing expeditions and I regularly

went around myself to collect membership dues. This was the time I learned how a local Labour Party branch worked and then I became a member of the General Management Committee of the Chipping Barnet Constituency Party. This was a level higher in the party's structure, responsible for a number of wards.

In October 1970, I participated in my first General Election in Britain and joined in the election ritual of the Labour Party. This involved a quaint set of activities carried out every election time when cardboard boxes would emerge from people's attics with election material in them. Lists from the previous elections would be available and contact made with election activists to carry out the activities they always performed at election time. These included door- to door canvassing, 'knocking up' voters on the day and working in a committee room on polling day.

Notwithstanding all that hard work, there was a swing of 4% to the Tories and Edward Heath became the new Prime Minister!

The campaigning issues of that time have a resonance, as they remained the central issue of nearly every election I knew in Britain: how to revive the flagging economy. In that election, Heath warned that a Labour victory would result in a further devaluation of the pound. The electorate clearly believed his message more than Labour's convoluted one, which blamed slow economic growth on the balance of payments deficit. Labour promised that the country was in the process of turning the deficit to a surplus that would ensure economic growth in the future. The sceptical electorate voted in Edward Heath, known also as the 'laughing grocer' in our favourite satirical magazine, 'Private Eye.' Heath was not a popular prime minister after all, and I remember him mostly for his hearty laugh when he heaved his shoulders up and down, bared his teeth but his eyes remained glacial, icy blue and fixed.

My training in the NUDW stood me in good stead. It was where I learned not just the irksome bureaucratic ways of doing things, but the procedures of meetings, the taking of minutes, speaking and debating. In the Labour Party in Arkley at Branch level, and Barnet, at Constituency level, I made rapid progress from ordinary member to being selected in a very short time to stand for the Council in 1970.

We had lost most of our belongings from the first part of our life, and when we moved to England, I stopped throwing things away. I kept all the documents I thought of value so that with time I had collected stacks of files, diaries, notebooks, letters and even minutes of meetings, my

archive. This acts now as an *aide mémoire* to assist in recording highlights from the past. There are times I kept a diary; so that I have many facts at hand…I need not rely on memory. Of course, the atmosphere, the flavour of the times is long gone and some of the events now seem trivial but remain a reminder of what I did more than thirty years ago.

In that local election campaign, I needed to learn the nuts and bolts of the locality, essential for a local representative. A new Council estate in the area was in the throes of development – it was being built on a former sewage farm, and was knowingly referred to as Alcatraz by the locals, but officially called Dollis Valley. From its beginning I was involved with the construction problems that arose by the choice of this low-lying site. Even before it was occupied it was clear to me that Dollis Valley had all the characteristics of a slum, a Council estate sealed off from the neighbouring community. A series of roadways connected it to the main road but added to its isolated feel. The cheapest and shoddiest of building materials ensured that from the first day people moved in, there were countless complaints.

It was proof again: the construction of public housing for workers does not happen on prime land nor are the houses well built. Disused strips like Dollis Valley and unwanted old aerodromes like Grahame Park in West Hendon, these were the 'palaces' for the workers and the poor. Land values everywhere always ensure that prime land is reserved for those who pay the most; it is the way of the world. London is surrounded by a wonderful green lung of land, the Green Belt which is reserved for public recreation and agriculture In our area then, whenever there was any application to develop any land adjoining this green open space it was always for the most sumptuous and expensive houses. The rich paid for the view.

Much of my election campaign focused on this new estate, as well as other most established neighbourhood Council Estates.
With the two other candidates for our Ward, we concentrated on Council tenants because at that time they formed the core voters for the Labour Party.

The Tories were convinced they would retain the Ward, as it was a very mixed area. In addition to the Council estates and modest private housing that we concentrated on, there was also a centre of Tory strength. It lay in street upon street of large desirable properties, and Arkley was really identified a 'rich' area. Although the majority of householders

were Council tenants, with their estates tucked away, it would be easy to assess the whole area as 'blue chip' Tory.

The sweet moment of success, which I remember with relish, is the public announcement in Hendon Town Hall late one night of our Arkley victory to a large crowd. Our count was over; the three of us declared the winners in the room where the count of votes took place. That was exciting itself, but now this needed an official announcement by the Town Clerk Crowds of party supporters in the Town Hall and outside would cheer or boo the announcement of the results. With the announcement of our results ready, there was an elderly tall ruddy conservative man sporting a large blue rosette and pinstriped trousers. He was standing in front of me and he said very loudly and confidently, "Well, here comes one of ours." I concentrated more on his reaction than the Town Clerk reading out the results: his expectant pink jowls sank to his chest in shock horror and disbelief. For me, it was a moment to savour: seven years after leaving South Africa and I had won political office in London.

The Tories retained overall control of the Council but I went home thrilled to be part of the Opposition. I decided to paste a notice outside the gate to our house announcing my results and victory.

My father wrote quite emotionally:

"…Whatever results later from your first step it will never seem as important and wonderful as the first time…. and in your case as an unknown immigrant. I am really quite bewildered and of course very flattered vicariously through your efforts. No doubt you will have to toe the caucus line and I'm sure you'll come up with many an original thought."

From then, mounds of documents, two or three times a week, were delivered by special messenger from the Town Hall, and I was addressed by my new title, Councillor. It irritated me that they always appended my degree to my name in all communications. However, this did reveal some of the curious initials some Councillor colleagues added to their names. It took quite a time to unravel what some of them stood for; some had letters after their names which stood for their membership of a particular society or a diploma of doubtful status. There was hardly anyone who no letters after their name!

Before the election, I had received an abrupt note from Robbie Robinson, the Leader of the Labour Group in Barnet. Quite curtly, he said attend a meeting of the new Labour Group of Councillors (the Caucus) - if elected.

The first meeting of that new Labour Group was telling. I was invited to travel to the meeting with a contingent from our area and a rather oily man W. whom I did not know very well, arrived to fetch me. He was much older, an experienced councillor and well-known local politician. The purpose of the lift became clear in the car. It was a canvassing exercise and not too subtle - a cabal had stitched up a scheme to elect a new leader and quite simply, they expected me to vote for this new person. The others in the car, already briefed, had decided that we should vote in Pat Tyler as Leader. He was the company secretary for the 'Daily Express', a lawyer, articulate, smooth and cautious. Although young and inexperienced, I did object to being asked to vote for someone I had not yet met, let alone had any idea of his worth. Was this Tammany Hall democracy?

My impressions of Robbie Robinson were quite negative and I did not fancy him much as Leader. On election night he had made an inappropriate speech for the Labour Party and the cursory note were my only contacts with him. During that car drive, 'they' said Robbie was wrong for the job whereas the new man had all the right qualifications. Robbie was working class, a movement stalwart, tactless and a heavy drinker.

The proceedings that followed at the meeting were quite off-putting, as it was quite clear that a *small group* had canvassed us all, and had everything stitched up. Newcomers like me, who were easy targets, eventually voted as canvassed. Manipulated but uneasy, I also voted for Pat Tyler and he got the majority vote.

The next time we met together was our first proper one at the Town Hall with proper agendas in front of us. The Labour Group was there to decide on its policies and reactions to issues. That meeting allocated members to committees and as representatives on outside bodies. It was when political patronage was on display as we, Councillors, accepted positions on a variety of organisations in our new capacity. In the British system, they always nominated a Councillor to any establishment that received Council money, to oversee the spending of public monies.

Our first task was to select a Secretary to take the minutes of Group meetings. We were only three women in the group and one of the men said: "Will one of the women take the minutes". Rosemary Thorpe Tracey, a large woman, who became a life long friend, said clearly and dismissively, "Get a bloody man to do it." I supported laying down ground rules such as these and kept quiet. Unfortunately, the third woman, Joan Pudney, a woman who knew her place in this scheme of things, and much to our disgust, agreed to take the minutes.

Our Labour Group was quite representative of the Labour Party at that time with a right and left wing clash on most issues at most meetings. There were the lawyers among us, careful in their drafting of motions and amendments, expert at Standing Orders and procedures. The better your grasp of Standing Orders the more effective your debating skills; there were other rules of the game too. Some of our Group loved the Tories; they were gentlemen's gentlemen, and liked to play at making private deals with other gentlemen's gentlemen in the Member's Room. The Young Turks among us, of whom I was one, hated these backroom discussions, which we suspected of being deals of a dubious sort. Most of us were thirty-something and we immediately formed a cohesive faction. We spent many happy hours together in the Member's Room of the Town Hall, discussing, trying to solve and laughing too at the problems of the day.

The Tories were also a divided group. Mrs Thatcher, who was then Secretary for Education and a local MP, was most influential with the new younger Tory intake that was markedly right wing. They loathed us, a sentiment we reciprocated. We seldom talked, often we snarled at each other. Instead, we sometimes socialised with the old-school Tory, who in that period were becoming a near extinct breed, dedicated as they were to fair play and service to the community.

Education has always been a highly charged class issue in Britain and then the principal political battle we faced on Barnet Council. My appointment to the education committee, an obvious choice for an ex teacher, placed me immediately at the centre of the heated debate with a ring side seat to the machinations of Mrs Thatcher and her cronies who meddled in Council policies. As one of the outer London Boroughs, we were responsible for running our own education service.

From the sixties the country faced a tremendous political battle with a decision by the left, namely the Labour Party in the local authorities it controlled, to abolish the established two-tiered State secondary school

policy based on the grammar schools for bright children and secondary modern schools for the others. From Labour's point of view at that time, the streaming of children at the 11+ age favoured the middle class who would pass the 11+ entrance examination and then take up places in academically orientated grammar schools, many of which were old and prestigious, often modelled on the elite public school system. The rest, those who did not make the 11+, went to secondary modern schools where the majority were from the working class. That decision made at eleven years roughly determined the life chances for that pupil because it was rare indeed for a pupil from a secondary modern school to get a university place. What we were trying to do at that time was to amalgamate the two types of school into one comprehensive one, based more on the neighbourhood principle.

At the time I joined the Education Committee many of our local schools were changing their status to comprehensive. There was a political battle for certain 'favourites' to retain their old grammar school status. We backed the 'establishment' Tory section of the Council, the old grandees, and supported a system called Plan C, which involved certain mergers, re-building and closing down of some schools. In stepped Mrs Thatcher, then Secretary for Education and a local MP, with the support of the right wing on the Council and she vetoed many of our plans, but let others go through.

It is interesting to note all these years later the argument for non selection is not solved and even now, certain schools have the right to chose their pupils and do so, on ability. Of course, many middle class parents do not want their children to attend the same schools as children from Council estates. A more insidious aspect exists of an unspoken but perceived social advantage of certain schools and it is to those schools that parents struggle to get admittance for their children. This set of values owes its origin to the public school tradition in Britain, the models of so many academic schools.

I found as a teacher, then as a Councillor that education issues seldom rated as a priority on the British agenda. Perhaps this is now different with more of the articulate chattering classes using state schools. At that time, it did not seem as though most parents realised how awful the conditions were in their children's' schools, in buildings erected in the early twentieth century or earlier with outside ablution blocks. Maintenance and modernisation of school buildings were always first in line for the 'axe' when the 'powers' needed to make any expenditure cuts.

Mrs Thatcher caused a nation wide controversy when as Education Secretary she ended the provision of free milk to over seven year olds. She was labelled, 'Thatcher, Thatcher, the milk snatcher.' She justified the savings of £9m in a full year as a change in priorities, giving her revenue to improve and replace some of the old primary schools.

Both were required, free school milk and new schools; it demonstrated her petty and mean spirit, as the savings were negligible in the total. Yet, there were so many needy children who came to school without breakfast and relied on that drink. They were probably the same children whose school buildings desperately needed refurbishment. As both are necessary, how do you choose one or the other?

We campaigned against the ending of free school milk. I moved an amendment against its implementation in the Education Committee and I spent time writing letters to the press on the issue. The Education Milk Act, 1971, came into being and dented a core principle of the Welfare State, which until then had ensured the nourishment and a healthy diet for all children at school.

During 1972, Idi Amin, the dictatorial leader of Uganda announced that Britain must assume responsibility for all Ugandan Asians holding British passports. This amounted to an expulsion order and he later extended its provisions to include Asians who were also Ugandan citizens. He claimed they were "encouraging corruption": and "sabotaging the economy of the country". The result was that over 26,000 refugees from Uganda came to Britain that year bringing with them only £50 per family and a maximum of £485 of personal effects.

That episode, with its racist overtones, moved me deeply. With the memory of our own expulsion and the personal tragedy faced by those victims of a 'mad dictator,' I moved an amendment in the Council asking that we offer Council houses in our Borough to thirty families.

In Council, my amendment was defeated because there was no available housing! Even in the Labour Group where we discussed my amendment, there were ugly divisions. I was very angry with those who said that charity begins at home and all housing must go to Britain's own needy on the waiting list and not to foreigners. I was sure the colour factor was an issue and said so to the Group and in the Council Chamber. My speech was emotional:

"I do feel in my heart that the crux of the matter is whether we want to face a further increase of coloured immigrants in our midst, and clearly from the amendment before us, SOME DO NOT…. We cannot insulate ourselves to such an extent to be unable to play a role in what is a national emergency …if so, can you put your hand to your heart and say that you were not prompted by feelings of racial prejudice?"

When my motion was lost, I shouted my disgust and very noisily made my exit from the Chamber with papers flying and seats banging.

These were some of the political issues that formed part of the London local government scene of that time. There were also the personal problems of constituents that we took up regularly, the surgery we ran on a regular basis. This was my métier; I loved the work of a Councillor. I concentrated more on political issues, was less attracted to planning issues, traffic problems or Council housing management. I was never very interested in what Leon called pavement issues.

I recall the lighter moments too. For instance, it was a time when the gentlemen's gentlemen in control tried to do a deal with the Tories whereby Labour would take the position of Mayor the following year. Negotiations opened on whom we would propose as Mayor on our side. There was an obvious candidate, in seniority and availability; also he wanted to be Mayor but he did not have a wife. He was unmarried and his partner was a black woman. The leadership of the Group clearly believed this would not be acceptable for middle class London suburbia and worked out a political compromise. One Sunday morning, unexpectedly, the leader of the Labour Group phoned me and asked whether I would consider becoming the Lady Mayoress. This would be a way of overcoming the problem…and, to add insult, he added that a dress allowance went with the position. The cheek of it, the unspoken racism and sexism in that offer appalled me. I was furious that as an elected representative he thought I would even consider taking the job of a Mayoral 'consort', to ride around with the Mayor. In the end, the Tories withdrew the offer anyway: their move to the political right made it impossible for them to allow the mayoralty to rotate.

A group of us opposed the residual nineteenth century role of the Mayor that the Tories held on to with nostalgia. The robes and some of the ceremonial functions were no longer compatible with a modern Council and we were in favour of modernising the function of Mayor to that of an effective chairperson with ceremonial functions. However, we were also

aware at that time that the mayoralty had certain powers such as the casting vote that would have suited us as well.

Political relationships can be very intense. As well as the opportunity for making close friendship and alliances in this framework, the same is true for enemies and opponents.

In the Constituency Labour Party at the time, as elsewhere, the Common Market issue seriously divided everyone and the divisions remain, only the issues change. At the beginning of 1972 Edward Heath, as Prime Minister, signed the Treaty of Accession and formally took Britain into the Common Market, known then as European Economic Community (EEC), now called the European Union (EU). The Labour Party Blackpool Conference in 1972 decided to support a referendum on whether or not there should be British membership. While everyone agreed on the referendum issue, some were committed to the European ideal while others passionately believed that membership would destroy British sovereignty and the supremacy of Parliament.

This argument resonated at all levels of the Labour Party, at national and local level; it was a bitterly contested issue to tear everything apart. Factions developed as to whether you were a person who favoured being 'in' or 'out'.

It played itself out locally one night at meeting in Barnet, when speakers put opposite cases to a large Labour Party gathering. I was a member of the Management Committee, and at the end of that meeting, we had to vote, to mandate our delegate to the Labour Party Conference a few weeks later to represent our views. The pundits predicted the vote at the national Conference would be close, and would effectively decide Labour Party policy on the European Community.

The discussion at our meeting was heated at times: the divisions in opinion fierce, sometimes emotional. When the Management Committee called for the vote by a show of hands I decided to abstain. Actually, I was unsure how to vote, I did not have a fixed position on the Common Market issue. They counted the votes and there was a tied vote; the Chairperson declared one person had not voted and called on that person, me, to vote. In the limelight, this was the worst of all scenarios because my casting vote turned our Party's official position in favour of Europe and destroyed my creditability with those who were passionately anti-Market. It shattered my alliances in the local Labour

Party because the anti-Market group effectively ran it. They gave me a hard time from then on. Sitting on the fence had not worked.

Those days of fulfilling activity, of being useful and effective some of the time was an exhilarating period. I was constantly meeting new people, representing the Council on a number of outside bodies and acting as school governor to a number of schools. My horizons widened all this time and I felt an identity with Britain and even used 'us' and 'we' to describe things British, without self-consciousness. Ten years earlier I was a trade unionist in South Africa. I did not forget South Africa but pushed the pain of exile out of my consciousness and lived in a new sweet present. I hardly ever talked about that past country in this new life and few people asked me about it: more and more, with my English sort-of accent, I did not think that many people took me as foreign.

It then came as a great shock to me on a summer day in England in 2003 when I sat in Rosemary's garden in England and told her I was writing this memoir. I asked her how she had identified me all those years ago when we first met. Did she think of me as South African or British? Her answer shocked me: she identified me as Jewish, neither British nor South African. My reaction upset her so she elaborated that perhaps it was because I was small, attractive and clever, characteristically Jewish (?) or was it my name that was the give-away? It did not really matter what she said after that. She could not quite understand why this upset me and was at pains to remind me that it was she who had introduced me to the books of Primo Levy, organised the Anne Franks Exhibition in Hertfordshire and her very special feelings for Jews and the Holocaust. True, and I knew that, but it was not the issue for me. It was that realisation that I, Lorna Levy, who defined herself as British during thirty-four years residence and as South African, for the balance because it was the country of my birth, had never described myself first as Jewish, although it has always been one of my identities.

I have thought about this a lot and from a biography of Sidney Bernstein,• I have recently found some of the answers. I suppose that in truth my homeland remained something within me. Because wherever we were, over the years in Britain or South Africa, I fashioned something always that was uniquely ours and it was always Jewish too. At those times when I thought it was only British, I suppose some people thought so too. I see now that it was an over simplification when I tried to label myself

• Caroline Moorehead: (1984) Sidney Bernstein: A Biography (Jonathan Cape)

British because in fact I was always…. part of a never clearly understood fraternity.

CHAPTER 15

BIRMINGHAM, THE BACKSIDE OF BRITISH CAPITALISM

Leon agreed to a career change when he was headhunted by Mobil Oil Company and left the Research Department of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. He only remained at Mobil for a couple of years, when he was recruited by Rootes Motor Company to a senior position with interesting potential in Industrial Relations.

At the time, it was not known publicly that Rootes had enormous financial problems, to be taken over months later by the American motor 'giant,' Chrysler Motor Corporation. The first change was to re-name the company and it became Chrysler UK. Afterwards in a series of asset stripping, Chrysler next sold the Central London Head Office and the fabulous art collection; then the whole operation re-located to the industrial belt of the country, nearby to its factory outlets. It was a radical overhaul of the company, with more to follow later.

As these changes unfolded, it became clear that Leon's work would ultimately be re-located from Central London to Coventry. In the first instance he commuted, sometimes staying over but it became increasingly unsustainable as he was always on the road, somewhere between the Midlands and North London. Emma too remembers that her father was never there until she was about six years old.

Eventually it became clear we would have to move closer to Leon's work. That relocation was a personal disaster and I do not think I ever fully recovered from our relocation to Birmingham. It was the move one too many for me. When it occurred, it meant I uprooted myself from my new absorbing life in politics in London. Councillor Mrs Lorna Levy was going places in Labour politics, collecting more committees, invitations and interesting challenges. It had to be another new start; I could have been immigrating to another country.

We chose Birmingham to live, because it was the second city and Coventry or Leamington Spa did not seem right for us. They were small and provincial. We decided that Birmingham's second city status meant it would be just behind London in its facilities. However, we discovered that second best meant something quite different. It is not

just that Birmingham had few cultural facilities at that time, but its provincial attitudes and physical ugliness were striking. Later on, after our time, they built a beautiful new Concert Hall and Simon Rattle put the Birmingham Orchestra on the map as a leading British orchestra.

But in the mid seventies when we moved we were immediately struck by the ugly design of the city that had given little thought to human need in its grossness. The vast and complicated road interchange, called Spaghetti Junction, as it resembled a bowl of spaghetti, seemed to symbolise it all. The main shopping mall in the centre of Birmingham, called the Bull Ring was as hideous and alienating as it name suggests. I have forgotten the origin of the name, just remember the over-bulky precinct constructed in that post war style so favoured by the British that dominated the city centre. For the rest, we always compared the glossy head offices in London with their pristine window boxes of geraniums replaced here with grimy work yards, ancient factories and dirty canals. From the Industrial Revolution onwards, the Midlands was part of the source of wealth in the heartland of heavy industry. We called it the 'backside of British capitalism.'

As if to capture our mood when we moved, we bought a large house for a low price at an auction By London standards, it was cheap, but wrong for us. The architect who designed it commemorated this work with a plaque with his name engraved beside the front door, a 1930's edifice that resembled any number of Odeon Cinemas in its curved façade. We called it 'The Castle' after we discovered there was a Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight and our house was located in Carisbrooke Road in Edgbaston.

We let out a wing but this still left us with enormous accommodation, too many rooms for our needs, and we furnished them rather graciously in keeping with the house. The garden was huge by British urban standards, over a half an acre and before we got rid of them, it took me four hours to spray the hundreds of roses. We had to simplify the garden, modernise it, and Mr. Fogarty helped us. A nurse, for the other days, he would come every Saturday morning on his bicycle to earn some extra money and do the hard work. Over the years our garden was truly beautiful, a mixture of evergreen shrubs, roses and herbaceous flowers, an English garden with something for all seasons.

At weekends, we would take trips into the country, sightseeing, looking for antiques and interesting pieces in junk shops and always, plants for our garden. I haunted the specialist nurseries in the

countryside and Leon loved 'antiquing,'• as we called it. In the little villages of Shropshire, Warwickshire,

Worcestershire we would go looking, taking our picnic basket with us. In this way, we visited castles, explored the countryside and bought interesting things. And always some plants. Emma would often bring a friend along and they played and ran around, and sometimes we went fruit picking as well.

The first important decision we needed was to find a school for Emma. I visited the neighbourhood schools and none was suitable. Frankly, they were Victorian slums and the majority of the pupils were non-English speakers. Therefore, against my political principles, on pragmatic grounds of self-interest and with Leon's encouragement, I chose Edgbaston High School for Emma. It was a private school and I compromised my commitment to the state sector by choosing what was best for my child outside it. I felt rather shifty in Labour circles after I betrayed that fundamental principle. It was my skeleton in the cupboard and I always expected it to pop out.

This dichotomy in education was highlighted for me every day when I got a job in a school with very deprived children who had been re-housed from an inner city slum to Council housing in what they termed the Middle Ring of the City. Behaviour problems dominated my teaching schedule; the school provided many of the children with shoes and washed them when they arrived. They certainly depended on all the services of the Welfare State – it protected and nourished the needy, without question. They were not penalised because of their parents. In this environment, the school tried to make good a deficit and had to teach. They classified my pupils as 'backward' and my brief was to make them literate. I tried and sometimes I succeeded. What I did provide was a stable adult relationship for them, which was also important. During that period in Birmingham I was seconded also for a lengthy period of training specialising on the child with early learning difficulties.

It was just as well that I began to work soon after arriving in Birmingham. Otherwise, I would have broken down. I got lost when I went out… I knew no one. … In addition, it was colder than London. I recall a postcard I received in reply to a change of address card I had sent: "When are you going to stop moving northwards?" said the card. This

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• As the effects of the oil crisis of 1973 took hold and sent prices of everything soaring, antique buying became much more expensive and we no longer bought much.

was indeed another country for in London there had been friends from day one. Here there was no one.

The Birmingham Labour Party was able to provide a thread of continuity, the central issues were the same although locally it was very different. I could carry on with the political activities I had started in London; as an ex Councillor the doors opened more quickly than before.

I joined the Edgbaston Labour Party, my local Party. It was very different from London and the left-right political divide was sharp and angry. The constituency straddled both-up market Edgbaston but also some awful slum areas and the City Centre. It was the heyday of that grouping called the Militant Tendency, very prominent in Birmingham. There was no chance to form friendships this lot did not adjourn to the pub after meetings as in London. At Constituency level, nasty name-calling and bitter arguments over policies would occur and often there was shouting as well when the different political perspectives boiled over into bitter rows. The issues seemed immaterial and ranged from nationalisation of industry to the fencing of a local park.

I was committed to the Labour Party and continued to attend those rather unpleasant meetings. By immersing myself in these local affairs I created a continuing structure to my life but continued to feel that my main focus was elsewhere.

In the by-election in Handsworth, an inner city slum, I saw the squalor and awfulness of housing that still existed from the Industrial Revolution. Back-to-back houses were built then for workers in this area and now in the nineteen-seventies, Asian immigrants largely occupied them. This structure must have ensured a close feeling of community in that period of the nineteenth century, so distant from the bleakness of the high rise buildings that largely replaced them, designed for the post-war nuclear family. To return to the back-to-back houses; we found them damp, dark, cold and overcrowded and many of the occupants suffered from bronchitis and other chest disorders associated with living in condemned housing.

Later I became Chairperson of the Local Branch and a delegate to the policy-making committee of the Birmingham City Labour Party. Within a couple of years of moving to Birmingham I was thoroughly entrenched in the workings of that party, holding various positions at all levels but they offered no personal enjoyment because of the constant

quarrels and rows, everything we did was punctuated by deep-seated antagonisms.

The Militant Tendency element in Birmingham wreaked havoc with the Party and turned everything into a battlefield. They should never have been in the Labour Party, as they did not subscribe to its basic tenets, too left wing and unrealistic. Sometimes they were called Trotskyites or 'entryists' because they attempted to hijack the Party for their own ends. Their methods were often quite dishonest and destructive and wherever there was a weak branch or link in the party, and there were many, they would attempt a take over

Living in the Midlands in the seventies was a ringside seat to watch people begin to turn away from Labour. When Margaret Thatcher came along, she seemed to articulate a growing unease.

When I canvassed, people would talk about others who 'lived on the free bank' which referred to those who abused the welfare system and received benefits of one kind or another to which they were not entitled. It was always someone the complainant could identify, the person across the road, or his next-door neighbour, who did not work legally, but scrounged. Equally, the same person would complain about the level of strikes, although he/she could be the striker the following week. It was easy to find scapegoats, so much easier than finding real causes of problems.

The Labour Party seemed to have a death wish in those years. Harold Wilson and then Jim Callaghan were in power and there were rounds of unending strikes. The seventies was the decade of trade union power, where it seemed the sectional interest of a group was more important than the future of thousands of other jobs in the same factory. There were demarcation disputes where a few could bring a whole industry to a halt, with little forethought for the consequences.

It seemed more a parody of the trade union belief that an injury to one is an injury to all. Shop floor power was the order of the day so that the union leadership, either nationally or locally, was often powerless to prevent a spontaneous decision to strike, usually led by very militant shop stewards. In the Midlands, it appeared as though there was always a strike in progress somewhere and particularly in the motor industry. This easily led to the spread of the anti-union feelings of the eighties.

Leon held a key position in Industrial Relations at Chrysler Motor Corporation. In the mid seventies, the Government needed to rescue British Leyland, the largest of the four British car manufacturers and take it into public ownership. At the same time, the smallest of the UK based car manufacturers, Chrysler UK that had only taken over Rootes a few years back, now experienced financial difficulties and the parent company threatened to cease operations. This was the ugly face of multi-national capitalism whereby Chrysler Corporation had asset stripped the UK Company when it took control and brought out only one new model in eight years in Britain. When Chrysler Corporation faced severe difficulties internationally, it decided to cut its losses and shut down its British company. Sixty five thousand jobs were on the line at a number of plants and Harold Wilson told the House of Commons that the Government had a 'pistol to its head.' The Government needed to launch a rescue operation although this undermined its manufacturing strategy. Leon played a major role in devising a recovery scheme in which worker participation became entrenched in company decision-making.

Chrysler's strike record was legendary. It seemed to me that there was always a strike on the go, sometimes involving thousands of workers. At other times, a minor demarcation dispute could entail factories working a shortened day. The disputes happened all over the country, at the different plants in Coventry, in Glasgow and Dunstable. They all involved Leon. He was always going somewhere, often to consult with Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon, the 'kings' of the trade union movement of their day, to try to bring the workforce back to work.

It was clearly a recipe for failure, the appalling strike record of the workforce and the Company, under funded and needing modernisation of plant and of course, investment in new models. The rescue operation involved financial aid up to £162m in the form of grants, loans and guarantees. To do nothing would have meant the closing down of the entire operation and the cost to the government would have been the same in unemployment pay. This would also have had a serious effect on the balance of payments and dire implications for Chrysler's distributors and suppliers.

At the same time, the selection process in the safe Labour Council seat, Acocks Green adopted me as their candidate. Three of us were short-listed for selection and I was the rank outsider, the other two well were well known. I prepared for the selection conference and was

flabbergasted when they adopted me. Each of the nominees made a speech to the Constituency delegates for approximately ten to fifteen minutes and then answered questions for about the same amount of time. It was standard procedure throughout the country. After this, the candidate retired to another room while the next one went through the same procedure. Later, while biting ones nails or pretending not to care in that adjoining room, the candidates waited for the meeting to discuss them and to vote.

I kept the notes I prepared for that selection conference. I certainly would not have read my speech but what I said was probably not very different from the following – it sounds so dated in style and content:

"…Obviously I am new to Birmingham and cannot pretend that I know the complexities of this Ward and the split representation with the Tories. I have fought the Tories before, and if it is to be a hard fight with gloves off, so to speak, I will be prepared for it. I will be available at all times and I do have my own transport. If the Liberals put up a candidate, they must be shown to the electorate as having a different policy for every street.

The conclusion I drafted reads as follows:

"*I have deliberately concentrated on local issues in my address to you. I am deeply committed to wishing to see a fairer and more just society with a re-distribution of wealth and industrial democracy. We have a Labour Government now attempting to bring a greater degree of equality in our society. I hope it will be re-elected with a strong mandate to implement the Party's programme. We will then need an ever-stronger Labour controlled Council in Birmingham to implement radical policies in spheres such as land, housing and education. In addition, I believe that a well run Labour controlled Council is a firm basis for keeping the anti-Socialist alliance of Tories and Liberals out."*

At the start, my selection delighted me, especially as an outsider I had won through as though chosen for a top job, a safe Labour seat through much competition. I looked forward to proving myself in this new area with new people but underestimated the difficulties.

Some weeks later, I met a committee headed by the Leader of the Council, Clive Wilkinson, to ratify my selection. It was not a mere walk over. They questioned me on a whole range of topics in that meeting, including the Common Market. I had to express my views and

perspectives; there was no opportunity for fudge. Once Wilkinson established that I favoured membership of the Common Market, he was prepared to support my candidature with additional funding and personal endorsement. From then, I had observer status to attend meetings of the Labour Group, the Caucus, who ran the City.

I did not enjoy those meetings, my idea of Tammany Hall. Members could only speak on an item if they belonged to the relevant committee. It was censure and prevented the expression of diverse opinions. Wilkinson said the Group was in danger of becoming a rabble and he handled people quite roughly who did not tow the line.

I became Governor of a group of Special Schools, appointed also as the 'assigned visitor' to two of these schools. This meant I was the regular liaison between the school and the Governors and needed to report regularly on those schools. I visited them often; there were enormous differences between them, and other schools I had known.

Calthorpe School in Balsall Heath was a designated school for 'Educationally Sub-normal children.'(ESN) Later the policies towards education changed and words like 'sub normal' and separately designated schools disappeared both from the language and the framework. In fact, the pendulum swung the other way and education departments devised methods whereby one school could be adapted to cater for all types of children and labels disappeared from educational language.

Knowing that Calthorpe School was housed in a nineteenth century workhouse, a large forbidding building, made it a very depressing place to visit. The pupils came from all over Birmingham and their range of educational disabilities varied. It seemed so cruel that a workhouse should house the least able. It was the embodiment of the educational sink bin, writ large.

The second school catered for many types of physically disabled children, and contained a separate autistic unit. The two schools were so different. However, what struck me was the dedication of the teachers who worked in both establishments. When I could, I would have lunch in the staff dining room at both schools. For many of these teachers, their job was a vocation and they provided an atmosphere of love and interest in their pupils quite missing in a school like the one in which I taught.

Like Barnet, Birmingham was also in the throes of establishing comprehensive education throughout the city. They called their system 'the consortia plan' and merged numbers of schools in groups so that they could share scarce facilities but allow the school to retain its own identity. In practice, some of these consortia were over large, impersonal and scattered. Near our house was the large George Dixon Grammar School, ready to merge with a couple of neighbouring secondary modern schools to form one consortia of over 2,000 pupils. Middle class parents of the George Dixon School complained vociferously. This became a central part of the political attack between the two main parties: the Tories maintained that Labour was removing all freedom of choice while Labour was determined to push their comprehensive plans so that they were irreversible should there be a change of Government or Council. It could be that the implementation of changes took place too speedily.

It was quite compartmentalised, that life we led with diverse groups of friends and different sorts of activities. I was clearly quite flexible with the choice of people I interacted. Take the pair of other mothers of children from Emma's school that helped out with lifts. We looked after each other's children, and then decided to take up golf. This was so out of character for me who had always avoided games. We began to play one afternoon a week at the Municipal Golf Course nearby, took lessons, and had great fun trying to play nine holes, frequently losing our balls and making little headway in the skill of the game, but having much fun. Other than children and our attempts to master golf, we had little in common.

We were uncomfortable at the Municipal Club so I decided one day to apply to join the neighbourhood Golf Club. I filled in the application form and stated that I had no one to propose or second me because I was so new to the locality. In due course, much to my surprise, the lady's committee invited me to meet them for vetting and I was amazed that following that tea, they approved my membership. I believe that I was the first Jew to get membership.

Soon the three of us were members and it was much more pleasant and convenient to be able to have our lunch in the clubhouse before a game and have locker facilities to store our golfing gear! However, we did not integrate into the life of the club- for one thing our game was too poor to join in club fixtures. There were very clubby things like lady members were meant to take turns to arrange the flowers for the Clubhouse and women were unable to play on Saturday afternoons and Sunday

mornings, being reserved for men only. When we left Birmingham, I put my clubs in the loft and that ended my golf.

It was my political life, however, that absorbed so much time and thought, though at the same time there was an awful feeling of alienation. Both Leon and I were busy and seemingly in the middle of activities, and yet we were quite lonely.

There was very definitely a Jewish Community in Birmingham. Being provincial these slices of life are soon apparent, particularly as some of our Jewish neighbours sought us out. Once we were identified we were invited to participate in all sorts of Jewish activities, but we found most of the community rather smug and conservative. One night I was part of a panel discussion to put the Labour perspective on the Common Market (now the European Union) to an elite group who called themselves 'The Jewish Graduates.' It was the period of that Referendum, I referred to earlier, and that had been fiercely debated in my former Labour Party Constituency, when we were to vote whether to be or not be in the Market. I am told that same Graduates Group still exists with a younger circle that meet. They may even still talk about membership of the European Union, now it could be whether Britain should be part of the monetary union and use the 'euro' or not. That invitation to speak was flattering - to participate in a debate with a large group of well-established professional middle classes of Birmingham, well-heeled doctors, lawyers and accountants in the audience.

From the platform, I was immediately aware of the hostility in the eyes of that crowd and their accusing questions. To me they resembled their counterparts in Johannesburg, with most of their questions and comments laced with scorn and criticism of the Labour Party. I wondered why Jews had become so right wing in Britain and there were so few Jewish supporters of the Labour Party, although at that time there were many in the Conservative Party. This was quite different from the era of Jewish progressives in British politics – Sydney Silverman who piloted the abolition of the death penalty comes to mind and Mannie Shinwell who remained a dynamic force on the Labour Party benches in Parliament until into his nineties.

Local Government was re-organised into a two-tier structure. It created six new Metropolitan Councils in England. Birmingham became part of the West Midlands Metropolitan County and extended from Coventry to

Wolverhampton. The other tier was the District Council and what was previously known as the Birmingham City Council, changed its name to the Birmingham District Council.

The new bigger authority would take control of strategic planning for the whole area, while the district council would retain its previous functions. Immediately it seemed that the new layer of government was always in search of a role and many Councillors did not know which layer to select. Where would they be more powerful or effective? Which Council would have more authority and prestige? I remember the rivalry in the relationship between the two leaders, Stanley Yapp who had moved into what he perceived to be the larger and more prestigious authority. The other leader, Clive Wilkinson took over as the leader of Birmingham and within a short time, we all realised that real power still resided in the district level and Clive had scored the win!

I attended a Local Government Conference in Birmingham and there was a hilarious moment when the leader of Birmingham was called to speak and both men, Yapp and Wilkinson, moved towards the podium, each claiming to be the leader and spokesperson of the City.

Clive Wilkinson took a special interest in my election, defined as a key Labour seat. Acocks Green was an interesting suburb of the city, a microcosm of the Midlands, as within its boundaries were factories, decaying slums, Council estates and neat semi-detached private houses. Here too our campaigning always concentrated on Council estates where we believed the bedrock of our support existed. An interesting letter I have kept from that time sent to me from Mrs. P French in Acocks Green disagrees:

"I have just been reading Labour News – which has been pushed through my door. What has struck me most forcibly is that you only seem to be concerned with what you have done and going to do for Council tenants. This is a bone of <u>contention</u> amongst many pensioners (including myself) who are owner-occupiers. I get £12.98 pension a week. I have to go out office cleaning and I am sixty-nine years of age and cannot manage and try to save for repairs that might be needed to my house. My bathroom is in a terrible state and if I was a council tenant, I would be OK, they would see to it.

My husband died a fortnight after retirement of sixty-seven, literally worked to death. I have brought up three children, not bothered the Council for a house. My husband was in and out of work, but never

been on social security. Labour's motto seems to be helping those who will not help themselves. Don't think I am a Tory. I was brought up in the Labour movement; my dad was a Councillor in Wales for many years.

The election campaign was a disaster. Although it had been promised, we could not get a proper election machine in the area, not obvious at first because all the trappings existed. My Election Agent was most disorganised and probably dishonest; the 'team' he pretended to put together kept falling apart as no proper decisions were taken as to where we would pitch our campaign. It was difficult to be too bossy as the Ward was their territory and I seemed more like one of their workers, hardly the key figure that needed to win that election.

It was quite problematical for me. I was given little scope to prove myself seeing that the campaign was being managed by the local party. As I was not local and a woman I just accepted the incompetence as a given, proof that it was difficult for a woman candidate in that group that was so mannish, even loutish with eventual turns in the pub playing darts. It would have been out of order for me to ask how the campaign money was being spent.

On one occasion during canvassing, I met with some black youth who I enrolled as Party members and, as they were so keen, I encouraged them to join our canvassing group. I was delighted to increase our team and to involve black British youth in our work. They appeared so alienated and after all, the Labour Party stood for 'racial equality.' My group discouraged this, which shocked and upset me and although they did not say it openly, I was able to recognise their feelings of racial prejudice.

The National Front was very active in the area, distributing their 'hate' message. Labour Party Headquarters instructed us not to acknowledge them in any way. It was the strategy of the day and although many of us were apprehensive we hoped the strategy would work; that by ignoring their existence through silence, we would give them the kiss of death. However, they put about their racist message and I saved one of their leaflets. It said:

"STOP IMMIGRATION NOW

Britons did not fight two world wars to see their own country turned into an Afro Asian slum. Vast areas of our big cities have been taken

over by aliens. Our children's education is suffering though being in multi-racial classes. Encourage the return of immigrants and their dependants already here by a policy of phased repatriation, in a humane and orderly fashion, give assistance where necessary."

Someone whispered to me that the Labour Club in Bristol Street had a colour bar. Although it was separate from the Party as such, Labour members could drink there, presumably if they were white! From the time I joined the Labour Party I was aware of wide range of ideologies within it and the careful balancing act needed to make it work. When we quarrelled in the Labour Group in Barnet on the Ugandan Asian issue, I had to confront the racist dimension openly within the Party. I found this intolerable. Was it naïve to expect a left wing party to practise what it preached? On the one hand Party policy was dedicated to equality and by that time, quite openly and widely supported the Anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Yet hidden away there was a colour bar within its ranks. Racism in the party was clearly swept under the carpet when it occurred: at that time, it rankled but it was so unpleasant and difficult to deal with, together with the other problems I faced during that election campaign.

In the months leading up to my election, I held a weekly advice session attended by lots of people, mainly those with housing problems. Some were council tenants but others lived in privately owned condemned housing and they had a desperate need for re-housing. I spoke at trade union meetings in the area and even addressed a couple of factory gate gatherings. We motored around on Saturdays shouting our message through a tannoy system. That was fun and Sid Tierney, the local Member of Parliament, often helped. He was a very active constituency representative who spent most weekends doing constituency work.

However, the swing was really against us and in the end I lost. Locally, that rather poor and corrupt organisation did not help me but it was the national picture that counted most when I lost the safe seat. Inflation was soaring, strikes in all the services were a regular feature of life *and* the government seemed to be losing its grip. Dennis Healey, as Chancellor in a Budget a couple of weeks before polling day, raised National Health charges and thereby ensured a massive swing against Labour. Perhaps by then he was too out of touch to know that his timing would hit Labour just before the local elections.

The voters of Acocks Green gave me the thumbs down. We gave them a leaflet entitled "*25 reasons why you should keep Brum labour*" but they

chose Mr. Ross, a Tory bus driver who lived locally in a Council flat. When they announced the results I was ecstatic – a strange confession, perhaps, but by then I no longer wanted to be a Birmingham Councillor representing Acocks Green. During that day of the election it became clear to me that I would lose- it rained in the afternoon which is a bad omen for a good Labour turn out at the polls. Later that night after the count, I made my speech of defeat but was quite exhilarated anyway. I felt I had changed places with Mr. Rose, the winner, and that I was really the Tory lady from Edgbaston who had won and that he, the working class bloke represented the Labour Party. It was my private celebration of defeat.

I was urged to put my name on to the 'B' list of Parliamentary candidates and might have done so had we continued to live in the Midlands. However, my experiences in that local election lead to a decrease in interest and we had already plans to move on. There was still one further painful political obligation before we moved on from Birmingham.

The Birmingham Community Health Council seemed an innocuous enough body, the watchdog organisation set up to monitor the workings of the health system and I was one of the Labour Party representatives on this body. Other political parties were also there but principally it was made up of experts in the health field. Nevertheless, our group insisted that we caucus before each meeting, imposing party control on the most non-political and seemingly innocent issues which seemed to contradict its spirit.

There was the occasion when I arrived at one of its meetings having failed to attend the caucus beforehand. In my absence, the Caucus had chosen me to nominate a Dr G as Chairperson for the coming year. That was part of the agenda that evening and I was instructed to do a good job in motivating for his election. He was certainly not my choice, I could not stand the man, but my party loyalty had to be the priority. I rationalised that I owed it to the Labour Party but all this was made more embarrassing because I had agreed prior to the meeting with a number of women committee members that a non-political chair should be elected that evening, preferably a woman. I felt quite sickened by this Caucus instruction and had to face those accusing eyes as I mouthed and mumbled my mandate that resulted in the election of this new Chairperson. Immediately afterwards I resigned from the Community Health Council and that was to be my last involvement in politics in Birmingham.

A short time later, thankfully, we moved back to London. It was never the same again, but I had learned a lot about everything in those few years.

CHAPTER 16

RE-CONNECTED - WITH SOUTH AFRICA AGAIN

Family Matters

We returned to live in London at the end of the nineteen-seventies. It was a period of introspection for me, another beginning.
I remember the scene as we moved into the quaint little bungalow we bought in North West London. Escalating property prices in London during our absence nearly priced us out of the market but eventually we moved to Mill Hill, accessible to work and schools. It contrasted dramatically with our first move to London with only a suitcase each and now fifteen years on, we transported a house full of material possessions, rolls of carpets, antiques and books, box after box and even pots of plants were piled on the grassy verge outside.

Emma had passed the entrance exam for North London Collegiate,• a most prestigious girls' school while we were still in Birmingham. I put my reservations about private education aside after Emma's headmistress convinced us of the benefits of a quality education at this school. I did realise then that this step, as happened to other Labour Party politicians, could blow me out of Labour Party politics.

Mill Hill was accessible for Leon to get to work in Dunstable and Luton where he took charge of Labour Relations for Chrysler's large commercial vehicles outlet, but it was not long before the French Company, Renault Trucks bought out this division. Leon had requested this move which enabled us to return to London. I got a morning job teaching slow learners at a neighbourhood school, in Edgware.

The return to London was like a dream come true and after a couple of months I had put the Birmingham out of my mind - we refer to that period as an unfortunate interlude in our lives. Nevertheless, the settling in it was more complicated than I anticipated. I had not realised what a big move this was and once more, I had to start again, older and

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• The illustrious Miss Buss founded the school that now occupied a property, Canons, built around the original house in which Handel lived during his time in London. Miss Buss, together with Miss Beale of Cheltenham Ladies' College fame, were famous in English education –pioneers in quality academic education for girls.
Their names often crop up in quiz games and crossword puzzles!

less confident. Those years of hectic Labour Party activity were over - I had broken the link.

…Then I was overtaken by other concerns and the connection with the past.

It was the time of my father's terminal illness. From the time I left Johannesburg until his death in 1981 I had always been in contact with him. That strong bond made me feel secure; it gave me a warm inner feeling, my signal that he was always there for me. He reinforced this himself. With improved technology, telephone conversations became less difficult and we talked more often. I saw my parents regularly, almost annually, and the regular correspondence kept the thread of continuity going about personal things, family matters and always lots of news about Emma, their only grandchild.

In spite of the closeness of family relationships, as the years passed that South African background, my childhood and adolescence, receded in importance. South Africa was where my parents lived and they kept us informed of important political events that took place. We followed these in the media and I always turned first to the South African news in the newspaper. In the mid 1970's things began to hot up with the Soweto Riots and the murder of Steve Biko. Headline news. But in Mill Hill these were faraway events as we became more integrated into England and it never struck me then that a return to live in South Africa c of ghastly happenings in that repulsive society we had left forever could happen in our lifetime.

I was there in Johannesburg, on my special entry visa, on the 28th August 1981 when my father died. I was not at his bedside at the moment he passed away, just at the point of leaving early in the morning to visit him when the hospital phoned with the news of his death. His suffering had come to an end, which was all I wanted at the time. It left a gaping hole in my life that remains to this day.

"Raising my eyes, I see his screen,
Bending my head, his table clean,
These things are there just as before.
The man who owned them is no more.
Suddenly his spirit has flown
And left me fatherless, alone.

Alone I'm desolate and drear
Severed from the father I revere.
Deep in my heart grief overflows,
But no one knows, no one knows."•

A doctor friend in London had suggested that I take Valium to help me cope. In the circumstances I needed to be strong given that it was eerie in the family home during that period. All through his illness my mother refused to acknowledge that my father was dying. By the time I arrived in August, shortly before his death, she had gone to pieces. There was no food in the flat, it was very cold and with constant power cuts we were mostly frozen and hungry. Her life was quite pitiful; there was no one to care for her needs and because she had kept my father's illness a secret, he too had few visitors and she had little help.

I was truly an outsider, the exile. Barely acknowledged, it underlined in a very deep and personal way the extent of my estrangement from the place of my birth and in my parents' home, where I had once lived. I was beyond the pale. Uncle Bernard Janks made the necessary arrangements for the funeral. My father left instructions for a cremation, but this was difficult to organise as my parents were not members of a Jewish congregation and only the Reform movement recognised cremations as a legitimate Jewish burial. I did not have the courage to suggest that it would have been easier and more appropriate to have a cremation without Jewish rites, considering that my father was a non-believer. I was not consulted. It seemed as though I forfeited that right as an exile. My mother had taken to her bed, as I anticipated.

Six months earlier I visited my father after he had begun his treatment for lung cancer. My entry visa from South Africa House stipulated a 21-day entry visa. The day I arrived in Johannesburg was distressing – I found my father shrunken, pale and brave and later that same day, his sister, Flora, died suddenly. Only a few hours before, while sprawled on the bed I spoke to her for about an hour on the telephone, filling her in with all our news. It was our last conversation because a couple of hours later she had a massive fatal heart attack. I was so devastated by the news - we planned a visit to her the following morning and instead, we went to her daughter's house to help plan her funeral that afternoon.

• Cao Pi, King of Wei, from "Songs of the Immortals," An Anthology of Ancient Poetry.
I found this poem some years ago, copied it out and kept it. I do not have more details about the verse, but I have read it and re-read it over through the years, even as his image fades the memory of my father remains strong.

It was my first meeting in decades with Flora's children, my first cousins who weaved through most of my childhood memories, although considerably older than me. My father had often needed to stand in as locus parentis when needed as their late father was quite feeble.

The following morning I drove my parents to a gathering in Flora's daughter's house to mourn and plan the funeral arrangements. What erupted was a tasteless display of sibling rivalry and hatred, each heaping abuse the one upon the other, each in fact blaming the other for the death of their mother. The two sisters blamed their brother and insisted that his in-laws should play no role in the Jewish tradition of carrying the coffin to its resting place. My father, his voice thin and in pain, eventually restored some dignity and took control of organising the arrangements for his sister's funeral.

My father was too weak to attend the funeral but at the graveside, I broke down and openly sobbed. I had been very fond of my Auntie Flora but knew this was the dress rehearsal and soon my beloved father would also die. It was also the first time in twenty years that I met members of our large family.

And indeed that is just how it happened. Six months later my father died, and many of the same relatives were at his cremation and at the prayers we held after the funeral. I insisted we observe this Jewish custom – my only contribution – because it gave a larger number of people the opportunity of paying their last respects to my father. My mother and I were present with the men saying the prayers lead by a Rabbi. We sat to one side against the wall, the next of kin, there were no other women in the same room and they were scattered in other rooms, as is the Jewish custom. As I looked around at the men present, standing with their prayer books, I knew that I would probably never meet them again. So while it was adieu for my father, it was effectively that for me too.

A bundle of my father's effects were returned from the hospital - his glasses, slippers and pyjamas. I sorted these out and took them in a bag to discard in the large dustbins at the back of the building. It was a symbolic gesture too, throwing away my father's personal possessions. I walked away from bins, and then turned to look back. There I saw an old African man rummaging through the bin taking out those things of my father's he could use. It was a potent reminder in my grief of where I was.

Schreiner Badhuza, personal assistant and friend of my father who worked for him for some years, came to tea to personally express his condolences. He had attended the funeral but wanted also to meet me because of shared beliefs and comrades. It was quite emotional to see him again, a presence from that past, and to exchange news and views.

The South African Government operated with petty spite on the question of my entry visas. Although I had appealed for an open entry visa to cover this period of my father's illness, knowing it to be terminal and backed these with medical reports, I was given specific dates of entry. It was clear that once classed as their enemy your sentence was for life and all these years later they would not let up. My first visa was for three weeks from 15th December 1980 and the second was for a month from 20th August 1981. I applied for the second visa at the end of June and was eventually told by South Africa House in London that the delay in my receiving it was because of the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles. I never bothered to query such an excuse. How else can one react to people who behave like that?

Those visits to South Africa unbalanced my notions of my new found British identity. I think that after my father's death my perception of myself as British began to shift as I slowly came to realise that my roots really belonged in South Africa.

That deep involvement in British politics through the sixties and seventies had given me great pleasure and fulfilment. It was also the opportunity to reduce the pain of severance. I scattered my father's ashes to the wind in Braamfontein but it underpinned my connection with South Africa.

I drove around Johannesburg in my father's old car and visited all the places of my childhood, the houses and the schools. I retraced the routes I had used and my old haunts. It had an unreal feel, as though it had all happened in another life, to another person. So much had changed. New roads bisected old localities and new buildings replaced the old. Nothing was left unchanged in Johannesburg; only the atmosphere remained of the buccaneering city, swaggering and violent.

It was a time of grief that I could never express properly. The distress of the death, the time leading up to it and the time after was unreal for me. I was there, another strange person acting out a part: the foreign daughter of Dink Borkum, someone British, charming and elegant, who had 'come out for the funeral.' To the family I had never been a part of them; it

was as though I was part of another life my father might have once had in England. I was treated with reserve and distance. Then I returned to the other place where I now lived, my other country, where mostly no one had known him or cared.

My mother continued to live alone in Johannesburg for two years and then she came to live with us. She was bereft without my father who had cared and nourished her. She was pleased to leave. She did not complain or mourn openly, rather she retreated into herself.

Living in London again

In the next few years I searched for something meaningful to do besides my job but it was a period of restlessness as I went from one thing to another. I would become very involved and committed to something, then tire of it and drop out. I was quite restless.

I stood for the Council again in a no-hope seat to help out – it was thought my Jewish name would draw in a large Jewish vote in Edgware, an outer suburb of London. But the voters were more interested to know what Labour was doing for Israel than local issues such as housing and library facilities that I was no help to the Labour cause. The campaign was enjoyable, mostly because I knew it was not winnable and I was giving support.

Actually, local politics had changed and I found it less interesting. Was it burn out? Before we left Birmingham, I applied for a senior position in a London Citizens' Advice Bureau. I was short-listed and during the subsequent interview, I stressed my political neutrality. This was a prerequisite for the job but to my surprise, the interviewing panel diagnosed my neutrality, as disillusionment and I did not get the job. Their interpretation of where I stood on the political spectrum was a revelation!

I retreated from active participation in the Labour Party, only helping at election times and became more involved with the South African struggle. Then I applied to formalise my membership of the ANC.

I became active in the National Union of Teachers. I was the school representative (the shop steward) in my school and began to attend union meetings regularly. The Tory Government wanted to change the state

education system. Keith Joseph, Margaret Thatcher's guru, was Secretary for Education and teachers' pay was being held down. This was the era of anti-unionism in Britain, the time of the Miner's Strike. I remember a packed meeting of teachers in the Hendon Odeon Cinema where after the vote to strike, a speaker prophetically predicted that if the Miners could not win, then the teachers had no hope.

I took another degree in education. I joined a group of practising teachers and got a grant from the Council for the degree course. They were much younger than me but we all bonded together and endured the rigours of part-time study. I got a first class pass that proved there was a bonus in being a mature student. Ironically, after that success I reassessed whether I wanted to spend any more time in education and decided to resign.

But what turned out to my final fling in the teaching profession and as part of my union activity, I paid another visit to Eastern Europe, this time to East Berlin. These visits to communist countries broadened and darkened my being - they were of such significance to me that I never forgot them either. This time I was part of a National Union of Teachers delegation of about twenty London teachers , guests of our opposite numbers.

CHAPTER 17

TRIP TO EAST BERLIN

I have included an account of this visit because East Berlin is no more, a disappeared place, the German Democratic Republic with its education and political system has gone, damned now, integrated into one German State. Strange too, because in 1987, on that visit in the Spring Half Term months before I quit teaching, one could not have predicted that changes were just around the corner. The occasion of the visit was to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the existence of Berlin as a city. I was part of a National Union of Teacher's group from London invited to share that event with our East German colleagues.

I carried a huge part of my own history with me on that trip. Alain de Botton• said of journeys that they enabled one to have an internal conversation where a quaint correlation forms between what is in front of you and the perspective collected and carried around over the years.

In my collection of papers in a box file labelled 'East Berlin' I kept the record of our itinerary, my diary, our report and the views of the group at that time in 1987. We were quite a mixed gathering of teachers from London, some teachers of German and politically, several progressives, the others apolitical. What is interesting to find in those diaries was how many in the group were quite open minded about their expectations of East Berlin. I could not describe my attitude in those terms.

A very rigorous itinerary was planned to keep us going from morning till late visiting schools, universities, factories and all the important places of interest that sightseers normally visit. I came away with a very detailed picture of life and education in East Berlin. I had retained a lifelong interest in life in the communist world but as The Holocaust remained part of my collective memory, until then I had avoided visiting any part of Germany.

It was on Sunday 24th April 1987 that we arrived at the Airport in West Berlin. From there a coach drove us eastwards across glitzy West Berlin and then suddenly, we caught sight of the Wall covered with graffiti, and all sorts of images swarmed around. It was still such an important part

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• Alain de Bottom (2002) "The art of travel" (Penguin Books)

of contemporary life that I was not sure what I expected to see or feel but Check Point Charlie was my biggest surprise – it was so very ordinary, and I didn't register anything particularly sinister about it. We all stared at the endless barrier as we sat in our air-conditioned coach waiting for our passports to be processed.

On the east side there were no graffiti on the wall. It didn't much matter because the wall remained, and we were to find that it continued to be the focal point in our minds at any rate, throughout our visit.

"It was a long drive to Muggellsee, where we stayed in a lovely hotel on a lake and en route the driver pointed out places of interest. I was surprised that people in the streets on that hot Sunday afternoon were well dressed in an old fashioned way. I expected to see them dressed in the style I had encountered in Prague and Moscow in 1963."

Monday – our first day:

"*Our induction to the city began by watching two films on the construction which showed that in 1945 about 80% of Berlin was destroyed and the great majority of buildings around us now were relatively recently built. The town planner gave us an overview of the city using a vast model to point out significant buildings, places, reconstructions, past use etc. He then guided us through the city on a bus tour, through slums as well as newly reconstructed parts, of which they were rightly proud. Except for Alexanderplatz all other important landmarks had been reconstructed to look as they were before.*

For the German Democratic Republic life began in 1945 which made it nearly impossible to find ghosts of Hitler. The heroes of Communism were celebrated – a prominent pair of statues of Marx and Engels, Karl Leipnecht Bridge (scene of his brutal death) and of course, a statue of Thaelman, the prominent Communist leader at the time of Hitler's accession.

That evening we gathered to listen to hear the Deputy Burgomaster of Berlin and other 'big wigs' give the official political perspective. Then there was a question and answer session and our mealy-mouthed polite British group restricted their comments to bland references to welfare issues. This was so typical of them that I decided to change the tone and asked the following:

"*In view of the fact that the E/W Berlin issue has been the focus of the Cold War for so many years, I would like to know what the GDR in general, and Berlin in particular, is doing to improve their relations with West Berlin?"*

I wrote this question in my diary and the Germans on the panel became quite defensive, each asking the other to add something to the answer given by the previous speaker so that the discussion went on and on.

I summed it up as a good first day. Our German hosts were meticulously punctual and correct. They were also most hospitable.

"Of course we always recognised them as cultivated but their dedication to the communist system was quite overwhelming."

The next day began at the observation platform at the Wall. It was probably my most interesting experience of the trip as I stood at the flashpoint of east/west tensions, at the Wall, and looked over it to the other side. In reality it was only looking at the other side of Berlin, West Berlin. It was hard to reconcile the real object that looked so 'ordinary' with our objections to it. One does not often encounter such important symbols in our day-to-day life. Yet its presence dominated the lives of everyone in Berlin, East and West. We stood on the one side, the east, and looked at spectators on the other side gawking at us in return. They were Japanese and I wondered whom they thought we were on the eastern side looking across at them in the 'Free World.'

A slide show followed led by a young, very able and handsome military captain. He showed us trophies taken from people attempting to cross the wall. Some in our group afterwards accepted the inevitability of the Wall to make the GDR sustainable but, typically British, they could not accept there was no free travel! The captain didn't convince me, not because I was convinced by the Western version of West Berlin as the essence of the 'Free World'. Whatever the context, the Wall went with us everywhere we went."

The focus of the visit then switched and we listened to a serious and wide-ranging lecture on the structure of the education system in the GDR. I made copious notes. It was quite different from what we were used to and we were all convinced the communist education system would be superior to ours in London. For a start, crèches were provided for about 70-75% of pre-3 year old children. The kindergarten came next and all parents were entitled to use this for children over 3 years old. What an

advance on the British system! 95% of parents in East Berlin took advantage of these facilities and both the crèche and kindergarten were voluntary. From aged six, school going was compulsory and by 1965 there was a fixed ten-year compulsory school attendance.

Emile Durkheim, the father of modern Sociology, maintained that schools were society in miniature with similar hierarchy, rules and expectations to the outside world. This was overwhelmingly clear in the East German Communist system of schooling.

I wrote the following in my diary:

"The emphasis in the GDR education system was that school must be closely connected to life. From childhood, the pupil must be acquainted with work, as a part of life and learn about the effort to produce something. These were important changes for us to note because in the East German system pupils from the 7th grade spent five hours per week in an agricultural or industrial concern. By the 9th and 10th grades, they would be in the process of integration into a local enterprise. The pupils were free to choose the direction they wanted.

The 10th grade examinations determined the direction the pupils took. Would it be vocational training or the extended school period that led to the equivalent of the British 'A' levels'? Because their system provided enough places pupils knew in advance exactly where they would be going the following September.

All boys underwent military training in the last two years of education. The GDR believed this to be necessary as they were surrounded by other armed countries and particularly, NATO.

An interesting and central part was the division of schools where tremendous emphasis was placed on schools for the very talented, whether in maths, foreign languages, music, physics or sport. From the 9th grade the special school accepted pupils in all these subjects and additional exams would be taken. Here was the clue why there were so many outstanding musicians and athletes in such a small population. They were being singled out for special coaching, as diplomats and adverts for their country and its political system.

By the same token there were special schools for the physically and mentally handicapped. The emphasis was quite different from our own and even pupils from a deaf school had no opportunity of attending

university. The one I visited was poorly equipped in an old dilapidated building. There was far less know-how than anything I had been used to.

As the East German education system emphasised achievement, those with disabilities were treated as second class. The Germans rejected the British position, which favoured, wherever possible, the integration of all children into the same school.

The following days were spent visiting schools. Some of the interesting and distinctive features I noted were:

The Oberschuler 'Cuba' School had 400 pupils who were responsible for cleaning their classrooms and each class had its political leader. Lunch and breakfast were available for everyone. Every class was expected to grow to a collective and the class teacher managed this by getting to know the parents and the home. This could be very helpful in monitoring progress but there was a political overtone as well. The political system, allied with a topic called "lessons on living together" featured on the curriculum throughout the school. An aspect mostly missing in London schools, and which we all noted with some envy was the emphasis on good behaviour and friendship.

We sat in on a number of lessons and there were none of the discipline problems we experienced in London but we did not have that formality in the style of teaching. Younger children had far less equipment in comparison to our own well-resourced education system. We could not get our German colleagues to accept our concepts of mixed ability teaching. Even at the senior level, libraries had fewer books and fewer textbooks. We had all believed – and that included me – that their education system would be superior to that of inner city schools in London.

The Young Pioneers always wore their scarves. It distinguished them from the others. The Pioneers of this school were contributing towards the 'struggle' in Nicaragua. They were certainly the elite corps and the Palace of Pioneers offered excellent facilities for developing hobbies and skills. It seemed as though everyone aimed to belong. Was this the youth wing of the communist party and the breeding ground for the sinister Security Police, the Stasi?

The technical school was attached to a factory and boys and girls learned how to handle tools.

Pupils learned here to become familiar with production, as their education was to shape an all-round integrated socialist personality. Their tuition was also geared to provide them with employment when they finished school. We examined the special textbooks and the syllabus based on the theoretical findings of Marx, applied in a practical way. We watched pupils making things.

Most Berliners lived in flats built from prefabricated units – not attractive, but they did provide satisfactory homes at a reasonable cost to an enormous number of people. The housing estates with a large number of new flats were being constructed each year, and they incorporated schools, shops and other community facilities. They did not seem as depressed and run-down as similar estates in London at that time.

The Chamber Concert at the Conservatoire was a lovely part of the trip. We listened to really talented young musicians perform, the virtuosi performers of the future. At the end I gave the vote of thanks on behalf of our group and we went away for dinner. One of our teachers remained behind to make contact with a performer who had especially impressed him, and then Mr. Kruger noted his absence at the restaurant and rushed off to find him. The teacher was in deep conversation with this aspiring artist who paled as Mr. Kruger told him off sternly in German. Presumably unscheduled meetings were frowned upon because the persistent teacher tried the following day to visit this student at his home, but he was asked by his parents to leave. It was unwise to meet, they said.

There were more school visits and tours to Potsdam. My written record faded to odd sentences. I had got tired of writing.

I wondered about anti-Semitism. Was it really dead? In a revue we attended, a very forties style American style razzmatazz in a large theatre rather like the London Palladium it was noted afterwards by our German speaking colleagues that there had been a sketch with anti-Semitic jokes featuring a stereotypical old Jewish man with beard and hat. They were shocked but I had missed it not understanding German. We took it up with our hosts but the official view was we had misunderstood what was said. I suppose we all drew our own conclusions...

Finally there was the Warsaw Pact meeting in East Berlin and all the Soviet block leaders were present, including Mikael Gorbachev.

Our group left our lunch unfinished in the cellar of The Red Town Hall to shout 'Gorby Gorby' as he went past in a darkened and stretched black limousine. All the traffic had been cleared and we were the only people to cheer. The German bystanders watched us in amazement. It was the time of Perestroika. I suppose we supported him, hoping he would bring in some new world order, but it was also about letting off steam after a week in this very controlled society.

A year later I sponsored Esmy Berlt, my German interpreter on a week's visit to London. I had to vouch for her. We have remained in touch over the years but at that time no one had heard of an East German getting a travel visa! I suppose times were changing. On Esmy's visit to London I was amazed how positive she remained as I took her around. I expected her to make comparisons, to criticise the lack of consumer goods in East Berlin or perhaps the reverse, to extol the virtues of her system. She did neither and once vaguely said with longing as she stood beside me in a greengrocer, that she missed the fresh produce so easily available in London. Two years later she came back to Britain as a citizen of a re-unified Germany, her self-censorship gone, and she told a very different story of her life. I always admired her dignity and restraint as well as her extensive knowledge of English literature. In 2004 I went back to Berlin and met Esmy Berlt again. Alas, our time together was too short. Now she talked warmly of reunification, blamed most of the past excesses on the Russians, but I detected also a slight nostalgia for that lost world of East Berlin, that had been for her so certain and enclosed.

An unintended consequence of this trip was my decision to take up photography. I was so disappointed by the pictures I took in East Berlin. I owned only a basic camera and tried most unsuccessfully to take lots of pictures to commemorate this exceptional visit. I had been particularly struck by a weird and wonderful double statue of a seated Karl Marx, with Frederic Engels standing beside him. This was in Alexanderplatz and I wanted so much to preserve the memory of that pair.

I decided now to learn how to take decent pictures. I subsequently became quite passionate about photography and after acquiring a sophisticated Nikon camera I enrolled at the Central London Polytechnic to do a black and white course in photography. That was the beginning. In the next few years I did course after course, ending with a string of

City and Guild Diplomas in different modules. There were landscape, fashion, colour, portraiture and studio work.

Over the next few years I took a large number of mostly arty, black and white images, lots on travels in China, India, Egypt and particularly in France. It was at the time too when photography was gaining prominence as an art form and there were special exhibitions of the works of eminent photographers.

The interest in photography started on that trip to East Berlin, which I so much wanted to record. But when I returned to Alexanderplatz in July 2004 with more skills and better tools to take my own ‘definitive’ pictures of Marx and Engels, the statue was gone. It had been removed. That world had changed.

PART 3

CHAPTER 18

THE ANC IN LONDON

My first ANC meeting of the 'Barnet Unit' was not a friendly warm experience. Held at Babette Brown's house in North Finchley, there was a certain reserve, a silence that asked the question: where had I been in the intervening years and even now? These remained unanswered; I had decided in advance to brazen out any hostility, perhaps a natural reaction in the circumstances. However, if I was supposed to feel guilt, I felt only their vibes of suspicion - and the questioning faces with the silent 'why has she come?' I said nothing.

Many political exiles remained close over the years and retained intact their South African identity. However, many others had slipped away into Britain and not formally joined the ANC when it launched itself in the UK as a membership organisation open to all races. In later years when I served on its various Regional Committees some quite unexpected people applied to join, surprising because I thought they would always have been members. Sneering remarks would be made about 'coming out of the woodwork', like when Monty Berman joined shortly before he returned to South Africa. Freda Katz advised us in advance that he would attend his first meeting in her flat so that the bitching took place before he arrived. I always kept quiet.

From the beginning, I put personalities to one side and repeatedly told myself it was the cause that brought me into the membership and so kept the focus on the larger issue, the struggle. I refused to let the 'comrades' get me down. Experience in the Labour Party had toughened me so I would go to ANC meetings and briefings, often sitting on my own with no one talking to me. There were cliques and it seemed 'newcomers' like me were not welcome. I later discovered many feuds; people were tired of each other and in some cases, quite burnt out. Exile had not been kind, to everyone.

It took such a long time, years, to get my ANC membership approved. As an underground organisation I realised that processing membership would be thorough and lengthy, but not that long. I applied in the era of

Solly Smith, then Chief ANC Representative in London who was reputed to be inefficient and regularly drunk on the one hand, and later denounced as a security agent. Such a long time passed that I had forgotten about it when I was called to meet the vetting committee. Later I heard that many other people waited for years to get their applications approved.

That interview with the vetting committee in the mid-eighties was unpleasant. Ronnie Press was quick to raise the question of our non-participation in the organisation in recent years. I stressed that I was there to become a member, not to participate in any post mortem. I asked the committee to decide whether I, Lorna Levy, was suitable or not to become a member? The other members of the committee agreed with this approach and endorsed my membership. It was my first encounter with Ronnie Press and although we later worked together, I have not forgotten the ugly scene he tried to stage in that first meeting.

Secrecy underlined everything we did. We would change our meeting venues each month because of the spies and 'dirty tricksters' around London. Everything happened on a 'need to know' basis; it became a habitual way of behaviour, which continued, unnecessarily into the new future.

I was aware from the start that there was another forum, that higher magic circle I referred to earlier, where decisions and discussions took place on a similar agenda to ours. This was the South African Communist Party (SACP), powerful and influential, with hard working and committed members. I knew certain people to be Party members, they always had been but it took some time to establish who the other members were as they were silent about their Party commitment. After all, it was an illegal organisation but I was certain there were Party members who still enjoyed other advantages through their membership, rewards for their unflinching beliefs. When in the late eighties and communism could be seen to begin to crumble, the SACP began, quietly, to lose some of its most prominent members and a lot of its power. The invincibility of the communist system eventually died.

It was the Soweto Riots of schoolchildren in 1976 that brought South Africa back into sharp focus when the political scene changed to one of violent anger, and transformation became a reality. Day after day the British media carried reports of riots, strikes, arrests and violent deaths of

prisoners in detention. As the disturbances increased with time so the struggle against apartheid became increasingly one of the main items of news of the day. The South African government was increasingly losing its ability to exert that rigid control of the previous decades.

What would I have done had I not been drawn towards South African liberation politics in the eighties? I may have returned to study or found a completely different career, or perhaps I would have just drifted into idle middle age. Because my choice of total immersion in the South African struggle in London at that time then completely changed my direction.

I became increasingly involved with the ANC. It did not take a lot to re-ignite that passion for a liberated South Africa without apartheid. I had always supported the cause and it returned to the forefront of my life. Very soon after joining the 'unit,' I became its Secretary and worked at this quite diligently.

ANC membership was only open to South Africans and covered a huge age range. We were all colours. There were always newcomers who came to England to join that long settled exiled core. Some were younger exiles that left to escape army duty and there were always students on scholarships studying at British institutions so that we did receive a lot of fresh ideas and current news. We divided into geographical units around London and there were branches in parts of England where South Africans had congregated.•

The main structure was not the membership but the Mission, made up of ANC 'professionals' appointed by Headquarters of and President Oliver Tambo. Mendi Msimang was the Chief Representative in London from the mid 1980's. This Mission was the central focus of the organisation and the membership liaised with it. For some time I acted as the membership representative on what we called the 'Office committee' which formulated policy for the whole region. Mendi always chaired these meetings and was very much in control. Little debate or different opinions emerged in that forum.

In the 1980's there were a number of groupings that formed the framework of the South African struggle in the London that I became a

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• Roger Fieldhouse (2005) "Anti Apartheid, A History of the movement in Britain "(Merlin) states that in 1992 the British branch of the ANC had approximately 400 members, of whom 123 were active members. Over half of the 'lived in London.' At that time, there were three units in London, one in Manchester, Brighton and the South West of England.

part. It was an exciting time and even from the distance of London, we felt that cataclysmic changes were on the way.

As part of the Mission, Dennis Goldberg, released after 22 years imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial, ran a commercial enterprise for the ANC. He operated from well-organised premises in Islington, from where he sold ANC memorabilia such as T-shirts, flags and badges. At first there was a demand for these and he meticulously sent out orders around the country to shops that catered for an 'alternative' clientele, or arranged stalls at fairs or public meetings. The business flagged after 1991 when Britain went into recession and people no longer had any spare cash to buy t-shirts. It amazed me how he undertook this work with such enthusiasm; Dennis was much admired and respected by the wider British population and as the ANC spokesperson in London in the years before 1994, he was a frequent voice on radio and TV.

Until she relocated to Lusaka, Gil Marcus was a key figure in London where she successfully compiled a weekly news bulletin of key events relevant to 'the struggle' that kept interested people up to date with extracts from newspapers and other sources.

The Defence and Aid Fund played a pivotal role with Canon Collins as the principal figure behind it. By the eighties, it was large and had separated into two organisations; Ethel de Keyser ran the British section quite separately. A large number of exiled South Africans worked for the International Defence and Aid Fund. Countless defendants owed their proper defence in the Courts to the money raised by this organisation and it devised circuitous ways and means of smuggling monies to a network of sympathetic but unknown people within South Africa who then helped to sustain the families of jailed freedom fighters.

There were scholarship funds administered from the UK that assisted countless African students from South Africa receive first-class education in the UK and other European countries.

The Anti Apartheid Movement started in the early sixties and generations of British people cut their political teeth in that movement. Decade after decade British people marched across London and the UK to protest about conditions in South Africa.

"It had achieved one immense success in helping to force apartheid into the public consciousness. From being an unpronounceable foreign word describing an obscure practice in a far-off country, 'apartheid' had

become the epitome of an evil political system in the minds of many people, not only in Britain but in many countries." •

Mike Terry, its Secretary for many years, provided outstanding leadership and facilitated the Anti Apartheid Movement's extension into many other countries as well. Although there was always a South African presence, this was essentially a British based movement always supported by the radical-left movement – all the Labour leaders of the time were supporters and would speak at its rallies and public meetings. This was true of other political leaders such as sometime French President Francois Mitterand and US President Bill Clinton.

Steve Biko's appalling death in detention galvanised the civilised world. His death and the brutal police treatment of the protesting school children were a focus of protest among Anti- Apartheid Groups in Britain. The official enquiry into Biko's death inspired a play in which Albert Finney took a leading role and Richard Attenborough's film, 'Cry Freedom' was screened worldwide. In an unprecedented way, the world became conscious of the dangers to those vigorously opposing apartheid.

When F.W.de Klerk became South Africa's last white President in 1989, he embarked on a 'radical new approach' when he told Parliament on 2nd February 1990 that the ANC would be unbanned and political prisoners released.

From exile, the ANC brought about the Harare Declaration in August 1989, adopted by the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations laid a basis for a non-racial multi- party democracy, an entrenched Bill of Rights and a mixed economy. It also provided for an interim government to administer the country and supervise the first elections under a new constitution.

We watched the release from prison on TV of the white haired Walter Sisulu and the other Rivonia Trialists on 15 October 1989. What a moment to see them attend unmolested a welcome home rally in Soweto. Was this the first public meeting of the ANC in thirty years? We knew also that Government leaders were meeting with Mandela and many

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•Fieldhouse Roger (2005) op cit. p.62
*Davenport & Saunders (2000) op. cit. p.514

important discussions were taking place between the exiled leadership, then in their headquarters in Lusaka, and leading South Africans.

I was on a trip to India on 11th February, the day of the release of Nelson Mandela. I picked up The 'Times of India' pushed under the door of the hotel room in New Delhi to read the banner headlines – "Mandela to be released today!" I celebrated by going on a shopping spree and later, on Indian TV that evening, saw that now famous walk of the free Mandela with Winnie beside him. The next day, at that great monument of Britain's colonial power in India, the Gateway to India, in Delhi, a procession of school children congregated carrying with them flags and portraits of the young Mandela, marching and singing. It was their celebration. A photograph I took at the time proclaimed - 'Prometheus is unbound.'

I witnessed this historic event, far away from base. Most of the world commemorated the release of Mandela, an exhilarating moment to savour; now the dream of a lifetime could begin to take shape.

Soon afterwards the ANC itself changed its structure. In the United Kingdom, we now became a branch with a new constitution and our own bank account. Our members took meetings very seriously and we would include a briefing session.
I was the Unit representative on the Branch committee that met monthly to formulate our policy for the UK. These meetings could last for hours on Saturday, over long; sometimes we described them as democracy by exhaustion. Eventually in order to go home you felt you would agree to anything to get the meeting to end.

Dennis Goldberg was my first Chairperson of the Unit who talked incessantly but when Ronnie Press took over, he would often join in the argument himself on one side or the other. Johnnie Sachs, our last Chairperson, ruled the meetings with a rod of iron, rather like a strict schoolmaster. He was the only chairperson to interest himself in the agenda. I would hand a prepared list of items for discussion on the evening to the chairperson when we arrived.

During 1990 the process of change began properly. Part of the statement of the unbanning process was an indemnity granted to exiles and the exiled leadership returned home. From then onwards, a stream of leaders who came through London to lobby and campaign - they would brief our Branch on developments and the progress in the negotiations. Crowds of 'comrades' attended these meetings, particularly when people

like Chris Hani or Thabo Mbeki were speaking. Mandela came to London lobbying for the retention of sanctions until the ANC gave the word. At the special ANC meeting for him, an enormous crowd turned out and it was difficult to know whom all the people were.

We could never be sure how many members we had. There was the obvious way of calculating the number of people assigned to Units who attended meetings and paid their subscriptions. However, there were other supporters, not in a unit, who would suddenly appear when there was an important function. Our membership lists were further complicated because we also worked from a couple of large lists, two different databases of names and addresses, with information on some of them that bore little relation to the people we knew. When the Branch became responsible for its own finances and with the movement of people out of the UK, we became more aware of who the 'live' members were. This often caused deep resentment when someone showed up at an overcrowded briefing and had his/ her membership challenged. There were among us those 'sticklers', bureaucrats, who were quite prepared to cause ugly scenes rather than admit someone who by identification and loyalty believed themselves to be members of the ANC. You may have gone to prison for the cause, or be an activist in South Africa and be on a short stay in Britain, as a student perhaps. However, if the right persons did not give you the correct nod, you could find yourself being humiliated and challenged.

A lot of South Africans wanted to join the ANC once it was unbanned, after 1990. We did have quite a lot of new and young members and now I was a member of the vetting committee. We relaxed the joining criteria somewhat but needed still to be cautious. There were some very undesirable people around and there were occasions when we received applications from people who were unable to name two referees, ANC members to vouch for them. We heard via the grapevine that a diplomat at South Africa House had indicated he was keen to join the ANC. This threw us into a tizzy but fortunately, his application never materialised.

Many South African exiles were cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. I always told myself that we organised beautiful funerals, so dignified and painful. There would be many suitable tributes and messages, singing and the flowers. Freda Katz' coffin was draped in the ANC flag with a huge display of Cape flowers. Her funeral was an appropriate tribute to a tireless worker who did not survive the stroke she had in the ANC offices. We later held a special memorial meeting for her at the TUC in Great Russell Street. Jai Singh was so young to die,

the dynamic headmaster and chairperson of our Unit. He too had a heroes send off.

It was Mendi Msimang the Chief Representative, called 'Chief' by many, who controlled the organisation in the UK. There is an exquisite counterpoise in the changes of venue and status that eventually took place. It was heart-warming for all of us in London when Mendi became the ANC's first High Commissioner in London. He moved out of those offices in Penton Street, Islington that had been the target of a bombing incident, planned probably in South Africa House.• Mendi took up his position as Chief of South Africa House in the panelled sombre office facing directly onto Trafalgar Square, with one of the best views of London! He kissed hands with the Queen dressed in a morning suit and drove back from Buckingham Palace in a carriage driven by a number of horses.

South Africa House had a special significance for us all. Over the decades, it had been the focus of anti- apartheid demonstrations for more than thirty years. We all knew, change would happen one day, but who could have said in whose lifetime?

The ANC Mission was part of its Department of International Affairs, headed by Thabo Mbeki. By the 1990's, the ANC had established a network of missions all over the world. They were in effect Shadow Embassies and Foreign Offices were talking to them.

Mendi has always been close to the centre of power.• He started his working life in the offices of Mandela & Tambo's legal practice in the fifties. All through the years of exile he was part of ANC structures in Africa, India and London. Now in these final years, he was a member of the NEC and organised a large international conference of anti apartheid forces in Johannesburg. He would frequently be part of negotiating teams that met with leaders around the world.

I learned a lot from Mendi, a cuddly uncle with a hard centre. He had that combination of qualities often found in leaders of the ANC, always courteous and affable blended with utter determination and if need be, ruthlessness.

•After the bombing, Scotland Yard designed a security system, wide range and rigid, to withstand further attacks.

• After he completed his term of office as the High Commissioner in London, Misimang returned to Johannesburg and was then elected the National Treasurer of the ANC until the Conference in Polokwane in 2007.

Every morning in the basement of those Penton Street offices, all the mail needed opening to check for bombs. One day among my post was a personal poison letter, anonymous and so full of hate. I reeled with shock as I read it. I took it into Mendi's office and nearly burst into tears. He had already read it. It castigated him also for promoting me. Who had written it? Mendi was quite dismissive of the letter: "Anybody who hides behind anonymity should be completely discarded and ignored," he firmly told me. "Bin it and think no further about it." Afterwards I walked around Upper Street, quite dazed but I decided to say nothing about the letter to anyone and took his advice. *

Information would come into the Mission by email and by fax and hour-by-hour, day-by-day the developments taking place in South Africa would roll out of one or other machine. On computer, we picked up all the South African Press Association (SAPA) information.

The two parts of the ANC – the Mission and the membership had a formal liaison committee and if there were an important function, meeting or a campaign to run, both structures would work together. Our method of organisation was mostly chaotic, best described as 'crisis management' but luckily, things always came right on the day. Later in 1993, we organised huge and impressive Memorial Meetings after the death of both Chris Hani and Oliver Tambo, the one held in the TUC and the other in St James's Church, Piccadilly.

I threw myself into these various activities with enthusiasm and there were those around who lamented that they no longer had those reserves of energy. Too much had happened over the years. Perhaps because I had cut myself off from South Africa for such a long time, I now retained the best of memories and possibilities that motivated me. In "Lost in Translation"•, Eva Hoffman talks of her childhood in Poland:

"For a long time after the emigration, Poland remained an idealised landscape of the mind. Because I had loved and lost it, because I had been cut off from it summarily it seemed, irrevocably, it stayed in my imagination as a land of childhood sensuality, lyricism, vividness and human warmth."

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* I never found out who wrote that letter.

• Eva Hoffman(1989) "Lost in translation" (Minerva)

We were in constant touch with South Africa and there were many new developments. The Branch in London sent delegates to attend the first ANC Conference in Durban. The message of the Conference was to campaign for the setting up of an interim Government and the halt of violence. Bit by bit sanctions were lifted during 1991. Consistent with ANC policy, we campaigned against their premature lifting and argued that they stay in place until the move to a proper democracy was irreversibly in place. Proper negotiations only began at the end of 1991 and it took another two and a half years until the democratic election.

CHAPTER 19

"VOTES FOR FREEDOM"

I became rooted in the ANC Mission in Penton Street. It started quite casually as I remember it, as I just arrived and volunteered to help; from then for the last few years of its existence in exile, I was there every day often until quite late in the evening. Before that I had visited the Mission on official business through my secretary ship of the Branch, and to represent it on various structures; then gradually my stay became formalised and afterwards, I had an office and duties. It was an exhilarating period; what good fortune to end my years in London, a participant in the process of the graduation of the ANC from back-street exile status to the embassy in waiting.

During 1992, the ANC set up a fund, 'Votes for Freedom', to collect money in the UK for the first democratic election and it was in that area that I eventually established myself. Mendi Msimang set up a special organising committee for the fund with the acronym, CRAC, the Chief Representative's Action Committee. Typical of the times, this was the small 'inner committee' which took the effective decisions while the larger FRAG, Fundraising Advisory Group was a group of people with 'know how' about fund raising. They were mostly British fundraisers, professionals, who advised on strategy but not all their recommendations were accepted. To begin, I was on the larger committee, and then Mendi included me in this small inner committee. This was 'judged' as promotion by people in that office; they always looked over their shoulder to see who was going where, forwards or backwards. Competition seemed fierce but I did not give this much attention. Many of them were sick of each other; soured after too many years of struggle. They were played out. Fortunately, I had another life before, now I welcomed the historical changes of the day as they took place.

We planned a major strategy around a splendid reception for Nelson Mandela. It was a glittering fund raising event early in 1993, at the Dorchester Hotel and sponsored by Centurion Press. None of us had ever organised such a grand occasion before - it was to be the public launch of Mandela in Britain, a massive undertaking that needed meticulous planning. We established an extensive database of potential donors and for this occasion, the great, good and powerful of the UK were invited. Four of us inspected suitable venues for the event and the

Dorchester with its special security features designed to cater for heads of state, was my preference rather than the elegant Reform Club. The special concealed entrance in a side street would be a prudent step to protect Mandela's arrival and departure in a visit intended to take place shortly after Chris Hani's assassination.

The professionals' advised that the function be used as a conscience raising one with no attempt to collect funds. This strategy was meant to act as the prelude to further approaches for money after we assessed the 'friendliness' of our guests. I thought we would miss a golden opportunity to raise a large amount of money but agreed to they would know best.

Nearly everyone we asked responded positively to our invitation. It was my job to do the invitations, the initial phoning and then writing out the names of the guests by hand on the embossed cards with a black italic pen. Most of the invited came. I dealt with the guest list and received fulsome apologies from those unable to attend. On the night, the glittering ballroom of the Dorchester filled; it seemed like a roll call of faces well known in British public life.

Around that time the mode of dress in Penton Street changed. An imperceptible change came over the office and suddenly, the men wore ties; the days of the embassy in waiting had dawned. Certainly, for the occasion at the Dorchester, everyone was in a dark suit – only Richard Branson arrived without a tie. One of our ushers asked whether we should let him in – fortunately, I was standing nearby and recognised Branson!

Before the function proper, in an adjoining room, there was a special meeting of trade union leaders assembled to discuss their role in assisting the ANC in the forthcoming election. It had been my task to telephone all the major union general secretaries personally to invite them to this other function as well, and virtually every prominent trade union leader was present.

Arthur Scargill, then controversial and abrasive leader of the Mineworkers Union, arrived late. I opened the door to usher him into the room where the trade union meeting was already under way. He looked in and turned back to me. "I won't go in," he said "I can't stand them." I then needed to keep company this most egotistical and unpleasant man until the function proper began. He was an idol to

many but personally, I had never liked his style and there in the flesh I liked him even less.

The evening was splendid: already to many of the most sophisticated people of the land Mandela was a saint. It was the first function of this type in London he attended …afterwards there were many. However, on that night in that throng of eminent people, they fell over themselves to speak to Mandela, or shake his hand. I heard Lord King of British Airways say how humbled he felt in Mandela's presence and Neil Kinnock promised Lord Weinstock, Chairperson of General Electric Company that he would arrange an introduction. The day before the event, at Sylvester Stein's house, we planned the logistics and worked out a list of the most illustrious to present to Mandela; Martin Kingston, banker and member of our committee, would escort Mandela around the room and make introductions to the most illustrious of the guests. In any event, Mandela ignored this protocol and spoke to everybody present, including the waiters.

It was the first time I heard Mandela speak in public, an unreal experience to stand facing the legend as he made his speech from a podium in the dazzling splendour of the Dorchester. There was a sincerity and simplicity in his manner that moved many, including me, to tears. Since that occasion I have heard him speak in public many times and although not a good orator, he has a quality that always touches his audience.

The next public fund raising event was an auction of well known photographs at the Photographers Gallery in the West End. Over months, a special committee of professional photographers had accumulated hundreds of photographs donated by celebrated photographers like Helmut Newton and other famous people, some quite valuable. Everything was donated from jazz musician's George Melly's services as auctioneer and the delicious buffet supper that came from a nearby restaurant. There was so much goodwill, everything donated, with even the masses of beautifully arranged flowers that decorated the gallery being donated by a supportive florist. What fun it was with masses of photographs for sale but the limited space in the gallery meant we could only display and sell the best. It was a most eclectic selection: some highly abstract photographs by contemporary practitioners as well as more traditional black and white early works. We also auctioned a section of early South African political photographs containing the original print of the Treason Trial picture by Eli Weinberg, for example. I would love to have bought it, but an eminent English barrister paid thousands of pounds for it.

I handled the sale of tickets for the screening of the film premiere of 'Friends', a film exploring friendship in a dramatic South African context. It was to be part of the film maker's contribution to funds for Vote for Freedom. It was screened in the West End and followed by a party at the trendy Marquee Club. The sponsors who organised the Gala Evening reneged in the end and did not pay up, so a lot of work produced very little money. Glenys Kinnock, wife of the former leader of the Labour Party, Neil Kinnock, and a prominent member of the European Parliament, introduced the evening with great charm. She told the audience to start buying South African goods: "the boycott is over and buyers should try to select South African products as their first choice!"

I tried so hard to make that film premiere a success but its outcome was disappointing and showed that among the genuine well wishers, there were also people prepared to use our campaign to promote themselves.

In the office, day by day in the months leading to the election in April 1994, mail bags would be brought in filled with donations to Votes for Freedom and they could range from cheques for £5 to £5,000. These contributions were the main thrust of our fund raising drive, the culmination of the unshakable support for the South African liberation movement. The British public had identified with this struggle for thirty years; generations had marched and boycotted and now they responded to our direct mailing and telephone work. Teams of volunteers would work in the evening and phone selected individuals to ask for a donation. They would speak from a prepared script. We used lists supplied by Oxfam, the Labour Party, Defence and Aid Fund and the Terence Higgins Trust. They made their databases available. During the day other volunteers would work tirelessly receipting the money. The General & Municipal Workers' Union loaned us a huge and sophisticated computer system to use for this process. It was part of their contribution.

Touching letters would often accompany these donations. One of them I kept:

"Dear People,

I have sent a small contribution to the Votes for Freedom Campaign, but I just wanted to write to you to wish you well on the 27th April in the election. I am 23 years old and ever since I can remember, there have been pictures of Nelson Mandela in my parents' house and 'Free Mandela Mugs' around our home and our office. I was always afraid

they would make sure he died rather than ever let him be free, but the day he was released was one of the major days of hope in my life so far.

> *I know the struggle is far from over and that many are still dying. Perhaps there will be much more bloodshed before the balance of power is restored to the millions of people in South Africa from whom it has kept for so long by such a small minority. But this election is an important first step, and our hearts, myself and many of my friends, will be with you on the 27th.*

I pledge my everlasting support to your cause and will fight in some small way for justice and human rights all my life. Your work inspires me to try harder.

Yours in friendship -------Carol O'Dea of Tunbridge Wells.

We looked for large donations as well and spent a lot of time working out strategies to approach 'the fat cats' for money. However, the highlight of the campaign was the overwhelming response from ordinary people.

Our professional fundraisers' committee, FRAG, met regularly to devise new and different ways to raise money. They had their own jargon and techniques of selling and I was learning about new ways of marketing like 'cold mailings'! FRAG meetings would spend time analysing the responses to each 'mail shot' and the cost of each item of direct mail. We advertised in selected newspapers such as the 'Guardian' and 'The Independent', and in addition to the volunteers employed a professional firm to conduct some of the telephone requests. This was effective but expensive.

At the same time, the ANC had hundreds of requests to provide speakers at meetings of organisations like Labour Party branches, student bodies, trade union branches and Church groups.

I was on the panel of ANC speakers and spoke at dozens of meetings at this time. I liked particularly to go to Labour Party meetings and I would trundle across London, often as far as Essex and Kent, sometimes by train or by car.

It was a period of tremendous exhilaration and I was on a constant high and carefully wrote up events of the day and filed away papers of the period, recognising the enormity of the changes as they happened. Not

everyone saw things this way. Many of the 'comrades' were jaded by now; unable to be excited by anything anymore. There were others too young or distant from South Africa to appreciate the scope of the change.

I was between the two identities and places. In the one story I was the long-term exile in London marvelling at the changed British-South African relations, remembering the coldness many British institutions like the TUC felt about us in the early sixties.

Over the decades, all had changed completely and John Smith, then new Leader of the Labour Party, pledged assistance to the ANC. The TUC, without hesitation, now allowed us to use their committee rooms free of charge for all our meetings. Even the Foreign Office was talking to us. In an election broadcast in 1992, John Major used a handshake with Mandela in the doorway of 10 Downing Street. He was using Mandela to promote himself as a statesman.

In the other more important story for me, I saw the end of exile so that the forthcoming democratic election and an ANC elected government had a personal meaning too. It opened another future back in South Africa that I had never considered.

Six months after the Dorchester Reception Nelson Mandela visited London briefly. We held a smaller fund raising reception. Elaine and David Potter provided the venue and catering at their St. John's Wood house. This time we openly canvassed for money and Anthony Sampson acted as the facilitator. Some large sums of money were publicly pledged and in addition a few of us were assigned to socialise with particular guests to request donations from them. I found this an awful task and was unable to even broach the subject of money. This time we invited some very wealthy South Africans who wanted to meet Mandela and were prepared to make large donations for the honour. Negotiations for a new dispensation were under way and by now they supported it although earlier, they may have supported his imprisonment. We meticulously planned the logistics of the evening beforehand and later judged it a great success.

I had the names of four or five people to ask for money. One couple left an indelible memory but I forget their names. They were elderly, Jewish, rich and titled. Lady X became aware of our struggle when she agreed to visit Tilly First, Ruth First's mother, shortly after Ruth's assassination in Maputo. Tilly was at that time elderly, alone and quite traumatised and her tragic situation came to the attention of the Jewish

Community. This couple had a hazy knowledge of the South African struggle until they became involved with Tilly and her family history. They were charming and caring but after talking to them I just could not ask them for money.

Our Votes for Freedom campaign raised just under £2 million in Britain. Only a few people worked on it full time, but unstintingly. There were donations by ‘fat cats’ and the unions but it was the volume of individual responses to our appeals that made this campaign the magnificent climax of the anti apartheid struggle in Britain. It was definitely one of the best times in my life.

CHAPTER 20

'THE DIPLOMAT'

I was filled with boundless energy during that episode in the Netherlands in 1993that I call 'The Diplomat'. Emma had grown up and was mostly away, while Leon was engrossed in his work and working long hours. The South African changes were my own renaissance too; in middle age, my life was in a process of change. Everything was exciting and challenging and it seemed that for every moment, a sweeter and more promising one would follow.

The high moment was my acceptance for fast track training for a reorganised Foreign Affairs Department, to become a diplomat in the new South Africa - to be prepared as an official representative and civil servant with a new enhanced status. Diplomatic life would bring together many different strands, promote and represent my political interests as a formal representative of a liberated non-racist South Africa, framed by policies of the ANC.

The process began in 1991 when I presented a vague letter from Shell House, requesting that interested members of the Unit to apply for diplomatic training. It was short on detail, was noted with little comment but I immediately liked the idea and considered I may have some of the necessary qualifications, not least of which was my increasing fluency in French. I asked Dennis Goldberg for advice and he replied: "Mendi says I am too old to apply." He referred to himself and did not answer my question. I am younger than Dennis, but assumed his reply meant he did not think I had a chance.

I decided anyway to pursue my application and sent in my CV. Over a year later, in September 1992, the Department of International Affairs (DIA) phoned me from Johannesburg asking whether I was still interested in a diplomatic training course. I was speechless but Leon and Emma were enthusiastic and persuaded me to say yes. The ANC then offered me a place to join a three-month training course at Clingendael, in The Hague, Holland.

I accepted the placement with trepidation but did not immediately tell anybody because I did not know what to say nor was I sure the project would eventually materialise. However, I did consult Mendi whose advice was to prepare myself to go. "They have chosen you," he said

and as far he was concerned that was that. "Spend the next couple of months preparing to go," he said.

At the next Unit meeting there was again a notice asking for applications for diplomatic training. I planned to follow this with my own announcement of placement when Johnnie Sachs scornfully rejected this saying he and others had not heard anything about their applications lodged more than a year ago. "They are wasting our time," he said. Then it was my turn 'to tell' which was received in silence. After the meeting only a couple of people congratulated me. I dismissed this reaction as part of the dynamics of exile politics where tensions and resentments prevailed – they were not necessarily of a personal nature because I am sure not many wanted this placement; they just did not want anyone to have it.

This lack of enthusiasm by the people around made me quite nervous. Also there was no more information about the course and I just waited for further details in the dark, so to speak, when suddenly, as though he was Father Christmas, a few nights before Christmas, a courier arrived late in the evening with a huge package from Johannesburg. In it were the reading lists, time tables, work schedules, all sorts of information on the course that had been dispatched from the Hague months before. They now arrived after a circuitous journey, but it was far too late for me to prepare constructively.

The bumph that came did give me a background to Clingendael and then I established the travel arrangements and my accommodation: I would share a modern house with two women, also on the course.

The idea for the Diplomatic Training Course developed during a plane trip when Stanley Mabizela, then a senior ANC official of the Department of International Affairs, sat next to Jan Pronk, the Dutch Minister of Development Aid. Pronk had been a devoted supporter of the Anti-Apartheid struggle for many years and on that trip, they devised a training module for a new South African Foreign Affairs Department. The Dutch had a reputation of facilitating training programmes and, in fact, a group from Albania received training at the same time as us, not that we interacted. Based on the ideas of Jan Pronk, his Ministry of Development Aid then funded training programmes at Clingendael for the ANC. Although these courses – mine was the first - contained many unique features to cater for our needs, their structure resembled that used to train Dutch career diplomats. Clingendael itself was a staid and

prestigious institute, the Dutch counterpart of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.

Clearly, the new South Africa would need a fresh Foreign Affairs Department mandated to promote its changed world outlook. The framework of the pre-1994 foreign policy was to defend South Africa's internal apartheid policies and promote its image where possible. Multi-lateral organisations such as the United Nations still excluded South African from membership; it had few diplomatic ties with countries in Africa and the non-Aligned world. It was therefore reasonable during this transition period to prepare for a new period of South Africa foreign policy•

The purpose of the course was to train a new diplomatic corps to come into being with the new South Africa when the ANC Missions merged with existing Embassies. New diplomatic missions would need to open in parts of the world where there was no representation. Most importantly, South Africa would re-join the international community. It was in the remit of the ANC that the new South Africa would play a dynamic role on the continent of Africa and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). A different type of personnel needed training for those positions.

I finally left London on a Saturday afternoon in January for Amsterdam and in my suitcase were a couple of books on diplomatic practice I had bought, just in case. I did scan them but I really did not know what to expect. One of the books I bought was in its fifth edition and called 'Diplomatic Handbook'. I did not know then that, its author, R.G Feltham, from the Oxford University Foreign Service Programme, would be part of our team of tutors. His book included all sorts of fascinating advice for a diplomat such as the appropriate terminology for writing a treaty, the wording for an invitation for a State banquet and other interesting diplomatic topics like dealing with 'official mourning.'

The house in The Hague was in semi-darkness when I arrived. My housemates were bombed out and huddled in blankets as they tried to adapt to the changing time and climate. It was a European winter evening, colder even than Britain. It took us some time to get to know each other – Lindiwe Maseko came from Soweto and Bongiwe Qwabe from Umtata and at first, Lindi thought I was British and from the Anti-

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• Greg Mills & Simon Baynham (1994 "South African Foreign Policy, 1945-1990" from "From Pariah to Participant, South Africa's evolving foreign relations, 1990-1994" (1994) edited by Greg Mills (SAIIA)

Apartheid Movement. They were strangers too and it took me time to realise that the scope of individual differences within South Africa was wider than the racial classifications imposed by the Government. Someone from the Transkei had a very different life experience, language and culture compared to the violence and urban bustle of Soweto even though both were subject to apartheid's infamy.

Later, we described our respective childhoods to a Dutch friend and the three of us presented such different experiences, hardly from the same country although Bongiwe and I had a more settled and normal childhood than Lindiwe in rioting Soweto. Lindiwe and I both grew up in Johannesburg but the apartheid divide of her life in Soweto and mine in Yeoville revealed the enormous differences. Bongiwe, on the other hand, went to boarding school in the rural Transkei, also another world from ours.

I was the last to arrive in that house in Lohengrinstraat, The Hague, and obviously got the worst of the three rooms. It was my attic at the top of the house to which I became attached. Instead of a garret in Paris, this was mine in The Hague, an illuminating and enhancing experience.

We were a group, internationally based, and although I did not know anyone to begin with, we all had a common loyalty and history. Most of the group came directly from South Africa and worked for the ANC; there was also the group who lived outside the country, the exiles. From the latter group were the ANC Chief Representatives from the United Nations, Brussels, Denmark, Botswana and Holland. There were also two post-graduate students studying in Holland. Within a day or two, we knew each other's histories and the one thing we all shared, everyone knew some people in common. We were part of that international ANC world, a phenomenon which by 1993 spread throughout the world. It created a foundation for friendship, loyalties and alliances that endured beyond the course. We talked politics incessantly; we had heated differences of opinions or would analyse the same points endlessly. By the end of the course, I had received another education as well – I sharpened my political debating skills, and enjoyed as much as any, a good robust political discussion. At any moment, my colleagues could start a political debate, whether over lunch or in the evenings, conversation would focus on politics. We mostly concentrated on South African topics, but with time, our range of discussion extended to other parts of the world.

The Dutch Foreign Ministry provided us with housing and pocket money. At first Professor Voorhoeve, the Director of Clingendael, later to become Minister of Defence in the Dutch Government, was quite apprehensive about us: was there a group of terrorists in his midst? Perhaps we learnt our first lessons in diplomatic skills fast enough to quickly dispel these myths. Because the people of Clingendael soon warmed to our enthusiasm, vitality and we charmed them; our behaviour was quite correct.

At the first Group Meeting, we held before the Course began, we all promised to attend punctually every morning and to dress appropriately. Tim Maseko would be our leader and formed a committee together with Tebogo Mofole, Feroza Adams and Oupa Gomou.

The media showed a never-ending fascination in us. Journalists and photographers followed us around all the time and we featured in every Dutch newspaper, radio station and TV. This gave us all excellent practice in working with the media, we all had the opportunity to give interviews and appear on TV. We intrigued the foreign media by our presence and even CNN news did a three-minute news item on us.

They filled our days with a programme of lectures, quite intense with reams of accompanying notes. The lecturers were mostly Dutch academics and the subjects they covered included International Relations and Law, International Organisations and Security as well as studies on specific foreign policies of countries such as the UK, US. Japan, Russia Germany, China etc.

We had periods of practical training every day. They divided us into tutorial groups to train us in political reporting and presentation. The tutor of my small group was Mr. Hans Jonkman, Secretary General of the International Court of Jurists. He was elderly, charming former Ambassador to Britain and former Private Secretary to Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. He was a fabulous teacher and I was so flattered when he told me at the end of the Course that I had been his best student.

As a Group we had many heated political discussions on problems we anticipated for the future, such as whether South Africa should continue to be an arms supplier. There were those, me among them, who wished the new state to uphold a higher morality than exports at any price and as a supporter over years of Nuclear Disarmament in Britain, I opposed the notion of South Africa being a large scale exporter of arms, for other peoples' wars!

We all went by coach to the European Union in Brussels for five days, visiting the Commission and the European Parliament. We also spent a day at the vast fortress style headquarters of NATO just outside Brussels.

The time spent at the European Union was instructive. Coming from Britain the Common Market issue had dominated politics for years but I had underestimated the scale of the operation and the complexity of the structures that made up 'Europe.' The European Union was a town on its own, with its great buildings and thousands of civil servants from all the representative countries.

The course entailed a lot of homework and late into the night I would prepare the material given to us to read, and write the essays and position papers. We were often invited to evening receptions of ministries, Dutch companies such as Ambros Bank and various Chambers of Commerce. At that level, we were entertained magnificently and this gave us the opportunity to try to sell South Africa.

We learned negotiating techniques from many people especially brought in to teach us crisis management and various conflict solving programmes. The one I clearly remember is the one that caused a lot of argument and dissent.

Two Israelis, internationally known at the time for training on pre-negotiation techniques in conflict resolution did a two-day session with us. It was the fact that they used the Palestine-Israel dispute as their model that caused such a rumpus among us. They divided us into two role playing groups and assigned us each a name and occupation. The one side were Israelis and the other Palestinians. They gave a background lecture on the Middle East conflict and showed a film entitled: "From confrontation to co-operation." We then moved on to the simulation games set in Jerusalem, the object was to get adversaries into a dialogue, to break down hostility and find a common point of agreement.

Most of our group were extremely hostile to the Israeli dimension. They saw the exercise by the two men as a vehicle for promoting the Israeli perspective. I did not see it like that, more as a well-known issue on which to hang the conflict management sessions. But being Jewish

meant I needed to tread that route carefully. When these two men came into the lecture theatre and studied the names in front of us as they divided us into groups, they seemed transfixed by my name. I remember clearly how from stopping in front of the name Levy, their gaze, separately and together, slowly moved from the name to study the face that belonged to it. It was embarrassing. Later during the coffee break, they discretely approached to find out more about me!

The ANC always had close relations with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and their struggles had much in common. That relationship of the two organisations did not bother me, and I had found much in visits to Israel that resembled South Africa's apartheid practices. Nevertheless, it came as a shock when the PLO representative in the Netherlands, Leila Shahid invited us to share a mutual briefing session in their offices, followed by a reception to honour our visit. At that time in 1993, when this meeting was planned and it was before the Oslo Accord, I speculated what my fate would have been as a Jew, with the name of Levy, had I been in one of those hijacked planes in the seventies.

I did worry whether I would be accepted and how I would react if there were any anti-Jewish statements. I put these aside because in training to be a diplomat one needed to handle all sorts of encounters in a professional way. The gathering was most interesting and began with a lengthy briefing on the history of the PLO. It was the first time I had heard a detailed and uninterrupted exposition of the conflict from the PLO perspective. Feroza Adama, for the ANC, replied on our behalf and outlined the current negotiation process. There were interesting differences of strategies and approaches but there was no discussion.

Afterwards we adjourned to Leila Shahid's beautifully appointed house for a buffet supper and joined other guests.

My initial unease evaporated. I enjoyed the experience, a lovely evening eating Middle Eastern food, drinking fresh lemonade and talking to Palestinians, a first for me. At no time was anything said that could have been construed as being faintly anti-Jewish, by even the most sensitive. At the end of the evening Tim Maseko, our Group Leader, asked me to give the vote of thanks to the PLO on behalf of the ANC. Our host was a woman, Feroza had spoken at the briefing and I was given my turn as a woman. I panicked initially, the Jewish factor, wondered what to say that would be appropriate but not compromise myself, the ANC or the occasion.

I must have managed because I received many compliments afterwards for an excellent speech and although Leila Shahid invited me to her house again, I never went. I meant to go but did not get around to it. There were so many other commitments.

The reception at the South African Embassy in The Hague was an important historical moment for all of us. We discussed and argued at length the merits or not of accepting the invitation by the Ambassador to a special cocktail party he wished to host for us. At that time, there were still no contacts of this nature between the ANC and 'our enemy.' In the end Super Moloi consulted with the ANC in Johannesburg and it was Thabo Mbeki who gave the instruction that we attend.

Lindiwe wore traditional dress, the rest of us, dressed formally for the occasion. I wore a black suit. The Embassy was built by the Dutch East India Company and the building was bought by the South African Government in the nineteen seventies. We were ushered into a very grand and spectacularly beautiful banqueting hall. A large table in the centre was set with a buffet supper and chairs were arranged around the wall. We arranged ourselves on the one side, facing on the far side of the large room, the senior members of the Embassy staff who sat on the chairs opposite. It was extremely stiff. Mr Nothnagel, the Ambassador was a small fat man. He was red in the face and sweating as he made his welcoming speech. He looked as though he could have had a heart attack or stroke at any minute.

"Fellow South Africans, welcome to your Embassy," he said. "We must forget the past."

He asked us to introduce ourselves and say where we came from. It revealed so simply our different circumstances, our life history to the other side, as one after another, we gave our names and where we lived. It went like this: "Lorna Levy, born Johannesburg, exiled London". On their side, they gave their job title and where they came from in South Africa.

We then stood up, toasted South Africa with South African wine and standing around the sumptuous buffet table, began tentatively to talk to each other. It was easier for some than others. Reconciliation is a very individual thing. Some people are more forgiving than others. To borrow and adapt Isaiah Berlin's useful definition of acceptable conduct

from the post-War period in France to these times "you might have needed to do business," he said, but "you did not have to be cosy with them." [•] That was my own position.

The Economics Councillor told me that he had never supported the National Party. This was almost the first thing he said to me, completely unsolicited. Later, I heard this sentiment expressed in many different ways.

When the Ambassador greeted us on our arrival, he assumed I was a Dutch escort of the group from Clingendael. Being a white woman his first reaction was that I must be Dutch. When I pointed out his error he was fascinated by the phenomenon of me: a well-dressed white woman who belonged with the ANC group. He seized my arm and afterwards, seemed to hold onto me all evening. When the others teased me about this later, I assured them that I was a last hope of white salvation for him, proof that multi-racialism would exist in the new South Africa.

He showed us around the building and we were surprised to see pictures of Nelson Mandela and Cyril Ramaphosa hanging in the corridor with other South African leaders. Were they put up just before our arrival?

Mr. Nochnagel had been the National Party MP for a Pretoria constituency for many years until President PW Botha kicked him upstairs into his Ambassadorial job. This is what he told me that night. A couple of months later there was a huge rift in the Embassy, a sort of mutiny, when he was accused by some of his staff of being too liberal. In the election in 1994, he claimed he would vote for the ANC.

That time in The Netherlands was a unique experience. It was an opportunity to share and live together across the colour divide, bringing together twenty-three of us on neutral territory. We broke up into friendship groups but we all connected as an entity. I had been away from South Africa for such a long time and before that life had been so circumscribed by racist laws. We all grew up in South Africa in our racial pigeonholes and even when we worked together and socialised in Johannesburg, the constraints of the apartheid system made relationships so unequal. If you can't go to a restaurant together or freely come and go from each other's homes, how do you have a proper relationship? Of course, we did this is London, but then we were exiles together. But here in The Hague from our different backgrounds and regions, we were

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[•] Anthony Beevor & Artemis Cooper (2004) "Paris, After the Liberation 1944-49" (Penguin)

eating and living together, joking and arguing, discussing our hair problems and buying cosmetics together. We were all familiar with the working together part, we had done it in the past, but for most of us I think, living together broke down unspoken barriers.

Later, when the course was over I went to South Africa on a visit. It was an opportunity to spend time with friends from the course. It was my looking-glass view of what life may be like in the new South Africa.

I went to Umtata, still the capital of the Transkei Bantustan, to visit Bongiwe and Nomahlubi Kakana. They had extolled the beauties of the Transkei, the lovely seaside resorts of the Wild Coast that I had not seen before. They invited me and planned that we would see these resorts together.

It was a visit with a difference because I found myself provided with a chauffeured car to visit the beauty spots such as Coffee Bay and Port St Johns. These were indeed idyllic resorts, but sadly, we were the only sightseers. The driver's real function was to act as an armed escort and he followed me everywhere, even taking up a position when I went to the toilet. He would stand outside. Friends in Johannesburg cautioned me against making this trip – it was dangerous they said and two white motorists had been recently gunned down on a similar visit. I felt quite safe with our bodyguard and it was such a new experience for the three of us.

Bongi and Shlubi both worked for the Transkei Homelands Administration, the Bantustan. They were civil servants in its Foreign Affairs Department. As the Bantustan could not have independent external relations separate from South Africa, I wonder what they did other than liase with South Africa.

The Transkei Administration Building, dominated the skyline.in Umtata. I went there to meet Bantu Holomisa, then a General and Head of the Transkei Bantustan. While there and watching from a window we observed an interesting march of striking teachers converge on the building for a demonstration, many of them were toyi-toyiing. It was a different observation point being on the inside, looking out at the strikers. One of the officials looking out of the window with us said: "Demonstrations like this should be banned. Teachers should set an example and not behave like this." Teachers should not wear denim

jeans, quite inappropriate clothes. It shocked me that some Africans did not support strikes at that time – I expected everyone to do so. Yet, here were conservative civil servants talking in much the same manner as one expected from their counterparts in London.

My visit was clearly unusual and people stared a lot.

CHAPTER 21

DIPLOMACY IN OSLO

Towards the end of 1993 I spent four weeks at the Foreign Ministry in Oslo 'on attachment.' A group of us were to be instructed in the workings of a foreign affairs department, in this case the Norwegian one.

Evenings in Oslo in November were very long and dark. It was dark when we got up in the morning and by 4.30pm night had already closed in with a gripping cold. This and prohibitively high prices were a disincentive to going out too much at night. It made me rather introspective and gloomy so that every evening I would read, watch TV and meticulously record the events of the day. The Norwegian winter had a deadening effect on my spirits. Edvard Munch's paintings seemed to encapsulate the bleak freezing dark for me in the melancholy and anxiety of paintings like 'The Scream.'

Although I left full of enthusiasm the stay did not have a good start as I arrived in Oslo one day early and there was no one to meet me. *"It was the usual cock up with none of the arrangements in writing so mistakes were inevitable."* Surprisingly, at Oslo Airport I remained composed since I had no idea where to go. First I tried to contact the Foreign Ministry but it was closed being Saturday but luckily found someone in the offices of the ANC. My first destination therefore came the ANC offices, "*very nice, large and attractive where a meeting was taking place to discuss the Nobel Prize arrangements a month away. I feel I am walking from one part of history to another."*

The Nobel Peace Prize winners for 1993 were Mandela and de Klerk and the ceremony would take place in early December in Oslo, just after our group left. I spent the first evening at Thandi Rankoe's• flat where over a Chinese take-away we watched a video of the 1992 Nobel Prize Award to a Guatemalan. In the light of what we saw, we pondered the format of the ceremony to come. How would the eulogies be presented?

The whole group arrived the following day. I knew quite a few people. As usual, we started with an ANC briefing meeting when we once again

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• Chief Representative in Norway at that time, later High Commissioner to Tanzania. She left Norway at the time I arrived to attend a parallel course 'on attachment' in Germany.

chose Tim Maseko [•] as our 'spokesperson' and 'leader,' as the most experienced among us. We stayed together in one building, each with our own beautifully appointed self-contained flatlet with a cooking area, cleverly concealed behind a cupboard when not in use. When opened, it transformed into a kitchen with fridge, cupboards and stove.

Every morning in the crisp cold we ate breakfast in the hotel adjoining our apartment building and then walked for ten minutes through the gardens of the Royal Palace to the Foreign Ministry. On the first day the Permanent Secretary met us, greeted us individually and "proclaimed his friendship and the continuing wish to help with support and aid for the new South Africa."

"The member of the group with the highest profile is Robert McBride -I had not met him before but knew about him. He is a very large man with a baby face who could be very sweet and innocent."

I liked him and for most of the time we got on well. But even when having a laugh with him, there was an underlying curiosity, always unspoken, to know more details about his real feelings when he killed a couple of people. He was on 'death row' for a long time and perhaps because of that experience about which he did talk, he spent a lot of time on his own and preferred to walk instead of riding. He always carried a briefcase and never left this in cloakrooms like the rest of us – he constantly kept it beside him and I suspected that he kept a revolver in it. Robert was a controversial figure, discharged from prison a short time before in exchange for a maniacal murderer called "Wit Wolf." The Norwegians had cancelled the visit at one stage because they did not want Robert included in the group, but then changed their minds.

The visit to the Nobel Building was well timed in view of the imminent award of the Peace Prize to Mandela and de Klerk. The building was dark and slightly gloomy. The Director General of the Nobel Institute explained the procedures around the awarding of the prize and showed us around. The Norwegian Parliament appoints a committee of five Norwegian citizens to choose the Peace Prize winner. Alfred Nobel stipulated this condition when the Foundation was set up in 1900. We were shown a beautiful room with pictures of all previous winners, fascinating to recall the great names of peace over the decades. I had left my camera behind that day otherwise I would have taken photographs

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[•] Chief Representative in Denmark at that time, later Ambassador to Bulgaria.

of myself standing in front of the former South African prize winners Chief Lutuli and Archbishop Tutu.

The Nobel Committee gave us the following statement:

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 1993 to Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk for their work for the peaceful termination of the apartheid regime, and for laying the foundations for a new democratic South Africa.

From their different points of departure, Mandela and de Klerk have reached agreement on the principles for a transition to a new political order based on the tenet of one man –one vote. By looking ahead to South African reconciliation instead of back at the deep wounds of the past, they have shown personal integrity and great political courage.

Ethnic disparities cause the bitterest conflicts. South Africa has been the symbol of racially conditioned suppression. Mandela and de Klerk's constructive policy of peace and reconciliation also points the way to the peaceful resolution of similar deep-rooted conflicts elsewhere in the world.

The previous Nobel Laureates Albert Lutuli and Desmond Tutu made important contributions to progress towards racial equality in South Africa. Mandela and de Klerk have taken the process a major step further. The Nobel Peace Prize for 1993 is awarded in recognition of their efforts and as a pledge of support for the forces of good, in the hope that the advance towards equality and democracy will reach its goal in the very near future."[45]

The approaching Nobel Prize ceremony was raised often. Mostly it would be an occasion to congratulate us, as South Africans, but Robert always used the opportunity to criticise the award being made to F.W.de Klerk. Was this the diplomatic behaviour that went with the training?

In Oslo, it was a heavily contested argument as to whether we should accept an invitation to tea at the South African Embassy, recently re-established after the severance of diplomatic relations. We sat around the conference table to discuss this and the consensus was that we refuse the invitation. Robert took charge and produced a prepared speech - this

[45]Statement of the Norwegian Nobel Committee on The Nobel Peace Prize for 1993. (Own papers)

was a *big issue*! He must have prepared his case over the weekend, had canvassed the group and written out the speech he read to us. He was certain the South African representative had spoken against his being in Oslo. Tim and I spoke in favour of going and we were sidelined. Few were interested to know our experiences in Holland where we viewed the meeting with the Embassy as part of a learning experience. Later we discovered others who agreed with us but decided to keep quiet in the meeting. I favoured accepting the invitation on pragmatic grounds: that this could be a learning exercise whereby we may find out something useful from a meeting with people we would soon have to work. This was misconstrued and Robert countered, "*Comrade Lorna is not being part of the collective."* I did not understand what he meant in that context but thought afterwards that perhaps as a white person I should not make these suggestions. ……..We did not go to the Embassy.

The Press and Information Centre in Oslo was housed in a converted station and beautifully designed with eye catching artefacts and pictures. They showed us some films which could be described as propaganda films. "Women in politics" revealed that 40% of Norwegian MP's were women. Gro Bruntland, Norway's Prime Minister at that time was depicted in domestic scenes that resembled an ordinary woman's lifestyle. We had not seen anything like that of Margaret Thatcher. Leaders of other political parties were also women. We discussed the films afterwards and established that Norwegian women had struggled for their positions that had not fallen into their laps. Our group had an argument on the role of women in society. All the women got heated and voices were raised, particularly as some of the men in our group, particularly those from rural backgrounds, insisted that a woman's first duty should be as a mother and home provider.

This argument continued that evening over drinks and on other occasions. In the ANC at that time it seemed there were too few women to fight their corner militantly. It was easy for men to pay lip service to equality for women but affirmative gender action seemed a long way off in those dark nights in Oslo. One young comrade bucked the trend of the male members of the group and described the evolution in his family. He helped to bath and feed his children, something his father never did and his grandfather would not have believed possible for a man to do.

Not that there was much gender equality in white South Africa at that time. A Norwegian woman diplomat told us that during her tour of duty in South Africa her writer husband worked at home and acted as carer for the children and house. The 'white' establishment preferred

traditional patterns of work for diplomats frowned on this arrangement. Theirs was a world where diplomats were usually men and where the wife stayed at home.

I spent a lot of time on my own and did not fraternise much with the others in our free time. I decided to explore as much of Norway as I could and one Sunday I took a train trip to Lillehammer where the Winter Olympics would be held later that season. My trip was to see the construction site of the Olympic Village and the ski slopes. The countryside was magnificent and by 5pm when it was too cold to stay out I took the train back and it was full of Norwegians returning from their weekend retreats. I was aware they did not feel the cold like me, and their appropriate outerwear was neatly hung on the hangers arranged throughout the carriages of the train. Everything was quiet, the snow deadened sounds and the people were quiet too, all reading their newspapers. The streets of Oslo were mainly deserted early, as it got dark and motorists would signal that you could cross the road well ahead. One day I planned to return to Oslo in the long daylight to observe the summer temperament of the Norwegians.

The Olympic construction was impressive. They had planned the housing so that afterwards it could be dismantled and taken away for student housing somewhere else. The Norwegians produced a handbook on how to hold a Winter Olympic Games without destroying the environment and hoped it would become the bible for future games. The slopes and sleigh slopes were scary on a huge lake with masses of trees everywhere.

The course was geared to provide us with practical insights into the structure and workings of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. There were a number of seminars and visits by different departments within the Ministry. We spent time in the telecommunications centre observing (at a distance) the coming and going of coded messages by telex. This was riveting as was the introduction to their protocol arrangements to receive foreign delegations. We lunched at the Government Guest House and observed the style of entertaining and learned how they fixed the expenses for delegations visiting the country. Where there was a visit of Head of State they would pay for 15 other persons in the entourage; if the visitor were a Prime Minister they would pay for 10 staff and in the case of a Foreign Minister only for 5 persons. The personnel, excluded the spouse, but included all clerical and administrative staff and this referred to accommodation, meals, transport and even local telephone

calls. Any costs for additional people in an entourage or any extended stay would be referred to that Embassy for payment.

This provided an interesting insight into Norwegian values. Their basic moral and political values have always favoured the country's involvement with the Developing World and it always played a central role in giving assistance. Although small, it is a very rich country with an abundance of oil and gas but revealed nothing sumptuous or pretentious in style and modus operandi. The food was always quite basic, even at official functions. I kept one banquet menu as a souvenir. That meal began with something called "Symphony from fjord and mountains," followed by fillet of stag, mushroom sauce and apple and cranberry compote. It ended with ice cream. Wine was served on occasions like that but mainly there was an absence of alcoholic beverages wherever we went.

I was something of a curiosity to the Norwegian officials with my white skin. Everybody was admiring and discrete, but whenever it was possible I would be asked lots of personal questions about my background. In return I was able to enquire as to their opinions on a wide range of foreign issues. On one occasion, a member of the Oslo negotiating team on the Israeli-Palestine Peace Accord sat next to me at an official dinner. His views and experiences of that historic and almost successful negotiating process were most illuminating.

At the end, I copied down these lines under the heading 'Thoughts on Norway.' An associate of Grieg's wrote them in 1866 and I recorded them in my diary when I visited an anniversary exhibition of Edward Grieg:

> *"I sit up here on the fringes of the world*
> *and am so constricted as not to feel part*
> *of life and art."*

Could this sum up the visit?

Tim was determined that the younger members of the group should know about the backgrounds of the older ones like himself, me and the others who lived in exile. At a gathering one evening he described his own life abroad since the sixties and he wanted the post 1976 generation to appreciate us. There was Ndlovo in Zambia, Silver in Stockholm, Thandi in Oslo, me in London. We were the oldest and the young lions listened politely. He warmed to this idea and suggested we meet each

Sunday afternoon where we would each talk about life in exile and the work done for the South African liberation in our respective country. It sounded like an excellent idea but the younger members were not keen. When we met for the first of these discussions the following Sunday, it was proposed quickly by someone that we adjourn, *sine die.* There was an important football match on TV.

I am not sure whether we got as much out of the Oslo 'Practical Attachment' that we may have. The Norwegians were very proper but not friendly, so that aspect of our stay that had been so warm and caring in The Hague was missing. But the group too was quite mediocre and more than half did not participate at any time. At our final assessment meeting they had nothing to say. It could be that many in the group just did not have sufficient knowledge to be there but were chosen as a reward for other reasons.

Bongiwe came back to London with me from Oslo. She stayed for a few days. I wanted to reciprocate the hospitality in Umtata and showed her the sights of London, with Emma's help. She loved the bustle and the shops and commented as most South Africans about the relaxed way people moved around the streets in central London.

Before we left Oslo I drafted the report on the course, the assessment we would send to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Johannesburg. The Group asked me to prepare this for discussion. When we met they were amazed that I had not dealt with the major point they wanted answered: what offers of jobs would there be for us? I was the only person in the group who had not given this serious attention while the rest had a game plan and their eyes were firmly focused on their future. If they did not hear soon from the Department of Foreign Affairs, they would examine other options.

It became clear the race was already on for positions in the new South Africa. In London I got snatches of it but there in Oslo with the majority of the group coming directly from South Africa, they were in the throes of preparation of a life change.

It was then that I realised the extent of competition for positions and ANC 'cadres' all round the world were projecting themselves to be part of the new order. I speculated why I had been so unaware of the race. Yes, I was middle aged, white and living in London. But in these two courses I had acquitted myself with distinction. I had been told so in The Hague and Oslo. The ANC had my CV so that they knew I was

white, middle aged and in exile when they selected me for training, so these factors could possibly be an advantage. Of course, they could finally be the obstacles.

CHAPTER 22

SOUTH AFRICANS VOTE OVERSEAS IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE

The date for the first democratic election was finally set as 27 April 1994 and for South Africans outside the country, their vote would be the day before, on April 26th, provided they had approved identification. The Independent Electoral Commission stipulated that could be a passport, any of the Identity Cards or books issued in the past and the hated 'dompas', the document Africans had been forced to carry.

It meant that a long phase of our lives, exile, would end. April 26th 1994 would be the end of the liberation struggle as we voted in the government of our choice.

Our United Kingdom based election campaign began at the beginning of 1994, shadowing the South African one, as we provided voter education and campaigned to rally all South Africans to vote. It was left to me to administer that campaign in the UK.

We could not copy British elections campaigns because there was not much that could be borrowed: ours in this sense was quite a unique experience altogether. We copied the British manner of making contact with the voters, always important in the UK, to publicise the election date and our manifesto. Now we used other databases to contact a wider South African public to ask for their vote. Many people needed help to get identity documents; they had no South African documentation so we arranged for them to get passports. .

As I recall, the campaign began with an evening political meeting organised at South Africa House where different political parties presented their programmes. Dennis Goldberg spoke on behalf of the ANC and we went together, nervous as we arrived, not sure which entrance to use. We had spent years outside the Embassy on demonstrations, rallies, and walked past it, but we had not been in before as guests.

This meeting took place in the basement of the building, in their theatre called 'Kinema'; later, we often used this venue. A large crowd attended

the meeting but only Dennis, Mandla Langa and I attended from the ANC. The National Party had flown in an African speaker especially for the evening; Dennis Worrall, was there, was he then speaking on behalf of the Democrat Party? We remembered him as the former Ambassador in London when he was a vocal and powerful supporter of apartheid, frequently on television and radio to defend the policies of the National Party. Ben Ngubane, at that point the London representative of the Inkatha Freedom Party, spoke for them.

All in all it was surreal - the colour co-ordination of the speakers for that occasion seemed in reverse with the ANC represented by a white speaker and the National Party by a black speaker while Dennis Worrall with a new political hat, was full of bonhomie and enthusiasm for his new political alliance and able to oppose his old party with force. Dennis Goldberg acquitted himself competently and afterwards we drank wine and mingled with the audience who were keen to speak with us and ask questions. I think it was Gert Grobler, the First Secretary who chaired that meeting. The ice had been broken; we had been inside and the first dialogues with the 'enemies' of South Africa House had taken place.

January 12th 1994, the anniversary of the founding of the ANC, was a fitting occasion for a huge celebration and the launch of our election campaign. It was a Saturday afternoon and members, supporters and friends crowded the offices of the International Defence and Aid Fund, in Islington. Mendi Msimang, as Chief Representative, read Nelson Mandela's speech to mark the occasion and also presented the Election Manifesto. It was a great occasion, with hundreds of our British supporters coming together to eat, drink and listen to speeches and live music.

Among the vote we could identify in the U.K. was the large number of South African students studying in Britain at that time. We needed to contact them through the many Education Trusts that funded them. The British Council was the largest of these and I made contact with all of them. The students needed word that they had a vote outside the country and the location of their nearest polling station. We set up a Voter Education Workshop at the Trade Union Council Headquarters in Russell Square and invited all the students to attend.

There was an active ANC Students' Group; their leader at the time was young activist, Brian Molefe, now Chief Executive Officer of the Public Investment Corporation. He was a live wire, organising meetings with students around the country. Together with a group of other young activists, postgraduate economics students based at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, Brian undertook a lot of work with African students. Among this group were Brian's wife, Portia Molefe, now Director General in the Department of Trade & Industries and Lesetja Kganyago, now Director General of the Department of Finance.

Quite a lot of people attended our Voter Workshop. It included a mock polling booth with voting papers and began with a presentation by the Electoral Reform Society that explained the different proportional representation (PR) systems Their speaker endorsed the South African system as an excellent choice and then Brian Gosschalk, a South African from the MORI Opinion Polls, explained how opinion polls could influence the outcome of elections.

The voting procedure was then explained, followed by the mock election. Afterwards we recorded a number of spoiled papers which proved that our voter education had been inadequate and that many people did not record their vote properly and so were disqualified!

By that time, Mendi Msimang had returned to South Africa and Mandla Langa was in charge of the Mission. As Polling Day drew nearer I accompanied Mandla to South Africa House to hold discussions on the logistics of that day. There, in a poky little office at the back of the building, we met the official responsible for co-ordination of the voting procedures in the UK. It was cordial enough; but it was a strain, particularly for Mandla who was unusually reticent. It was a 'first' in having to work with the Embassy and afterwards we needed a whisky to overcome the pressure of the session!

Gradually there was a thaw in relations as we needed increasing consultation and then we were on first name terms. Gert Grobler, the First Secretary at SA House had taken charge; he was professional and affable in his approach. The ANC Head Office stressed that the 'foreign vote' should be held on neutral territory, under the control of local authorities – they did not want this to take place in embassies and we searched for alternative premises around London and for example, nominated Camden Town Hall and Lambeth Town Hall. However, the

Independent Election Commission (IEC) eventually ruled embassies as the most practical and well-known option: they became the polling stations outside the country.

One afternoon a call from South Africa House advised that the arrival of the ballot papers was imminent and we had decided to be there to observe the checking process as they arrived. The IEC regulations "stipulated that arrangements needed to be made for the safekeeping of the ballot papers in a secure strong room or safe".[•] Jackie Motsepe and I went to South Africa House to participate in the process. We sat in the strong room surrounded by thousands of ballot papers while women officials of the Embassy worked to count and bundle the papers. We watched and drank tea and it occured to me that if someone locked us in the strong room that afternoon, accidentally or otherwise, no one would know. We had not told anyone where we were.

There were nine polling stations in our region. These were South Africa House and two others in London, viz., the Commonwealth Hall and the Methodist Central Hall. There were also polling stations in Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Cardiff, Dublin in Ireland and Jersey. We appointed two ANC voting agents for each Polling Station.

Before Polling Day, 26th April for overseas voters, a meeting in South Africa House informed all the presiding officers and agents of the procedures on the day. A strong contingent attended and representatives from the larger parties were present and this provided us with an occasion to meet.

Interestingly, many people there said they did not have their own valid voting documents which meant they could not participate, or indeed, vote. By then I realised Leon was among them as he could not find his old green identity card and did not have a South African passport. In Leon's case, that Consular official advised that he present himself the following afternoon with two photographs and in less than fifteen minutes Leon had his first South African passport. No questions; just a couple of forms to complete and the oath sworn and *voila*, he was again South African!

[•] Independent Election Commission: Election April 1994: Foreign Voting Stations 3.4.4

We discussed our role as ANC agents at a special meeting. The organisation paid for transport and accommodation for those observers sent out of London. Ronnie Press devised a seal with ANC colours to use on ballot bags in the Region and our voting agents were instructed to supervise placing this seal on voting bags once they were filled. We were wary that votes and bags could go 'missing' and stressed that we observe bags being transferred by courier vans to Heathrow, en route for the count in Johannesburg with the other votes.

The Anti Apartheid Movement held a pre-election Rally the night before the poll at Congress House. It was the first time I had ever sat on that platform in a full hall. My role was to describe the mechanics of the voting procedure,

It was an emotional moment when Brian Molefe who spoke before me, referred to his comrades as 'young lions' and I looked around the hall and saw many 'old lions' like me. When it was my turn to speak about the mechanics of voting, I borrowed the lion theme to refer to those 'old lions' that would also be voting for the first time for a democracy, to those of us who had been in exile all these years.

It was an opportunity to highlight the changes that had taken place over three decades of exile. Thirty years before it was not possible to stand on the platform of Congress House because of the hostility by most of the union establishment and the Labour Party leadership. That was a high point of the Cold War and we were identified as communists or fellow travellers. By 1990, we faced a changed world, and in 1994, it was the end of our period of exile. This could be our last meeting in the TUC that had been so supportive and generous in recent years. I ended with an appeal to South Africans to have no fear of going inside South Africa House to vote, because the building belonged to them now.

Polling Day in South Africa House began early. I arrived before 6am to witness most of the embassy staff assembled while orders were being shouted at them in Afrikaans. They had been seconded to run the process, to take fingerprints and issue ballot papers. Like me, dozens of other voting agents arrived and there were countless observers and monitors present from different organisations.

When the doors opened, the crowds began to drift in, one by one, as organised by the security at the door. All day long, there were crowds of people; many of them holidaymakers in London dressed in casual clothing with cameras over their shoulders. It took some people as long as two to three hours to get into the building. A lot of South African voters had left the country fearing danger on the day and they were part of the huge crowd who gathered to vote that day. Outside in Trafalgar Square there was a festive atmosphere. Passers by wondered what was going on as an endless queue was entertained by music groups as they snaked around the Embassy and 'Nandos chicken' pieces were on hand to be sold to the waiting crowd.

The press and TV were outside to record the event, and in the middle of the day Father Trevor Huddlestone led a group from outside the main entrance of South Africa House. We went inside together to vote. The momentous moment was reached when finally millions of us could place our own cross next to Nelson Mandela's face on the ballot paper.

No one was sure how many South Africans were in London. The Embassy and the ANC tried to get figures from the Home Office but they could only estimate that figure varied from half a million to a hundred thousand. We were advised that at any time there were always South Africans in London on business or holiday and that would necessarily swell the head count. The actual number of resident South Africans at that time was considered to be much smaller and 20,000 people actually voted that day. To a passer by or someone involved it seemed as though millions had voted in South Africa House.

Today in South Africa by K. Fraser

It was not long ago,
I cannot remember
what it was like to be born,
yet I think perhaps
today is like that day.

Today for the first time
in all the years of my life,
I am given a choice
of who is to be my boss.
I will go to the polls

and consider the name
and the face,
then I will make my mark
or my cross,
And I will go home,
having done this thing,
this great and simple thing
for the first time.

So I think I know now
what it is like to be born,
to open my mouth
for the first big lungful of air
and then to expel it, yelling
and making them hear.

Oh, today they will all have to listen
to me and to you and to us,
and today they will have to see
the sounds of our voices on paper
and to count each one of our choices,
for what we decide today
Will be …..will be.

This was pinned on the notice board in the Penton Street offices: a souvenir of the never to be forgotten day.

CHAPTER 23

THE END OF THE FAMILY

When my mother died in London in 1993 aged 87, it effectively ended my family line. My parents' generation had died out and not having brothers or sisters, I gradually felt myself to be orphaned and unconnected.

My mother had lived with us in London for the last ten years of her life. We were never close. In truth, I never forgave her for not noticing me properly when I was a child and mourning the loss of her other child, a baby who lived for only six months. After her death along with her papers I found the birth certificate of my brother, Peter Leslie. Could this be confirmation that she never recovered from his loss and needed to keep the birth certificate with her through the years? I wondered whether she often looked at it during her endless spells of depression.

Mother was pleased to be out of South Africa; she had loathed the past thirty years where it seemed as though she and my father received some blame for our political activism. It was only when my father died that I became properly aware how ostracised our families had been, excommunicated and shunned. They had kept this from us.• My mother seemed to expunge those years when she lived in England because she seldom spoke about them, and certainly never with any nostalgia. Of course, it could have been her way of handling the break from her roots and the grief at my father's death. London suited her solitary temperament and she enjoyed watching the TV, reading the papers, going to lectures and making frequent trips to the library.

Two months after she died, I visited Johannesburg. Part of the reasoning was to lay the ghosts of my past. It was opportune too to try to form, after a gap of thirty years, more up to date views of my background and family.

The focus of Johannesburg as my home city had misted over the years. Everything seemed strange and yet familiar so that I recognised street names but not the streets that had changed so much. I had lost touch with most of my friends from long ago, but there were also solid links

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• Goldie Abrahams, Leon's sister had similar experiences. In the 1990's, she would also relate how in the same period people she knew, cousins and acquaintances, would cross the street to avoid a face-to-face meeting with her.

from the past that remained – like Bertha with whom I had maintained a continuous association.

I stayed with Bertha in her charming house, and did wonder whether this high life style around me would be sustainable in the new future…or would the poor and the dispossessed on their doorsteps, threaten it?

I realised too that whenever I visited Johannesburg I instantly became Jewish. Being Jewish has always been part of my identity because my parents, grandparents and ancestors as far back as we can trace were Jewish. However, in England, being Jewish was a smaller part of my identity that came to the fore when non-Jews reminded me of it, either consciously or not. From the time I read Jean Paul Sartre's [•]definition of an anti –Semite, I adopted it for my own use. The reality is that I encountered only occasional anti-Semitism, while being aware of its subtle pervasiveness. It just did not bother me. There were so few Jews in England and they were scattered which contrasted with my childhood where my friends, shopkeepers, doctors, dentists and neighbours were largely Jewish.

My alienation from the Jewish community started in childhood based on the stratified experiences of our family where wealth was a precondition to making you a person of standing which upset an early-developed feeling of fair play. When I was older I would rant and rave against the Jews; few seemed willing to acknowledge the parallels in the race laws in South Africa with those framed against the Jews in Europe. I expected more and it incensed me that people around me silently witnessed and benefited from the evil system.

Lyndall Gordon [•] eloquently described those times where "women lived idly like members of an *ancien régime*, but without the intellectual salons that gave a genuine social function to certain leisured women of pre-revolutionary France."

Milton Shain[•] further elaborated: "In the apartheid era Jews were appropriated…into the apartheid project." Conversely, a small but prominent number of Jews, that included us, participated in the struggle to end apartheid.

[•] Jean Paul Sartre (1948) "Portrait of an anti-Semite" (Secker & Warburg) "…the authentic Jew who thinks of himself as a Jew –it is because the anti-Semite has forced him into the situation.

[•]Lyndall Gordon (1992) "Shared lives" (David Philips)

[•] Shain & Mendelson (2000) "Memories, realities & dreams", Aspects of the South African Jewish experience" (Jonathan Ball)

About 90% of South African Jews came from Lithuania in the period between 1890 and the First World War. This gave them a degree of homogeneity and for the most part, their origins were very humble. They were all poor to start but the economic opportunities of the country ensured that a majority became quite rich over the years.

The immigrants with their distinctive Lithuanian accents and traditions were people of character and conviction. They wanted their children to have the opportunities and the education denied to them. They probably belonged in the generation Amos Oz♦, described in Jerusalem just after the Second World War – he used the term 'judaised' to describe East European immigrants who asphalted the front of their houses, took out the trees and shrubs. They were indifferent to that aspect of life, so too were our forefathers, too pre-occupied with making a living to bother with the upkeep of a garden! They worked very hard, and in many cases made great sacrifices to send their sons, sometimes their daughters, to university. Many families felt they had 'arrived' when they could talk of ' my son the doctor', the subject of many Jewish jokes.

My parents' generation, principally the first generation of South African born Jews, created the infrastructure of that Jewish way of life, as I understood it in my youth. They certainly attended to their gardens; many now had large homesteads and huge manicured lawns around them. For the Jews of South Africa from the fifties to the nineties, a sweet life style was the dominating motif. Where could you have such an opulent life style for so little? Cracks in the edifice emerged after the Soweto riots in 1976 and during the 1980's, and from then there have been waves of emigration of Jews, particularly younger ones so that most have families have at least one younger member living permanently in another country.

During that visit in 1993, I woke up one morning in Johannesburg and counted my sixteen first cousins who had been central to my early life. I calculated that about fourteen possibly still lived in South Africa and I was in contact with only three of them. What had happened to the others, particularly those on my father's side, to whom he had given so much support in his earlier life? They had largely cut off from him as he grew older and because of my political affiliations. I had last seen them

♦ Amos Oz (2004) "A tale of love and darkness" (Chatto & Windus)

twelve years before at his funeral. A feeling of nostalgia moved me to phone my cousin Sybil when I easily traced her telephone number. Her greeting was not warm but I pressed her to invite me to tea with another cousin whom she expected to see that day.

My reception was frosty, the conversation mannered. Three complete strangers faced each other on that afternoon in Houghton and an unspoken hostility permeated the clinking of teacups. They were much older than I was but as daughters of my father's two sisters, they had been an integral part of my childhood. They had no pleasant reminiscences for me, the little flower girl at Sybil's wedding, nor the fact that my father had played a central role in their lives. He had supported both his sister's children, financially and morally for many years.

It was naïve of me to believe I could re-create a thread with that past. For me, it could have been an occasion for reminisces, the big family occasions centred around our grandmother who kept open house, the throngs of visitors and table piled high with food, and especially, that evocative special family day, her birthday on Christmas Day! There was nothing of the kind.

Aware of a chilling atmosphere, I asked myself why I had come. How silly to have allowed nostalgia to overtake my better judgment. Although my mother had died two months before, on that day she did not even qualify for a warm word of tribute from Ray. Instead, she recalled that my mother had not said goodbye to her when she emigrated ten years before. It was not difficult to understand why my mother had avoided this woman all those years ago. The other cousin, Sybil, whose tea I was drinking was kindlier.

This incident reinforced my feeling of aloneness; while I had always stood outside from the family group for a brief moment, I hoped to re-claim a link with the past. However, time had moved on and we had all changed.

Of course, there are exceptions and we remained friends with Bern Janks, my mother's youngest brother. He was a well-known architect in Johannesburg, a long term friend of my father who had introduced my parents From the nineteen-thirties, he was committed to left wing politics, a curious blend of the communist -capitalist and, although I think that on balance he loved money most. In secret compartments in his house, behind bricks and paintings, were hidden recesses that contained his collection of Marxist books. It always

seemed such an unnecessary risk given that his was more of a hobby than real-politics. We had many bitter rows over the years – simply, he disapproved of my involvement with the Labour Party as a political 'deviation', and he seemed always to test my political allegiances when we met. I never told him that I disapproved of him as a man of property under apartheid. Nevertheless, there remained always a genuine affection between us.

In those last days in London, we would speculate about the quality of welcome we could expect from family and friends at 'home' after so many years of separation. People around were on the move - leaving to return to South Africa, others were on trips to find jobs, schools and houses. We talked about this a lot, and our reactions, hopes and fears divided on racial grounds. Most of the whites among us expected little warmth from the relations left behind. Black South Africans were less apprehensive. Some worried about members of their family who may have changed political allegiance to belong instead to hostile organisations and they could be viewed as enemies. This applied to Zulus but for the majority, they expected loving reunions.

My diary recorded
Johannesburg, 14th July 1993

"*Thirty years later, 1993, and I am separated and detached from everyday life in South Africa. This morning a woman on the radio described the garden of her childhood in colonial India and confessed that now she wondered whether it was it just a photograph she imagined - perhaps, she had never have been there after all. It made me think of my own reaction when I look at the houses, the streets and the neighbourhood of my childhood. I even visited my old school and took photographs of it. Unlike the woman who could describe the garden with the help of a photograph, I looked at the real thing and they were still there. But, the long gap in time, the lack of continuity blurs the memories to give the same fuzzy impression.*

Bertha remains an abiding link with my past.
Whenever I drive around the corner from her house in Linksfield, I pass the house she lived in as a girl. I remember the parties we had there and the lovely garden her mother tirelessly worked in. The continuity of an entire life in the same town and neighbourhood grips me. To know

people generation-by-generation, watch developments and decay on a daily basis is something I will never know from personal experience. Bertha, on the other hand, envies the choice of places, people and experiences that exile gave me. Nevertheless, now I am a displaced person in South Africa. I feel confused and ambivalent about my identity as its time now to return to England."

(Diary, 29th April 1994)

"There is hardly any white person that I have met here who actually voted for the ANC."

From the available sources, few white people voted for the ANC. The Democratic Party received only about 2% of the vote, and presumably, these were white votes, while the majority must have voted for the National Party who took about 28%. Once again I I was in Johannesburg to hear the results of the election; it was where I wanted to be.

The election count went on and on, day after day and the results were not finalised for announcement. Feroza Adams, who ran the Public Relations Department of the ANC, invited me to 'jol'• at the Carlton Hotel every evening. During that waiting period, foreign guests and the press were entertained at Johannesburg's principal hotel every evening which laid on these facilities for the ANC…. the government in waiting. Feroza and I remained close friends from the time we met doing the course together in The Hague until her tragic death about a year later. On the evening of 2 May 1994, as I arrived at the Carlton Hotel I did not realise that this was the night Nelson Mandela would take power and speak to the world from the Carlton Hotel. On the way into town, I heard President F.W. de Klerk address the nation – he was conceding power. It was the *night and as I arrived at the Carlton Hotel, white minority rule was over.*

Thabo Mbeki was ecstatic and introduced Nelson Mandela as the new President of South Africa and called on him to address the world from the podium. The phalanx of media in the front with their huge equipment

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• jol = South African slang to have a good time.

and elbows, made it impossible to have a clear view of the proceedings. There were so many of them; they shoved the crowd aside to capture this most newsworthy item, like the police holding back a crowd with their truncheons, only now it was the turn of cameras and photographers to capture the moment. Standing around Mandela were the leaders of the ANC, to become members of the future cabinet. Of that grouping, I recall Joe Slovo, first to jump onto the podium in cream casual clothes, almost as though for a cricket match while Cyril Ramaphosa's glum face only just made it on the line-up, he was already almost outside the frame. In his speech, Mandela told the cheering crowd to "enjoy yourselves tonight, because tomorrow work will begin to restructure this country". There were many foreign dignitaries there including British politicians like Neil Kinnock and David Steel. In that speech, the new President acknowledged certain people who were present and called them to the podium for public acknowledgement. Coretta King, widow of Martin Luther King and Limpho Hani, widow of Chris Hani were singled out. There were others but I only recorded these names in my diary. When I arrived earlier, the streets around the hotel were empty but when I left some hours later, there was pandemonium outside. The crowds cheered anyone coming out of that gathering and journalists and photographers wanted to hear what was happening. Into a microphone thrust in front of me, I said...it was the most unforgettable moment, the dream-realised. …What a privilege to be an eyewitness to the historical moment when South Africa changed forever. People encircled me, as I spoke, toyi-toying and cheering.

But in that unforgettable moment amid the singing, laughing and applause I knew so few of the people; I did not recognise the songs they sang. The reality was that as a white exile for so many years, I was really an outsider.

On the day after the Inauguration of Nelson Mandela in Pretoria, King David School invited me to speak to its senior pupils. This Jewish middle- class day school now educated the majority of Jewish boys and girls in Johannesburg. I was there, a middle-aged Johannesburg Jewish woman, an exile and ANC member and asked to tell that young Jewish audience about my life.

All around there was an atmosphere of exhilaration the day after the Inauguration. The occasion had transfixed the whole country, the

glittering ceremony and its deep significance. When I arrived at the school, the headmaster told me that a recent mock election among his pupils had revealed overwhelming support for the Nationalists. The ANC had little support among those pupils. It must have reflected the Jewish voting patterns in Johannesburg.

This made me slightly uneasy when hordes of unruly teenagers assembled in the lecture theatre to listen to me. I had spent a lot of time thinking and planning what I would say to this audience. After a few minutes, they settled down, and to my surprise, they listened to me in total silence. I needed to tell them about my background, quite typical of the times I grew up, perhaps as their parents had. I hoped that enabled them to identify me as I sketched in the happenings and the changes in our life.

My diary recording on King David School on 11 May*:*

"I told those boys and girls, children of white South Africa, that they were not responsible for the past; they did not create and sustain apartheid and they must not continue its legacy. From today, a new era has started and they should identify with it. Although many of them believe they will emigrate and live their lives elsewhere when they grow up, the reality is that the majority of them will never emigrate. They need to think positively about the future and play a positive role in the new South Africa. Although it was only the staff who asked questions, I assessed their pupils' response to me as a former teacher - it was one of attentive silence. I hope that means my impact was positive."

CHAPTER 24

BEYOND 1994

"The true freedom of woman is something that cannot be given her, that she has to work out within herself " - Olive Schreiner

(i)

I returned to London at the end of May to a quieter and smaller household. For the first time in years, only Leon and I were in the house. Emma had gone away to work for a year in Beijing, on the English edition of 'The China Daily.' She followed that by going on to Hong Kong where she remained for nearly two years. We encouraged Emma to travel, to have the experience of life outside the 'Developed World.' She joined her boyfriend Mark Paterson in Beijing and they both worked together and lived in a building over the newspaper, specially reserved for foreigners.

She changed direction when she trained to be a sub-editor, a profession which suits her talent for picking the exact word, *le bon mot,* the witty pun and eye-catching headline.

Emma went to Leeds University to study law but changed to sociology and media studies. She joined the Civil Service graduate intake and on their advice she was assigned to the Information Office. The vetting took months and we were upset when she was finally assigned to the Prisons' Desk of the Home Office which she hated. She would often regale us with prison stories and the ghoulish break-outs that happened in that period but after a year she left. She may have had a lifetime career in the Civil Service had she been assigned to a different desk.

There was a break in her career; and then she decided to study further. We hoped she might consider law again but journalism interested her and she enrolled to do courses in editing and sub-editing at the London School of Printing in South East London. After a couple of months of free-lancing with her new skills, in mid 1994 the job in China surfaced…and she was off. She was a sub-editor with her first proper newspaper job.

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In his play, "Absence of War, David Hare described an election as the "democracy ceremonial" and in London the many groups, friends and organisations involved in the fight against apartheid gave over to endless celebrations and parties to commemorate the great South African change.

Changes to the political structures would take place – the role was over. The ANC Mission in London would close down and the Anti Apartheid Movement, having successfully performed its task, would dissolve in its present form.

In the past thirty years South Africa had been expelled or resigned from the international world and now was the occasion to re-join to play an influential role in organisations such as the United Nations and its many affiliates. The leper status was gone forever.

The Commonwealth was one such organisation and I remember the occasion in 1961 when I voted in that Referendum that took South Africa out of the Commonwealth to become a Republic. Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, as Prime Minister, had written a personalised letter to every white elector telling them that *"should South Africa remain a Monarchy, it will have to suffer time and again from instigated racial clashes and economic setbacks, since these are the weapons used to prevent the coming of the Republic.*" At that time, although in the minority we chose the Commonwealth option rather than the racist Calvinist republic he proposed. But Verwoerd won the vote and now decades later South Africa had decided to re-join.

I was present on 20 July 1994 at the Service in Westminster Abbey when South African membership was formally acknowledged in a service of great pomp. The Queen Mother was the Guest of Honour and Thabo Mbeki, then Deputy President, as the South African Guest of Honour. Archbishop Tutu was the principal speaker in the Abbey and described his feelings when he voted for the first time in his life. "I went into the polling booth a boy," he said, "and came out a man". The Abbey was filled to capacity and although I had always been rather scornful of these sort of trappings when I watched them on TV, it felt different that morning to be part of the formal procession at the end of the Service lead by the Queen Mother.

The Queen celebrated with a small Garden Party at Marlborough House. It was a scorching hot English summer day; I wished I wore a hat for

protection and anyway, my friend, Thembi Nobadula, did not think my designer silk suit was 'complete' without the hat. The Queen, of course, wore a white hat trimmed with the same yellow as her dress and at exactly 4pm as stated on the invitation, she descended the steps of Marlborough House into the garden where the assembled guests, moved forward to face their guests of honour. Thabo Mbeki accompanied the Queen together with Prince Charles and the Director of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Chief Anekeyo. They stopped half way down and the band played both anthems. It was a moment to treasure, as we all faced the Queen, with Thabo standing beside her, and quietly and beautifully stood to attention, with no clenched fists, to honour our anthem, N'kosi Sikele Africa and of course, God save the Queen. It was the Royal Garden Party.

Afterwards we all mingled and spoke. In that single day, I saw five members of the Royal Family, the first time I had seen a Royal in the flesh! We drank champagne, while a butler or was he a footman hovered behind the Queen with a silver tray with the accoutrements of a cup of tea?

The Queen had a sweet very powdered white face, emphasised by her outfit. Thabo presented some of us to her, including me. I made a half curtsey as she put out her white gloved hand. It was a bob up and down, a reflex action because the whole experience was unexpected and after years of seeing how people behave in those circumstances I just did the same.

I wondered what the gains would be in membership of the Commonwealth all these years later. It seemed a hang -over from the British Empire, the Monarch as its head and former members of the empire as members. However by 1994 the ties that bound the Commonwealth were diverse and included trade deals, as well as educational and professional advantages and sporting links such as the Commonwealth Games. Obviously there were advantages as most of the former British colonies chose Commonwealth membership when they gained their independence as it formed another strand in a world aimed at co-operation.

The following day the Daily Telegraph carried a report of the event in Westminster Abbey with photographs of the Queen Mother and the Dean of Westminster. There was another photograph alongside it of Archbishop Tutu with Father Huddleston. 'The Daily Telegraph', in its inimical style described that afternoon as follows:

"*Later the Queen and the Prince of Wales marked the occasion with a Garden Party at Marlborough House."*

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iv

The years of exile had ended and it came around for the ANC to close down its overseas offices, in London at the end of May 1994. The Trades Union Congress held a farewell party to say goodbye to Mendi Msimang, no longer the Chief Representative but now a new Member of Parliament. The effects of the ANC office needed to be disposed of.

On the 31 May, we had the final Office Committee Meeting. I kept the minutes of that meeting (not written by me) and reproduce extracts here:

All present agreed a strong signal needed sending to people that the ANC office at 28 Penton Street is well and truly closed.

It was agreed that the Branch has to continue. The new Ambassador will act as an ex officio member and it will continue to look after the interests of the ANC and its members. They will have a line to the office of the Secretary General. Chief (i.e. Mendi) will discuss this and ask that a 'desk' be established in this office.

Ronnie Press will take control of arrangements to dispose of the furniture and equipment.

We would place an advertisement in the papers thanking all the people who had supported our Votes for Freedom campaign.

The Redeployment issue was discussed. Mandla Langa had arranged a job in Johannesburg and Jackie Matsepe would get employment in London. Jim, Lorna, Nad and Sisa are waiting placement. Mendi will return to South Africa the following week.

Someone brought a birthday cake with the ANC colours iced on it. We gathered around it for a final goodbye. It was sad to say goodbye as well and although relations had not always been cordial the hectic pace for the Comrades of Penton Street in the past few years, made us close relations.

V

Compared to the hectic events of the past few years, the rest of 1994 was quite a dull period. I carried on working as Secretary of the Branch of the ANC and one question dominated all our meetings: did the exiled community have a role within the organisation? We had set up a formalised communication structure with South Africa House and held regular and affable meetings with the Acting High Commissioner, Gert Grobler.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement then held its last meeting in the Camden Town Hall. They decided to transform into a new solidarity organisation to focus on the whole of Southern Africa, not exclusively South Africa and they took over the old ANC offices in Penton Street.• Only then did I discover how many different Anti-Apartheid Movements existed, extending to Greece, Spain, Australia and Canada. Mike Terry had maintained these international contacts and it was he who co-ordinated this final meeting.

My main pre-occupation at that time was the anticipated job, the diplomatic placement. I waited for the *big moment*, to be deployed to the Foreign Affairs Department in Pretoria. Everyone around me felt this was imminent but there was no word. I focused on this new beginning waiting for my new career to unfold in the newly organised Diplomatic Corps after that elaborate and expensive training. As trainees, we all believed we would be absorbed, although there were no official promises.

I met Robert McBride and was told he was heading a committee on the integration process of ANC trained diplomats. We resumed contact andI re- submitted all the relevant papers needed by the Department of Foreign Affairs in the ANC to co-ordinate the process.

Let me fast forward to the interview for a diplomatic position that was set up in South Africa House on 6 September 1995. I was told that my appointment would be subject to that interview. Two medium ranking diplomats from the old order met me for about an hour. I knew both of them, Mr. Morkel, known for his right-wing views and another man whose name I have now forgotten I had not liked or trusted either of

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• The new organisation was known as 'Action for Southern Africa' (ACTSA)

them but the interview was informal, pleasant and I left confident that I handled it adequately. It took a long time for my results to arrive for assessment in Pretoria and then, Elvis Govender, with whom I spoke on the telephone, told me that interview was successful and I would receive my letter of appointment. He suggested I prepare myself to be in Pretoria at the beginning of November or December.

When the fax arrived it was a two or three line letter of rejection with no reasons. With hindsight, I should have realised I would never make it past that interview even though I was confident: how inconceivable that those men would give me a favourable report. Robert McBride said I should appeal to Thabo Mbeki and revealed the reasons for my rejection: my British citizenship and that I had been an elected politician in the UK. These two factors barred me from representing South Africa.

I disintegrated. The sensible thing would have been for me to go to Pretoria to get some direct answers instead of passing the matter to Leon because I could not handle it myself. On Robert's advice, Leon phoned Aziz Pahad, Deputy Foreign Minister and he spoke to Thabo Mbeki who referred the matter back to Aziz. It resembled the children's game, pass the parcel, and it was me being passed around the circle and not getting a response. Leon thought Aziz would deal with the matter personally and perhaps he did but there was no change, no communication. In the meantime, all the applicants gathered in Pretoria for an initial training, and later, received placement abroad to represent the country.

I went into a state of decline. Sometime later, I read a most horrific account in 'The Guardian' (14/12/95) that described the killing of Elvis Govender, part of the group I was to join and with whom I had spoken many times about the placement. He had been viciously attacked on board a catamaran during an ANC training 'teambuilding' picnic at a popular resort on the Vaal Dam. I may have been on that picnic. Govender's English fiancée demanded to know through the press why the South African Department of Foreign Affairs were not taking tough action against the murderer of her fiancée.

I was standing waiting for a tube in London as I read this report. Elvis Govender's horrifying death helped me lay to rest my own diplomatic ambitions.

"*Govender was a former guerrilla and ANC national organiser. A rising star in the new civil service, he was expected to become a director in the Department of Foreign Affairs on completion of his fast-track training*

course. But he died on November 10 during a barbecue after boarding a catamaran with another trainee, Jacqueline Coetzer. The manager of a local aquatic club, Alan Stokes, owned the boat.

By Ms. Coetzer's account, they were idling their way through anchored yachts in a rowing boat when they heard a radio in the seemingly deserted catamaran and boarded to switch it off. According to Mr. Stokes, they broke into the vessel and looted his provisions.

Mr. Stokes saw them from the shore and raced out to confront them in a motorised dinghy armed with a machete. Allegedly shouting obscenities, he drove them off the vessel. Ms. Coetzer who could not swim, managed to cling on to the rowing boat and drifted away. Govender clung on the anchor line with Mr. Stokes chopping at his hands to try to make him let go. Mr Stokes claims Govender then drowned, but he has been accused of ramming Govender repeatedly with his dinghy again the side of the catamaran, killing him.

On shore, Ms. Coetzer, in a swimming costume found Mr Stokes. He had fetched two police constables who were amicably chatting to him. When she began walking away to dress, one of the policemen tried to arrest her for house breaking and theft. After an argument, they let her go. No apparent attempt was made to find Govender.

Mr. Stokes was charged with murder nearly four weeks later ...he was then released on a warning and the case was adjourned until April the following year, allowing him time to take part in the Cape to Rio boat race.

Ms Perkins, fiancée of Govender said the following: "The man is going off to have a nice time on a boat for three months. How does that feel to you when you have had the person murdered who was going to be with you for the rest of your life? It makes my blood boil." She went on to say: "the murder was clearly racial, in that Mr. Stokes let the white girl get away but attacked Govender, an Indian. I am upset about the low-key way people who worked with him are dealing with it. It is difficult to comprehend the passivity with which people accept death and racism in South Africa." ('The Guardian', 14Dec.1995)

After that, my personal pain eased. It enabled me to put my regret into proportion and realise that if the Foreign Affairs Department were so 'low-key' and casual in a case the magnitude of Govender's, what chance did I have.

It took me years to get over the disappointment. Nothing was quite the same after that – I never again felt the same enthusiasm for anything as when I had been on the verge of achieving what I wanted, the mid-life grab to do something *significant*. It had been the chance to do the two things I enjoyed most – to promote the new South Africa in a political context.

With time, I realised that because this project failed, it did not make me a failure because in the political world, there is often no middle course between failure and success; it is one or the other. In this instance, I failed and I will never know whether it was because I am white, because I was too old, or because at that point I was still living abroad or all these things put together. It could have been because some 'awful white fascists' sabotaged me and no one was prepared to do anything.

It was at this time that I sorted through the notes, letters, cuttings, written fragments and smaller diaries I had kept for more than thirty years. Reading them provided a memory jogger and helped to fill in the pieces to make the bigger picture. The formalised writing of those recollections, this memoir was the consequence.

CHAPTER 25

LOOKING FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Let's go home to be part of the new!

(i)

It was inevitable that we would go back to South Africa; exiles are people who usually return. We did not plan it like those who left the moment it was possible, to organise jobs and settle in before that election in 1994. Our decision was taken more slowly; we talked a lot about 'a return' and increasingly found the option appealing. More and more people around us packed up and said they were going home. But where was 'the home' we talked about, after thirty-four years in the United Kingdom? Was it Johannesburg, London or where? We had become citizens of everywhere; we had a more international outlook, belonged perhaps to the world and no particular country, 'cosmopolitans' as Lenin and Trotsky would have said! My grandparents and great grandparents had made their way to South Africa from Europe. Two generations later and there is a nationality change - our daughter is British by birth.

The diplomatic career would have re-located me to South Africa and at that time I pushed the practical considerations aside - I was on a high. Leon increasingly wanted a return to South Africa and Emma was an adult with her own plans. I did hope in a vague way that as a family unit we would come together to live in South Africa.

In 1996, we began to investigate the practical possibilities with Cape Town as the option. I rejected Johannesburg, too unsafe especially for a woman and anyway, we no longer had many roots there. 'Our' old Johannesburg had decayed into part of a vast urban slum; it was even dangerous to take an exploratory walk around our old haunts and that area, we called 'town' as kids had vanished. It was impossible to identify with areas like Sandton, Mid Rand and Four Ways that were as strange as any new city centre we visited over the years. This time there was the option to choose where we would live and Cape Town was alluring. We both remembered its physical beauty, it was by the sea and it could be the ideal new start.

(ii)

Early in 1996 I set out on a three-week visit to Cape Town – a feasibility study!

Cape Town:
13 November 1996: Arrival in South Africa

The Sea Point end of Cape Town does not instantly appeal to me. It reminds me of Berea in Johannesburg, or perhaps, somewhere I cannot place but when I drive further out from Bantry Bay onwards, it is heaven and as I drive along I feel that around the next bend I will see the Bay of Villefranche,[•] my utopia, from" le Moyen Corniche", only it is Clifton. It is spectacular.

The shops in Sea Point remind me of Raleigh Street, Yeoville, when I was a child and there is certainly no feel of a shoppers' paradise one finds in European cities in the 1990's, more part of another world. I am sure though that shrieking materialism must have moved somewhere else in Cape Town because the shopping scene is awful!

The newspapers, 'The Argus' and the' Cape Times' sweep me into an intense local political scene. Perhaps it is really too much to digest not being an intimate part of it. It makes me aware that I do feel like an outsider, overwhelmingly conscious that our South African life happened such a long time ago. Any future life here will not be an automatic continuation of the immediate past."

Cape Town
20th November 1996

"*I am reading Kader Asmal's book on the Truth Commission[•], which acts as a history and commentary, a fitting complement to my present journey, as well as VS Naipaul's "A way in the world" which Rosemary gave me as a present before I left London. Naipaul makes a point I can apply equally to myself - because here I am where everything is strange and not strange.*

[•] Villefranche sur Mer, a Mediterranean village near Nice in the South of France was our favourite holiday resort and where we spent many wonderful holidays.

[•] Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal, Ronald Suresh Roberts (1996) "Reconciliation through Truth" (David Philips)

"On the streets," he said, " I was more of a looker, half a tourist… to go back home was to play with impressions in the way I played with the first pair of glasses I had, looking at a world now sharp and small and not quite real, now standard size and real but blurred."

I like the French phrase, "une idée fixée"-because it is so applicable to that fixed view in my head of the Jewish involvement in apartheid. The current Cape Town headlines in the newspapers, has caused a new mood of gloom among the Jews. They are seized by a collective fear of being hounded by a militant Muslim Group, known as PAGAD, reputedly formed to oppose drugs in the area and the Jews are anxious about this Muslim activism.

The newspapers announced that Pagad would hold a large demonstration this afternoon at the Waterfront and I went especially to observe it. I was surprised to see crowds of people in 'full' Muslim dress, peacefully milling around, not in an organised meeting at all. However, just in case, I did notice a huge police presence a discrete distance away in scary military style vehicles.

I have spent these last few days taking longish drives to look around. I keep coming back to Sea Point as well and today, in blustering windy conditions, I drove to Hout Bay and walked around the Harbour. A possible place to live but no, I was put off by the suburban feel of the place, long changed from the isolated beauty spot of forty years. I was suspicious too of the sign 'Welcome to the Republic of Hout Bay' on the road side, –is that meant to be humorous?

Cape Town
24TH November 1996

"I am at the end of the trip in Cape Town and less confused about living here. The climate is not that great and it is hard to know in what sort of area we should look. Sea Point still remains my choice, not too posh, close to everything especially the sea and the city centre To be beside the sea and decide spontaneously to walk on the Promenade, watch the evening sunset, is an enticing prospect.

There is the chance that we will be absorbed into some activity, to contribute to the re-structuring of the country that on a selfish level will also give our lives further high moments. I have met new people here, returnees to Cape Town from overseas and those who have always lived

here. They have helped me with practical choices such as whether the flat should face west or east, should it be in that street or this? A smallish city like Cape Town could also offer opportunities for a social life.

I read an interview with Barbara Follett, soon to be a British Member of Parliament who years before was South African. She discusses the mantra that she carries around, taken from Bernard Shaw. She has written it on the first page of her large flat red file that she carries around and refers to it quite often. I am so impressed by its sentiments, just the advice I need now:

"People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances for what they are. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want. And if they can't find them, they make them."

(iii)

Early in 1997, I returned to Cape Town. We bought a spacious penthouse in Sea Point with a view from all windows. Later that year we relocated.

(iv)

With the hindsight of eight years I realise that we did not dwell in enough depth on the complexity of the move. We focused too much on the opportunities for a new beginning without paying enough attention to the losses that such a move entailed.

We held a large farewell party before we moved out of the house. Luckily, we chose a balmy warm evening and lots of people came to say goodbye. We decided not to have speeches. I don't think we wanted to hear people say how wonderful we were; more so, it would have raised the emotional temperature of farewells with which I would not have been able to cope. And so it ended on a high note.

(v)

At the end of September 1997 I sent the following letter to my friend Becky Sachs:

"*Sea Point,*
Cape Town.

Dear Becky,

It is now a month since we arrived and now seem reasonably settled in the flat. We have found a home for most of our things – remember the 181 packages which luckily, arrived intact – the careful packing and labelling by the shippers made it much easier to straighten ourselves out.

We have actually only been in the flat for about ten days and we like it a lot, particularly the spectacular views from everywhere. It has been decorated and the large airy rooms make it feel more of a house than a flat. We have the roof garden plus the balcony so there is scope for the gardening side of things. I've already bought a few plants, like a bottlebrush tree, a 'yesterday, today and tomorrow", loves from my childhood.

The weather too has been gorgeous, it is already summer most of the time, though the evenings are chilly. On Sunday we are going to Hermanus for a few days – it is the whale season and as I've never seen a whale before nor been to Hermanus, I am looking forward to the break.

Everything is new and a challenge but I am also home sick for London. At times I suddenly go into shock when I realise I am in Cape Town because most of the time this feels just like a holiday. Leon was invited to the COSATU Conference shortly after we arrived and was publicly acknowledged…"

Six months later I wrote to another friend in Manchester:

"Thembi is coming next week to spend a week here and I am looking forward to it. I am not sure what she will make of Cape Town besides the beauty side. It is still very much in the apartheid mould, not too much seems changed. Moreover, it is so very different from the rest of the country, not part of Africa really.

On a different tack, I chaired a large public meeting of my ANC Branch last week. Nearly 100 people attended to hear the Chairman of the Housing Committee give a very poor report on housing in Cape Town. It is a total mess. I was shocked by how casual he was about the whole thing, particularly as I seemed to be the only person present who had read a very long Council report about housing on the Cape Flats that has a seemingly uncontrollable increase of gangsters.

I have been appointed the ANC representative on the Community Police Forum. This is a body designed for the police and community to try to work together. I have only been to one meeting and found it gruesome to sit around the large table in the Police Station with about twenty pale male police officers. There were other community representatives as well but I did feel quite anxious when introduced as the ANC representative and they all turned to study me. Some wore uniform and an old unease crept over me".

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(vi)

It is 2005 and I want to bring this story to an end. I am not able to say that I have the happily ever after ending. I do not know how the future will work out.

To bring the story up date - For Leon, there were great strokes of luck –he does not look back - and with boundless energy has taken off into what seems like a continuation of the early days. It has a happy end for him and he was able to continue a life in the labour relations sphere in which he had specialised all his life. Now, as a Commissioner at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration, (CCMA) his trade union and management experience in England gives him the skills to implement the new labour legislation.

For me, the story has been different because I truly adopted London as my home, a lengthy adventure and identification with its metropolitan atmosphere. A love of Europe shaped much of my adult life, its glamour, to feel in the centre of things and I personally flourished. My life in London was a rewarding and stimulating one and I think I seized the opportunities it offered me for fulfilment.

vii

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so"
-------Hamlet 2,2,248

Writing about myself has made me conscious of how many different people I have been. When I re-read earlier parts I feel quite disjointed from that past. I worry too as I re-edit pieces whether these will be interesting for a reader because of my own fascination by this past where some of the events I describe were public moments and I recorded them. I just happened to be there.

Of course, I have highlighted certain years crammed with activities, others unaccounted. Those details of teaching, housekeeping and mothering are crowded out, the friends and minutiae that made up a larger part of my life.

The question of identity grips me. So much in contemporary South Africa is a discussion of our identities, many different peoples together trying to forge something new while re-examining the old. It seems always that under the surface there lurks so much anger as well as tremendous optimism for a better future.

I am back in South Africa now but who am I? So much of my life has been spent somewhere else that I wonder often about my own identity. I walk down the street in Cape Town with people around me, and I do not know who I am. The country has changed, and in any case, I was from Johannesburg and now I am in Cape Town. South Africa has changed and so have I. What is my new identity? Where do I belong? Who am I?

There are many parallels with my first exile - is this my second exile? It was satisfying to be absorbed into the radical life of London of the sixties as on our return to Cape Town in 1997 when we immediately plunged into a new life in the new South Africa, a hectic round of meeting people and doing exciting and useful things.

Cape Town in its way is as new to me as London had been all those years ago. South Africa in 1997 was different after thirty-four years absence, a place that I did not recognise. True, I knew people, events, and the political structure of which I was part but really, I had my own version of the country that I just did not know any more.

I am certainly not the white South African who compromised with apartheid but I am not black and so in street talk, I could not be recognised or identified as anyone other than one of those white South Africans who have lost power, but pretty little else. I would describe myself as having been damaged by apartheid, the system I chose to resist. I am proud that I did this as a conscious voluntary act and I can raise my head with pride.

I would not want anything to overshadow the immense satisfaction of witnessing the dream realised – the destruction of the apartheid state, to be part of a liberated South Africa. It does bring a feeling of fulfilment that throughout my life I held on to an unyielding principle and witnessed its achievement.