DENIS GOLDBERG*

Denis Goldberg was born in 1933 into a family already deeply committed to radical politics. He trained as an engineer, and in 1955 graduated from the University of Cape Town. In the 1950s he became prominent in the Cape Town Congress of Democrats, amongst other involvements in anti-apartheid politics. He was tried in the famous Rivonia Trial in 1964, along with Nelson Mandela and other African National Congress leaders and activists. In the trial it was revealed that he had manufactured devices that Umkhonto we Sizwe used in their sabotage activities. Together with his fellow trialists he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Because he was white, he was incarcerated in Pretoria Central Prison rather than Robben Island.

In 1986, after twenty-two years in prison, he accepted then President P W Botha's conditional offer of release, which compelled him to renounce the use of violence to overthrow apartheid. He went from South Africa to Israel, where his daughter Hilary lived on a kibbutz, but soon after his arrival left again in the wake of a controversial interview which misrepresented his politics as, inter alia, supportive of any and all violence as a tool in liberation politics. He went to live in England with his wife Esme, where he continues to live today. From the time of his release, he actively campaigned for the ANC around the world. He currently runs Community HEART, a non-profit organisation seeking to support social development projects in Southern Africa.

At the outset of the interview, he clarified his understanding of his Jewishness and the question of Jews and apartheid:

> In the United States, where people are very sensitive to these things, far more so than in Britain where Jews hardly acknowledge their Jewishness (except if they go to synagogue and then it's a very tight closed community), I would say I am a chicken soup Jew. I like chicken soup, it's very nice with matzah balls in it as well, but I reckon that's about the limit of my Jewishness.
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> When I arrived in Israel straight from prison I had a very long interview with a journalist. He asked me how I felt as a Jew about being in Israel. I said, 'You know, I've come to Israel because my daughter is here, and had she been in Saudi Arabia, that's where I

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would have gone, or Germany or England or wherever.' I spent four hours being interviewed in which I explained my opposition to Zionism, my belief that the State of Israel had a right to exist, but I had the right to criticise it, that the only way Israel could survive would be to live at peace with its neighbours, which meant new policy [towards Arabs and Palestinians]. At the end of that long, detailed, four-hour interview, in which my childhood and my family attitudes and my own mature political thinking was revealed, he said, 'Now tell me how you really feel about being a Jew in Israel?' And I said, 'I've spent four hours answering that question: I'm here by chance, it's not special for me.'

Being Jewish in South Africa meant being white, and being white meant enjoying all the privileges of apartheid South Africa. I experienced a very interesting phenomenon. When I was released I was claimed as a Jew who fought apartheid. They said, 'You see, there are good Jews who're opposed to apartheid.' This was a wonderful argument in which there was no logic, because what it said was, 'Denis Goldberg and Joe Slovo opposed apartheid. Denis and Joe are Jews, therefore Jews are good and all Jews opposed apartheid.'

It's a kind of syllogism with a missing middle, you know. It's like saying, 'There are good white South Africans who were opposed to apartheid, therefore white South Africans are good opponents of apartheid, therefore white South Africans did not impose apartheid.' Well, who did? This is a crazy kind of argument, and when I find it from a community, a Jewish community world-wide, which claims its coherence in terms of its Jewishness and its oppression, and yet ignores oppression of others, and then holds up the tiny minority of the minority in a population like South Africa's, and says, 'Look at us, aren't we good?' — that makes me bloody angry.

Interviewed by Fran Buntman
3 March 1995
London

Were your parents or grandparents born in South Africa?

No, my grandparents Morris Cohen and his wife Annie, were born in Biers. I think it's in Lithuania. My great-grandfather and most of his sons and daughters went to the United States. My paternal grandfather settled in London and so did my mother's parents, my maternal grandparents. My

Left:
Denis Goldberg (Photograph: Gisèle Wulfsohn)

mother's father died a long, long time ago, and I know nothing about him. My father was born in 1898, my mother in 1899, in the East End of London. Dad had six years of school, Mum worked in a clothing factory. Her name was Annie Fineberg. She was a seamstress, with thick, flowing hair and she and her friends used to memorise huge tracts of Omar Khayyam's *The Rubaiyat*, and so on. She was a rebel, that was obvious. She was not a conformist. Two of her brothers were founder members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. My father and his brothers were politically active in the left and in the Communist Party. During World War One, Dad would not join up because he would not fight an imperialist war. He didn't want to go to prison as a conscientious objector, so he became a sailor in the British Merchant Marine. He said the greatest day of his life was standing in Grand Central Station in New York in November 1917, and seeing the triple decker headlines about the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. Americans would call me a red diaper baby.

I'm Jewish because my grandparents and parents were. My grandparents were Orthodox, my parents were atheists and I have not found a need to explain things in theological terms. My parents lived in Australia, back in England, back in Australia, back in England and then settled in South Africa, I think round 1929. I still have a Barclays Bank savings book of my Dad's. It has one shilling in it from April 1933 when I was born. He must have drawn out all of his twenty pounds to pay for my birth, except for one shilling to keep the bank book open. [Laughs]

My brother Allan was born in England in 1928. In the 1930s he was suspected of having TB and he was sent off to the Sunshine Homes, which were for young white kids whose families could not afford holidays for them. It was a very bitter experience for him. He actually felt rejected. He was dumped amongst kids who were mainly young Afrikaners from a lower working-class background, who beat the shit out of him because he was English-speaking and Jewish. He never did learn to speak Afrikaans properly.

Did your parents have a Jewish marriage?

I'm sure not.

Please tell me about influences that were important to you growing up. You've already alluded to the fact that you call yourself a red diaper baby — that politics were important from the beginning. Were there other influences?

I was born on 11 April 1933 and I started school on 11 April 1939. Best birthday present I've ever had; loved every day of school with my friends. But on the morning of starting school, my parents called me, they were both going to take me, because it's a great day when you start school. They said, 'We're Jews, and there are going to be people who attack you because of it.

Do not be afraid, but you do not have to defend us.' My parents could defend themselves. Bear in mind, in 1939 there was a very strong anti-war, pro-Nazi element in South Africa. They also said to me they were communists and there would be people who would attack me for that. I was not to defend them, they could defend themselves. Nor was I to get into arguments or fights on their behalf.

On my way to school, I passed a butcher's shop: Oswald's Butchery. He was a Blackshirt, a Nazi. And if I walked to school, even with my schoolmates, on his side of the road, he would come out with a butcher's knife and threaten me. And when I told my parents, they said, 'Just walk on the other side of the road.'

Another influence: our house was open to anybody in the Party, in the ANC, in the Liberation Movement, the People's Club, whatever it was at the time. By the time I was five, my Dad had a little cartage contracting business, so his truck was used as the platform for meetings. It led the march on May Day with all the banners and the bands and so on. So at five years old, I knew about profits and I knew about surplus value.

I remember seeing a man badly dressed in the rain, on one crutch. And I said something sympathetic about his plight, and my mother said, 'Why is he so poor?' And I said, 'Because he's black.' I was five. And she said, 'And what else?' And I thought and thought and said, 'Because he's a worker.'

Years later, in the fifties, when I became active in Congress of Democrats and therefore worked in the Joint Executive with the other organisations in the Congress Alliance, I found I was very rapidly accepted. Later, as the trust grew, Zollie Malindi said to me, 'You know, Denis, we wanted to know if you were genuine or just a typical white kid, but your Dad was the secretary of the Political Education Committee in the Woodstock Branch of the Party, and that's where we learned our politics, so that's why we accepted you so quickly.' I found that interesting, that there was this watchfulness and awareness, but openness as well. I've had a wonderful time in the Movement, I must tell you. Not altogether. There have been some unpleasant incidents and rivalries and divisions, and you don't have to love everybody who's a comrade. You love your friends, you see. But warmth and comradeship and trust, it's very rare to enjoy that, very rare, lovely.

Was the environment you grew up in Jewish or mixed?

In my school, there were never more than four Jews in a class. I went to Observatory Boys' Junior and Observatory Boys' High. The white population tended to be railway clerks, railway artisans, that kind of social status. The Jewish community, their attitude was, 'Denis, who's your father, which Goldberg?' 'Oh, Sam! You mean the meshuganah Goldberg.' We were not in the mainstream of the Jewish community. There were others

like him, I can remember Frumer Kollavson from among many. She was wonderful.

Who was she?

She was a member of the Communist Party and excited about the Soviet Union's creation of Birobidzhan as a Jewish National Home. When Zionist Jews were attacking the Soviet Union for their anti-Semitism, I can remember her talking about 'Birobidzhan, Birobidzhan' [like an incantation].[1]

You asked me about influences. It was very interesting that Eastern European Jews who had arrived in South Africa understood Marxism and Communism and the politics of race in European terms. In Europe they were excluded from the society, and lived in ghettos set aside in practice for them. In South Africa, however, they were part of the dominant society. But they saw things in terms of Europe, not in terms of the national oppression of all South Africans who were not white. Apartheid was a system of cheap labour, in which people were not excluded from the society, they were drawn into the society, but pressed to the bottom of the heap. Whereas Jews were excluded from bourgeois society in Eastern Europe. The impact, despite the differences was that they [immigrant Jewish activists] understood a lot and their natural sympathy was to organise amongst African people.

Whom they saw as excluded?

Whom they saw as excluded, and as the working class or proletariat who would overthrow capitalism. For many of them, the question of national oppression was not sharply drawn, it was incidental to their being members of the working class. Whereas it's quite clear from later experience and understanding and reading, especially [Harold] Wolpe and [Martin] Legassick's interpretation, that national oppression was an inherent part of the creation of a black proletariat in South Africa.

Of the kind of people you're describing at that time, weren't there Jewish communists or Jews who identified with black national aspirations, but who did so as Jews, who had some sort of synthesis between their political identification and their religious or ethnic identification?

I suppose there must have been, but I don't remember. Bear in mind I'm talking about the period when I was a kid. I want to go back a step to May '48. D F Malan's National Party was elected to office in White South Africa. Some progressive Jews and communists left the country, many of them not

1 See footnote 4 on p 34.

understanding that for all the anti-Semitism and the threat of the Blackshirts, Jews were white and they were needed. Within a couple of years, there were Jewish business people and professionals who were saying, 'Whatever you say about D F Malan and the Nationalists, they know how to keep black workers in their place.' The more crude of them would say, '... keep the kaffirs in their place, look how the country is prospering'.

I recall when Verwoerd was prime minister, there was an election and Helen Suzman was the only Progressive Party member who was elected. In his victory speech, Verwoerd attacked the Jews of Houghton for electing Helen Suzman, the Jew. The National Party had just won an overwhelming victory. It was such an ungracious, stupid political attack, his attack on South African Jewry as a whole.

In the Congress of Democrats we got leaflets out immediately to go to the synagogues on Friday night. But of course on Friday night when people are coming out of synagogue it's already the Sabbath. I made my way up to the door of the shul in Claremont in Cape Town. The kids were so thrilled to see me. They were taking leaflets and running inside to give them out, making sure everybody got them. Then a gentleman came along and he took me by the arm and started thrusting me out, and of course I shook him loose and said, 'Do you have a problem?' He said that he did! It turned out that he was the chairman of the congregation and he objected to me giving out leaflets on the synagogue's premises. So I said, 'All you have to do is say "Please leave" and I'll walk out with you', which I did. When we got to the gate, I turned to him and said, 'Will you take a leaflet?' And he said, 'Yes, of course, but not on the shul premises.'

That's interesting, because it's the attitude of 'Jewry must not be involved inadvertently in a conflict with government.' But me, I wanted to know whether they'd do anything about Verwoerd's terrible statements. Then along came a man, six foot four, big, huge, in a blue suit, like a thirteen-year-old in his first suit. That's how he looked, and when I offered him a leaflet, he gave me a blast about defiling the Sabbath. His wife and his children (young teenagers) looked very embarrassed, because he was getting red-faced and puffing up like a turkey cock. And I said, 'If you're so concerned about the Sabbath, why have you got your car keys in your hand? Are you driving?' It was like I'd stuck a pin into a balloon. As he stomped off, his wife and children took leaflets and said, 'Don't worry about him, we'll show it to him later.'

Jews in South Africa always claim this now: 'Look at the role Jews have played in the Liberation Movement'. Well, I'll tell you, it's crap. The vast majority of people in the Liberation Movement are not Jews or white, they're black. The point is honesty. My school history book, *Ons Land/Our Land*, said South Africa was a democracy and everybody can vote. But it was patently not true. Once you've seen through that, then how do you live with this thing? If you have an 'Oh, don't worry about it' attitude from your parents who act as though there is nothing to worry about, it's easy to fall into a trap

of not being uncomfortable with the falsity, and I think that's what Jews, and whites in general, did in those years.

I'll tell you a secret. We South Africans tend to say that everybody who was oppressed was in the Struggle. It's not true. If it were true, then the Struggle would have been over a long time ago. Those who got involved from whatever section of our population were a minority, and those who went to prison were a minority, and the children of every family were very aware that their parents were away in prison, even if they were proud of them. There was an ambiguity. Families like the Sisulu family are almost unique in that all of them are still active. It's really rare, and very exciting, that there are families like that.

You describe being very happy at school. Was it not difficult being a son of communists, having very different views to everyone around you; did you not come under pressure because of that?

Ja, sure, but I always have been outgoing with a happy disposition. My mother used to describe it as my 'boots and all' attitude. If you do something, you do it wholeheartedly. I played rugby, I played sports and, yes, there was anti-Semitism, including amongst teachers. But they couldn't take my intelligence away from me, they couldn't take away my innate bolshieness and cheerfulness and the love of my parents. I remember a match in 1948, when I was fifteen, probably against Jan van Riebeeck High School, an Afrikaans-medium high school, and I had a confrontation with a kid from the other team who was scared of being tackled and I said, 'Let's put him down, he's scared.' He was much bigger than me. Afterwards he tackled me when I was standing to the side of the field when the game had stopped and he said, 'Who's scared now, Jew Boy?'

The biggest guy in our team, his name was Lionel Kalitz, he hammered this guy into the ground in a tackle. In the dressing-room, Lionel said, 'I fixed him for you good, hey, Jew Boy.' And I said nothing, because Lionel Kalitz was a big, clumsy ox of a guy, but I was his team-mate, and I was being bullied and he defended me. I don't know to this day whether he called me 'Jew Boy' to tease me, or because that was the way he spoke, but there was no animosity. He defended me. I was his team-mate. Strange conflicts you find in people, and Lionel was my pal from then on and my protector, and I was always the *pikkie* in the team, always the littlest, but always the hardest driver.

Did you have a bar mitzvah?

No, definitely not. One Jewish holiday all my cousins were staying home from school and I said to my mother, 'Why can't I stay home from school?' She said, 'You can, but if you stay home from school, you must go to shul. You can't misuse your Jewishness. Either you're Jewish or you're not. You

can be culturally Jewish, but you can't be religious Jewish and not observe the religion. So make up your mind: if you stay home from school you must go to the synagogue.' Of course, I went to school.

Later, when I was at the University of Cape Town, I used to take five sheets of airmail paper and take notes for my classmates. I mean, almost a third or half of the students were Jewish at the University of Cape Town.

So you did have some connection to the Jewish community?

I used to read the papers sitting on my Dad's lap every night. So I knew about the concentration camps and Kristallnacht. I couldn't have told you 'Kristallnacht', but I knew of the oppression of Jews as Jews, I was very aware of it. We were simply not religious, it was just a fact of life.

My mother was very funny. Sunday morning, we always had egg and bacon for breakfast and at lunchtime we would have roast chicken and roast potatoes, green peas, squashes, beans, things like that. It was always kosher chicken. Because it was the best quality, that's what she said. She wouldn't cook pork, she said it gave her a headache. It's just a fact of life, you see. Upbringing and culture — terribly important. I still like kneidel soup. We had it the other night.

Talking about food, I can remember seeing a labourer, actually he worked for my Dad, having his lunch. He was sitting on the pavement under the tailgate of a truck because it was shady. He had a long French loaf, and he had a tin of King Oscar sardines, and he split the loaf of bread down the middle and he emptied the sardines in the olive oil into it and he squashed it all together and he was eating it, and I wished my mother would give me food like that. But more than that; a white man walking past said to him, 'What are you doing, sitting on that pavement, you filthy black, making the place dirty, eating in the street like that?' And this man drew himself up and he said, 'Do not call me a black man, I am a respectable native person.' Two points. In the nineteen forties, the word 'native' was a respected term; 'black' was an insulting term, like kaffir; and secondly, the impression of courage and dignity this made on me when this man stood up: he drew himself up and he asserted his right to be there. What a wonderful man. That was one of the formative influences. I'm talking about the forties — it was fifty-two years ago.

My Dad, for all that he only had six years of school, knew about the world and had read widely. During the war years (I was twelve by 1945) we had battle maps up on our walls every night. We'd move the pins as the war front moved in Europe, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, paint in all the countries. Strange kind of game to grow up with.

During that period I used to go and sell *The Guardian*, because my parents asked me to, I enjoyed doing the things they liked to do and, frankly, because it was unpopular. It was an assertion of my dignity. I used to go to the

different clothing factories, to Abrasha Bor's Eskay Shirts in Woodstock. The workers were very politicised. It was the period of Solly Sachs and Johanna Cornelius (both of the Garment Workers Union) and others.

We used to sell *The Guardian* as workers came down the stairs, having picked up their pay. At all these factories there was a rush to get to them... fortunately they stopped at different times on Fridays. Those were the days when *The Guardian*'s circulation was four thousand a week. Abrasha Bor was a sympathiser. I would arrive and he'd say, 'What do you say?' and I'd have to put up my right arm, fist clenched, and say, 'United Front'. He'd say, 'That's right', and he would stand there while I sold *The Guardian*. There were workers who wouldn't buy *The Guardian*. He said it was because they didn't have pennies in their pay packet (*The Guardian* cost a penny), so he used to ensure that every pay packet had pennies in it. He used his status as the capitalist boss to ensure that *The Guardian*, the left-wing communist-edited newspaper, was circulated. It's a contradiction.

Another impact from those years. My Dad had very strong principles. Years later, he became an estate agent. He was a little businessman, that's all he could do. He was selling a house in Bishops Court Estate to the United States State Department as a residence for their ambassador, and the Deed of Sale was to be signed one morning at ten o'clock. Only that morning in the *Cape Times* there was a little report, 'Mr Sam Goldberg addressing a meeting in the City Hall last night attacked "American imperialists for their role in Italy"', or the Adriatic, or something like that. The sale never went through. The US Embassy said they had decided the house was not suitable. There was no doubt it was connected to his having made that speech. He would never have thought of saying, 'No, I won't make my speech tonight. I can wait, people will understand', and indeed they would have. But he made the speech, because it was necessary. God, we would have lived off that commission for years ... And of course, he was criticised in the Jewish community for not making a good living, for not being wealthy. He never would make money, you see. Now, I've great admiration for my Dad. I think in his private life and family life, he was no saint. I thought he did some really awful things to my mother and to my brother. I knew I was the favourite and I could say what I liked to him. I mean, I could challenge him. But he had principles.

When did you first become politically involved?

September 1953, while I was writing my undergraduate dissertation for my BSc Civil Engineering degree. You know, I started university in 1950, in the year of the Suppression Act, and I wasn't politically active. How could this be? My parents' friends despaired of me. Israel Chechanovsky, he used to rant and rave. People like him came close to driving me away from the left. I remember saying to him, 'I'm finding it hard enough to study.' It happens

that the engineering degree was one of the toughest degrees. But more than that, what I was struggling with, and this I realised later, I can articulate it now, was whether I was going to be politically involved because my parents and their friends expected me to be? Because I'd taken in the beliefs with my mother's milk, so to speak? Or was I going to be involved because I wanted to be? It took me my four years at university to come to the conclusion that I could not stand aside, though the price would be heavy. I was always going to be involved, it was a question of when. I first needed to finish at university.

You know, from the age of thirteen, I wanted to be a civil engineer, I wanted to build for people. Really and truly I thought it was grand, heroic. But in my matric year, I wanted to be a doctor but I never said anything to my Dad at all, because he could not have afforded it. I knew that. So I kept quiet about it and went back to my first love, which meant that years later I would become a technical person with Umkhonto we Sizwe, because I had an engineer's training.

I had to get through, Dad simply could not afford it if I failed. Every year end I'd get a letter from the Registrar of the University of Cape Town to say that until my fees were paid, I would not be allowed to sit the final exams. And every year I would go to Dad and he would say, 'Your job is to study', and his job was to pay the fees. And the next week — my parents had separated and he'd left home by then — I'd see him and say, 'Have you paid the fees?', and he'd say, 'Yes.' I'd say, 'What did you do?' And he'd say he'd given the Registrar three post-dated cheques. Fees were eighty pounds a year. It cost three hundred pounds a year to keep a student in those days; fees, living, everything. So for eighty pounds a year, half of that, for forty pounds, he'd given the Registrar three post-dated cheques! So he could not have supported me at university for another two years at medical school.

Then in my final year I met Esme. I was busy doing my undergraduate thesis, which I failed. My mother blamed Esme. In fact, I made a design error and if a bridge falls down, you fail; it's as simple as that. I'm not sad at all, quite honestly. I grew up very rapidly, very joyfully. I was going to finish my exams, get my degree and go off to Canada. Instead I got married just before I turned twenty-one and stayed in South Africa, no regrets, and became politically active.

Esme was politically active in the Modern Youth Society. She comes from a similar background to my own, politically speaking. Now you can say that this was a conversion by injection if you like, or biological conversion. You know, when young men and women, boys and girls meet, and they take on each other's beliefs. I thought about it a lot and that wasn't it. I had made up my mind when I finished my degree I would get politically involved. It just came more quickly because Esme was on the Committee of the Modern Youth Society, which was a non-racial youth organisation, multiracial of course, as the Congress would have said then. I very quickly became treasurer, or executive member or chairman, or something like that.

Then I went into the Congress of Democrats when it was founded in Cape Town and was in the Congress of Democrats until I was declared a banned person under the Suppression of Communism Act. It was illegal to be a member, but I was already in prison, that's when they banned me.

When did you join the Party?

I was invited to join the South African Communist Party after it was re-formed. It must have been before Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956[2] because I remember crossing Adderley Street, with my Dad saying to me after the speech that he felt he had wasted his whole life defending the indefensible. And at twenty-three years old, I said I didn't think he'd wasted his life. I thought he had to distinguish between the principles and the things that had gone wrong, but that there was no choice at the time. The fact that we were having the discussion at all was in part due to him and others like him defending that particular society [Stalinist Russia], and the defeat of Nazism as a result. And he turned to me and said, 'Do you really believe that?' And I said, 'Yes, of course I do, or else I wouldn't say it.'

He was comforted by it, you know. He was a very fine public speaker, an orator and educationist, and was very hurt by those revelations because, like so many others, in the innermost recesses of his mind he knew that some of the allegations had to be true.

How did the revelations in 1956 affect how you thought of the Soviet Union?

I was distressed, but there was the belief that they would solve their problems, that the distortions brought about by their lack of democracy would be resolved. So much so, that when Esme and I were invited to have a holiday in the Soviet Union in 1986 or 1987, I wrote in the visitors' book of the sanitorium we were at — it was alleged to have been designed by Stalin himself, he was not a good architect! — that being in the Soviet Union was the fulfilment of a dream. But the reality was better than the dream, because it was reality, because it in fact existed even though things were harsh. I still believe that.

The distress has grown over the years that this wonderful slogan of 'All power to the people, all power to the Soviets', of workers, of peasants, should have ended up with no power to the people, and total centralised power in the hands of the Party and the government. This is what worries me, for the future of South Africa.

I still find it difficult speaking to communists of a particular generation who can't understand the need to report events as they happen. That's where the possibility of dictatorship emerges.

2 In which some of the abuses which occurred under Stalin were revealed.

I liked what the young people of South Africa said when the Communist Party was relaunched. The Central Committee with Joe Slovo backing them said, 'The South African Communist Party stands for democratic socialism' and the young people said, 'Nothing doing, if it's not democratic, then it's not socialism, therefore we stand for socialism.' To accept that you have to define socialism as democratic, is to accept the class enemy's definition of what socialism is about.

Let me ask you about prison. When you went to prison, you were the only white political prisoner with a life sentence. What did that mean? How did you deal with this, or try to deal with this, at least in the beginning?

Well, at first it meant that I could chair the Escape Committee, because whatever prison sentence you got, whatever they do to you, it has to run concurrently with life, and I had four life sentences. I only served one, though, because they must run concurrently!

The life sentence also made me more defiant. I was much more bolshie than most. When I went to prison, I joined Jock Strachan and Ben Turok and Jack Tarshish. They had been given a very hard time; very, very harsh indeed. And I came in, all excited by the world attention from the Rivonia Trial and I would talk out like I'm talking to you now, and they would say 'Sssh, sssh'. I said, 'We can't behave this way.' The life sentence did make a difference. There was a guy, a sergeant, who used to come tearing down the corridor in the morning on a floor so shiny that if he wanted to stop, he would skid to a halt and his whole entourage would skid behind him; it was very funny! And they'd tear along this corridor and he'd walk past and say, 'Morning Jew, Morning Jew, Morning Jew, Morning Jew.' As it happens, Jock Strachan wasn't Jewish. But he did this a couple of times and I stopped him and he said, 'What is it?' I said, 'I don't like your greeting. You know my name, I also have a number. You can call me either, but you're not going to call me that!' So he laughed. The next morning he comes tearing down and he says, 'Morning Communist, Morning Communist, Morning Communist, Morning Communist,' and he smiled at me. I said, 'You're not going to do that either.' And he stopped it. The point is, not that I minded being 'Jew' or 'Communist' particularly, it's just that it's dangerous. You are actually very vulnerable in prison. But I found it interesting that Jews and communists were automatically associated in this rather ignorant young man's mind.

Do you remember his name?

Yes, Sergeant Vermaak. He was a lock forward in the prison's rugby team. Nice guy, just politically a bastard. So there were the four of us. My attitude was, I remember saying this to Bram Fischer, based on the editorials of the *Rand Daily Mail*, by ... what was his name? the great editor?

Laurence Gandar?

Laurence Gandar, ja. What Laurence Gandar revealed in his front page editorials throughout that period was that big capital in South Africa recognised that apartheid had done its job and it was time it came to an end. What surprised me, in retrospect, was that it took thirty years from then. You know Joe Slovo's classic remark when he arrived in England in 1960. He was asked how long he thought apartheid would last and he said that in 1948 he gave them five years and he saw no need to change his opinion.

I thought ten years maximum, there was always a rolling ten years, but I couldn't see how apartheid could go on. Already there was the need for it to end. You see, all the years in prison when I was studying economics, they'd let us read the *Financial Mail*. They chopped out all the editorials, but they left us the company chairmen's speeches, and it was interesting. The Anglo and Barlow Company chairmen who were the political stalking horses, were all talking about the need for the optimum use of South Africa's resources, human and material. W B Coetzer of Federale Volksbelegging was saying the same thing in Afrikaans, that they could no longer afford the high wages of the white South African workers, but in a slightly different way, because he had to be more careful given his constituency. The deal done in 1924 after the Rand Rebellion, the National Party/Labour Party Pact was beginning to unravel. And so I thought it was going to happen more quickly, and there was a sad lesson, or a good lesson, in how slow historical processes are. They do take longer than we want them to.

You asked me how I coped with prison, having got life imprisonment. I didn't think it was going to be that, but even if it was, the Rivonia Trial was a miracle of dignity, of honour. I felt honoured to be with the people I was with and yes, everybody talks about the Great Mandela. But Sisulu! Walter was kind, gentle, analytical always, and he had warmth. You just felt strength from him, and love, even then, you know. He had written the Freedom Radio broadcast. He said he was going to do forty-five minutes to an hour and I said, 'No, please, Comrade, you can have ten minutes. I'm going to be operating the radio and I don't want to get caught.' 'How?' he said. So I said, 'Look, I've read the stories of World War Two. If they're at all expecting it, we're going to get caught.' So in the end we compromised on twenty minutes. But he was prepared to listen. 'You are the technical man, Denis. OK. Let's work through it.'

In that speech from the dock, when Nelson made his famous comments about wanting to live to see a non-racial South Africa, but being prepared to die for it if need be, I sensed the tension. I knew it, I'd read it, over and over. But my eyes pricked with tears [when he said it]. Just the sheer dignity of the man. Of him throwing down the gauntlet, saying to Judge Quartus de Wet, the Judge President of the Transvaal, 'Hang me if you dare.' Of course, it took about five seconds for me to realise we were also saying, 'Oh, hang Walter,

and hang Denis and hang Govan as well, if you dare.' [Laughs] But really, it was a wonderful moment to be part of. And when he passed sentence, there were all the pleas in mitigation, the Judge was bored to tears and getting angrier and angrier, and I thought it was going to be the death sentence, because he was so stirred up you see. And he simply said, 'Life on every count for each of the accused.' My mother was in court, and she said, 'What did he say, what did he say?', and I said, 'He said, "Life". Life's wonderful.' I mean, I was making an instantaneous pun. I love puns, weak as hell, and everybody groans and they get tired of them. But that's a great one. Because life as a life sentence, life as something to live, and life sure as hell beats the death sentence.

Please tell me about the community of white male political prisoners in Pretoria; its strengths, its weaknesses, when people got on and when they fought, as communities do.

Fascinating experience, because everybody there was a hero, truly. But when you're living with people, you don't stop and say, 'He irritates the hell out of me, but he's a hero, so I'll say nothing.' I want to tell you, I know of no person, me too, who does not irritate others when you're with them twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, sometimes three hundred and sixty-six, year after year after year, whether it's sneezing, runny nose, farting, boasting, being too quiet, not taking a share of washing up, making a mess for others, being inconsiderate, being excessively considerate, being too polite. One way or another, everybody has some trait.

Some are less irritating, and I would say in truth there are comrades I was in prison with who I never want to see again, or rather, I don't mind if I never see them again. I recognise their worth and I recognise they probably feel the same way about me. But there are others to whom I feel drawn with a very deep and abiding friendship. Comrades who were not necessarily in the ANC or in the Party or Umkhonto. Dave Evans was one, Hugh Lewin another, John Laredo a third, but there were others. When I came out of prison I remember phoning Dave Evans who lives in Liverpool. We hadn't seen each other for seventeen years after he was released from prison. He did five years. And I said 'Hello' and he said 'Hello' and 'How are you' two or three times. And then we started chatting as though we'd seen each other a week before. It was incredible.

The fact that one is in a political movement with others doesn't necessarily mean you have to like them, though you can respect them. Which reminds me of prison warders from the rank of warder all the way up to general saying to me that they didn't like Nelson Mandela, but they could respect him because he was fighting for his people. And that was the preface to their going on to say, 'You, Goldberg, we hate you, you betrayed us.' It showed in their attitudes.

You asked about the community. I think that we as a group kept changing. At first there were just four of us, then there was an influx from the Communist Party Trial, Ivan Schermbrucker, Louis Baker, Eli Weinberg, and others, and then the African Resistance Movement[3] out of the Liberal Party stable. So there were twenty-one of us, which was the biggest number we ever had together. Tremendously unified group. Conditions were bad, very tough living conditions. We slept on the floor. The authorities said it's not concrete, it's a special compound designed for warmth. Well, only a person who's never slept on it could say that convincingly! They said we were not in solitary confinement, we were 'just' kept on our own for twenty-three hours a day. As a matter of treatment it was solitary. In common parlance that means you're on your own. But solitary is a punishment category, and we weren't supposed to be in punishment. Made a hell of a difference. Bastards. The windows in prison in Pretoria had no glass, and in winter, it's cold, one or two or three degrees Celsius, not enough to eat, always hungry.

How did we cope? We coped by being unified, by saying that we collectively are going to take them on.

Fortunately, there were always at least one or two warders who were human beings. If they were ordered to do bad things, they did, but they didn't go out of their way to look for it. Made a difference to our lives. You see, I used to study the great German sociologist Max Weber, his writings on bureaucracy as a system. Bureaucracy works by rules, it works by files, everything is recorded. Nothing may be allowed to slip. The point was, if you operate by the rules, then any official who breaks the rules is out of line, and that official (I'm going to say 'he' because it was a men's prison) must be brought to account by his superiors. It pays to read, because [you find out that] even to the Gestapo under the Nazis, killing a subject of interrogation was not something undertaken lightly by the torturer. It was an unforgivable accident. You might need more information. A decision has to be taken and recorded that a life can be taken. It's not for you at the bottom end of the scale to make the decision.

I'm talking about the rules and control in the hierarchy. So we stopped the frivolous complaints, but if a warder broke the rules or behaved very badly, we would build up a dossier in our heads about him and then we would pick somebody who was best suited to a particular warder and the complaint would go to the Commanding Officer, over the head of the sergeant, over the chief warder or warrant officer, and everybody else, to force them to take action. It worked. Gradually, especially after Helen Suzman asked questions in parliament, it became clear they couldn't get away with it because it would be asked about. So there was a kind of pressure from both sides. The Minister

3 See footnote in Raymond Suttner's interview, p 500.

didn't want to have to answer embarrassing questions which made him look foolish and petty in the eyes of parliament.

So you asked how we survived. That was part of it. Then we did other things, and I take credit for some of them, like starting the industry where we made our own birthday and greetings cards. We were allowed one letter in six months, later one letter in three months and so on, but no birthday cards, no greetings cards. We made our own. Everybody got birthday cards from everybody else, everybody else got wedding anniversary cards and so on. It was just ways of building unity. Another example: We were allowed to buy a few little goodies, like biscuits and fruit and chocolates and sweets at Christmas. Each man would contribute a biscuit or two to the common pool, so we could have a party, or give each other presents, wrapped. We knew we contributed. You might even get back what you put in. It didn't matter, you got a Christmas present. Hugh Lewin, in his book *Bandiet*, describes our Christmas concerts and our acting and the play.

You did all the props, didn't you?

Well, once or twice. There were others, I wasn't the only one. But in the initial ones, yes, and the point was, a toilet roll holder or the tube from it becomes something else. Depends how much you want to do it. I got irritated when there were young people at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College,[4] who said they can't play music unless they have the best saxophone. A cheap saxophone makes music, even if it might not be the best. You don't have to have the best drum kit, you have a tea chest and so on. That's all we had.

When you went to the Mahlangu College and you said that sort of thing to them, what was their response?

More or less, 'What do you know? We're not in prison.' Different situations, different responses. It was the dependence upon each other. I learned to be a thief in prison. We weren't allowed to smoke for years. All of us were smokers, or many of us. I actually stole a packet of cigarettes from a warder. I'm still amazed that I did it. I was actually going to take just a few, but it was such a new packet, it had eighteen cigarettes in it out of twenty, and if I took two or three, he would know and I couldn't leave just a few as though it was an old pack. I simply took the whole pack. He was a nice guy. He knew that one of us stole it, and he didn't press the matter. It was very interesting, he was

4 The ANC's school in Tanzania was named after Solomon Mahlangu, a student who went into exile in the wake of the Soweto uprisings and joined Umkhonto we Sizwe. He returned to South Africa where he was arrested after a shoot-out, and in June 1978 he became the first ANC guerrilla to be sentenced to death.

a very young warder of a new school of penology. This is the sixties. The prison command decided that the old, harsh Victorian style regime didn't make for an easy life for the warders in prison. There needed to be an attempt to build respect. Didn't always work and it's not always going to work. It requires an inner discipline, a self-discipline in the prisoner, and that's what was encouraged.

This is what the young warders would be taught to bear in mind, they came there straight from school. So they come on the job and the old sergeant says, 'All these new-fangled ideas!' But after a few years, there's a kind of dialectic because the stick keeps getting bent towards this new direction, where there are new sergeants who partly apply the new policy and partly there is still control from above. But, eventually, the new ideas work through. It can take twenty years.

When do you think the state's intent to change things started from?

They started off with a most dreadful system of absolute vicious control, of actual expressed hatred. At some point, I think the change had to do with Helen Suzman taking an interest, and with the outward policy of Vorster. Therefore they allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross to send in people once a year to political prisoners only, to show that they weren't barbaric. And we always knew when the International Committee of the Red Cross was coming, not because they told us, but because things we'd asked for a year before would suddenly begin to happen and then three days later, the Red Cross delegation arrived.

The Red Cross guys were very sympathetic towards us. They said that in Africa and the poor countries of the world elsewhere, physical conditions were far worse, but you don't have to have steak and chips to survive, it's the social attitude towards prisoners that can make things tough. They related the South African government's perspective to Calvinist attitudes; that crime is not just a social action, it's also a sin in the religious sense and therefore hateful and to be dealt with as sin. They said they had never experienced anywhere else in the world the attitude they found in the South African prisons between officialdom and the prison population.

I will say that as the conditions began to improve, so the tensions would rise in our community. There was less a need to face a common enemy every minute of every day. I'm not saying we were ever totally united. People would sometimes go off on their own.

The community also changed because initially we were a particular generation. Eventually Helen Suzman brought us a record player, which we were never allowed to play ourselves, it was always done for us, and we would arrange evening concerts, three hours of music. We would have jazz and maybe a piece of chamber music and a couple of symphonies or a piano concerto and that was the concert: eight sides of an LP. As younger people

came in and as the years went on, there would be more folk music and then more pop and more rock. Once I got to know it, I found rock of the sixties and seventies much better on the ear than pop, because you can listen to it over and over again and always find something new, whereas with pop music you listen to it a few times and it's gone, except for the Beatles and the Stones. They were real musicians.

We had terrible arguments about the structure of the evening concerts because these tastes did change. Eventually we had a huge number of records because there had been a lot of people who'd been allowed to buy one every two months and then we managed to fiddle it so we'd buy one album and it could be a two or three record set. I bought *Woodstock*, six sides, my God! When we had to cull the collection — the argument. [Laughs] It nearly led to fisticuffs!

I did have a fight with Marius [Schoon] once. I left him with a black eye. I regret it now, but it was a mark of the tensions. In fact, I'd been told that the length of our visits had been increased to forty-five minutes, which was very important to us, but the warrant officer, the man in charge, wasn't extending visits, because he'd chosen to delay it quite unilaterally, and I wanted to make an issue of it.

But I couldn't tell everybody how I knew, because it would get the prison warder who told me about it into trouble. And Marius was nagging, wanting to know why I wanted to take this up. And eventually I lost my temper. I was trying to eat and he was harassing me and I flew at him. He should never have done that.

I remember Ivan Schermbrucker, when he was still alive and in prison saying to some of our comrades, 'Why do you keep insisting? You've just been tortured and given up information, why do you think you have to know everything? Can't you trust?' And this was the point, really. It was just a strange tension that sometimes grew up, because Marius and I eventually became quite close.

Do you think that in an ironic way the tension may have increased as the population became more homogeneous in terms of political affiliation?

Perhaps, but also the number of years in prison began to tell. I've told you this about having a fight. But you know, Marius and I did a memorandum to the Commission on Penal Reform. Bram drafted it, then he got so ill and he left. I used to consult with Marius, and we worked very closely on this, and very constructively, and I found qualities in Marius I didn't know were there. For some people, and I take Marius as a deliberate example, and I know he'll forgive me, I think prison was the making of Marius because he came out of an Afrikaner Nationalist background and the revolt against it was a very difficult, emotional thing for him. Prison forced a new [self-]discipline upon him, which was very important for him. I actually admired that, you see.

Are there other people who you think prison had a positive influence on?

Well, I would take myself. I became far more introspective, far more aware of my own strengths and weaknesses. It doesn't mean I can necessarily always control the weaknesses, or the strengths for that matter, but I became far more aware of the kind of tensions I'm talking about. There are times when I can be quite ruthless and simply ignore someone because something has to get done, and if people are doing a job together and somebody wants to be hypersensitive, my attitude would be, 'Fuck that, let's get on and do the job'. I deliberately used a crudity to reinforce the point I'm trying to make. I think [nearly] everybody was strengthened.

There were exceptions. Raymond Thoms, who committed suicide a couple of years after being in prison, had I think got involved for similar reasons to those of Marius; the revolt against family background. They were very close friends at one time, but Raymond had a problem of psychological disturbance, alcoholism and so on, and would waver between the strength of our community and the strength of the authorities, and I think it weakened him. His betrayal of our community over Jock Strachan's[5] articles on prison conditions and his giving evidence to get an earlier release, and us sending him to Coventry, as they say, is an example. I don't know what else we could have done, but it was a very harsh treatment. I know that Bram Fischer and Ivan Schermbrucker used to surreptitiously breach the agreement that he was not to be dealt with and I objected to them. I said, 'There's a majority decision and you've got to choose where you belong.'

Are you so sure now about sending him to Coventry?

Well, I'm not in that position now. I'm telling you of the moral dilemma of protecting our community, and every prisoner community has things it doesn't want the authorities to know.

We couldn't have carried out an escape, like when the three [Tim Jenkins, Steven Lee and Alex Moumbaris] escaped,[6] if we had a spy in our midst, or a spy who was not under control. If we hadn't stood together we would not have got the news. We were not allowed newspapers or radio or TV for

5 Harold Strachan, known as Jock Strachan, had been sentenced to three years in prison in 1962 for possessing explosives. On his release he published three long articles in the *Rand Daily Mail* exposing the conditions in prison. This was read by the apartheid government to violate the Prisoners Act of 1950, which effectively censored the publication of all information about prisons. Jock Strachan was subsequently charged with perjury, and Raymond Thoms appeared as a state witness. He had previously passed information to the authorities about his fellow political prisoners, as well as violated various prisoner group agreements and moves. This latter behaviour had led the other political prisoners to ostracise him. See Hugh Lewin, *Bandiet* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp 89–106, on which this note is based.

6 See Tim Jenkins's account: *Escape from Pretoria* (London: Kliptown Books, 1987).

sixteen years. We could get black prisoners who were brought in to do the cleaning work to get us news. These black prisoners weren't interested in newspapers. But they would take the newspaper out of the rubbish basket in the office and put it into our rubbish bin. And then we had to pay for it. We'd put tobacco in the rubbish bin. You need secrecy, otherwise you get caught. The dilemma is that what they did to us made us behave with harshness. What would it have done to us if we weren't harsh?

I was willing to take up arms against the apartheid regime, knowing that if I'd been able to go on, the arms I would manufacture would kill people. When my son, having come out to Israel to meet me after I'd been released, said to me, 'Why did you do what you did, that took you away from us for so long?' [it was] a very convoluted way of saying, 'Why did you desert us?' Now my children were very proud of me. Nevertheless, my son, then aged twenty-eight years, or twenty-seven, needed me to tell him that I loved him. After all these years; Christ, what we do to kids. The price of a liberation struggle is not just death, it's not just imprisonment, or what it does to your family outside. Every kid, everywhere, of every ethnic and community group, wants to know that the parent is there when they need you. I said to David that I knew that what I was doing could hurt his mother, his sister and him, but I thought that things in our society were wrong, that there were hundreds of thousands of children who didn't see their fathers because of the migrant labour system, and I didn't see why my children were more important than those children. I said, I didn't desert you, I did things that I thought to be important. One of the things that makes us human is that if things are wrong, we act to put them right, we work together to that end. We've been very close ever since.

While on the kibbutz many Israelis wrote to me. Hilly, my daughter, would bring me my mail, always opened! On hearing that Hilly was the one opening the letters I was really upset . . . it was to be back in prison again where for twenty-two years my mail was opened. Through her tears she said she was saving me from the hate mail which was also arriving. That wasn't good enough. I'm sorry now that I upset her. But I needed to assert my right to be consulted. You don't agree with a thirty-year-old just because she's your daughter and to avoid a tantrum. You do that with an eight-year-old.

I should have understood earlier. But it took a number of years and it took therapy for her to learn to accept me again. The price is hell, believe me. The fact that my wife and I are together is due to her efforts. It's quite a miracle. And we're close, we have a close family. Far too valuable for me to consciously rip it apart again. I did once before. They did it to us, but still we made it! I'm not saying I suffered, or my children suffered, more than others. I'm just saying families suffer.

Raymond Thoms in his terrible frustration, having been promised early release for betraying his fellow prisoner, lit matches and shoved them into his eyes, burning them badly. I happened to be ill at the time. I would lead him to

the showers. He'd betrayed Strachan. Was I right or was I wrong? You can't turn against somebody who's blinded himself or who's blind, just because he's an enemy.

Hard choices. Bram Fischer had cancer. I knew, because I was close to one of the sergeants who told me. I didn't tell everybody. Bram used to put his hip under the hot shower every night and warm it, because it was so painful. In fact, that leg was the one that he broke. He fell. Now, Bram was on crutches because he was in such pain. I used to rush upstairs to get into the shower room before him, so that if his crutches slipped as he stepped into the shower, I would be there to catch him. One night he slipped. I simply had had to pee, and I didn't say to Bram ever, 'Wait for me', 'cause I didn't want to take his independence away. And Bram went into the shower and I wasn't there and he slipped. I don't know if I would have caught him, but he fell and broke his thigh. They rushed him off to hospital. And as I say, I was told he had cancer. Did I tell everybody or not? I chose not to. One, it would risk my source; two, what could we do; three, Bram was brought back from the hospital and put back into his cell with one leg in plaster from the toes to above his hip with a thighbone that had been pinned. He was having therapy of a sort, and I was given permission to be in his cell [to nurse him], which was very fortunate because you may have three men in the cell, but not two men, because two men might be immoral together. Three men won't be. In the ordinary criminal prison, the prisoners know this, they always had three, so that one could put his back to the spyhole so the warder couldn't see the immorality take place, the homosexuality. This is South African puritanism at work, and so I could be with Bram, but with the light on, which meant that I could finish the memorandum he had started for — I think it was the De Villiers or Viljoen Commission on Penal Reform.

Bram, one of the leading legal counsels in South Africa, had explained to me that it's illegal to sign somebody's name, that's fraud. But I could sign his name as his agent if he gave me permission to do so. So for the microphone in the cell, I said, 'Bram, we've been working on your draft, I'll read it to you if you like.' He said, 'No, I trust you.' I said, 'Can I sign it on your behalf?' He said, 'Please sign it on my behalf', so I could never say afterwards I wasn't acting as his agent. One of the reasons given for not releasing Bram Fischer when he was dying of cancer was that he had signed a memorandum in which he complained about the conditions in the prison. [Laughs] Isn't this crazy? What a crazy world.

You had started talking about the men of the next generation.

There was Raymond Suttner.[7] He couldn't understand why, after fifteen, sixteen, twenty years, or whatever it was, I found studying one bachelor's

7 See interview with Raymond Suttner, pp 497 - 517.

degree after another a bit boring and he couldn't grasp that he had seven years to serve, he had a date. I had a life sentence, I 'knew' that one day I'd be released, but there was no way of knowing when, and so my life was different. I mean, I rushed through my first bachelor's degree in four years, a Bachelor of Administration degree. Ivan Schermbrucker found it funny. He said, 'Denis, you really think you're going to take power so soon', and I said, 'Yes, I've got to be ready for when we take power.' Well, now I can laugh at myself and say, 'Comrades, what were you doing for thirty years? I've been ready since 1969, when I had my administration degree. What were you doing?'

After that I took my time. I had to make the bachelor's degrees available to us last a lifetime. Raymond was always working, working, working. Raymond was later detained under Section 28, the preventive detention thing, and he came out and he passed through London and he said to me that now he understood how I felt to be in prison and not have a release date. And I was pleased with Raymond for at last understanding, because I had tried to explain it to him, and was amazed that he hadn't been able to empathise, because he used to think I was bloody blunt sometimes, you see, and a bit strange in my emotional responses.

The different attitude; in my generation if you used cups and saucers, you washed them, you put them away. If you spilt tea on the table, you wiped it up, because others would have to sit there. The later generation didn't. In prison this becomes terribly irritating. Irritating to the person who wants it cleaned up, irritating for the one who says, 'I'll clean it up later, so what the hell are you nagging me for?' It reminded me of my mother fighting with my wife, with her daughter-in-law. My mother stayed with us because Esme, my wife, made it possible. I didn't. I didn't have any patience. They would argue about whether refuse gets wrapped in newspaper before being put in the bin. It became a burning issue, there were fights about it almost every day, and it struck me in prison. You don't want to sit down at a table and put your hand in a puddle of someone else's tea. For me that was important. For others it wasn't.

Ours was a community that didn't pass its love letters around. In novels and films they do. We didn't. You told what you wanted to tell and others respected that. I don't know if it was because we were remote or educated in refined attitudes. I'm just telling you how we were. You could see when somebody was upset, and for all that you are liberated and know that men on their own have affairs, and women on their own have affairs, and you even say, 'You must choose your life, and I want for you whatever makes you happy and fulfilled', the reality is very painful and it takes years to bring your emotions into line with your intellectual beliefs. That's what I call adaptation and sanity, by the way. That's my definition, to bring your emotions into line with what you know must be true and to get on with living.

That's sanity. That's adjustment. So your wife's having an affair. You know damn well that's what you would be doing if you were outside and she was inside. You're not going to be celibate, you see. So, what's your upset? Neither of you were virgins when you met. But I learned the hard way, that to hold on to a relationship, which might become a friendship with love, instead of a loving relationship, perhaps you have to learn to let go. To hold on you had to let go.

I could see with one or two comrades, they would get a letter, they would read it and you'd see their elation at getting the letter; you'd suddenly see the face go down, and I learned that the first interpretation of the letter is the one that matters. We were only allowed five hundred words, there wasn't room for all the emotion and the cover-up . . . But there's a sense of unease that the relationship is not what the letter says it is: when a friendship you know about is not just a friendship, it's an affair. And no matter what you believe, you feel pained about it. I watched so many, not just myself.

How has Esme coped all these years?

I think she's a remarkable woman. I truly do. I think my children are fine young people, my daughter Hilary is forty, my son David is nearly thirty-eight. I like them. They have different qualities, coming out of their innate talents and personalities. Hilary learned early to be a model to David. I was very grateful to her for that. But my mother lived with them as well, and granny was an extra person there when they came home [from school]. Both of them acknowledge this.

When you were in prison, your children were in England. Did you ever see them?

When Hilly was fifteen and David was twelve, almost thirteen, they came to visit me. It was after seven years. David found it very stressful, and said that he would wait till he was sixteen, the official age, before he would come again, and he did. It was very difficult. Hilly used to gabble to me, it was lovely. With David, words were like hen's teeth, impossible to find. He also spoke with a very heavy London accent and it would take me twenty minutes to learn to hear the words. But then he came with his girlfriend, Beverly, whom he eventually married. She came with him and I would ask him something and he would turn to her to discuss it and they would answer me and it was like having a conversation. Fathers and daughters-in-law are not necessarily good friends. I'm sure she has criticisms of me, and I have criticisms of her, and she knows. But I do love her for giving me my son back again, because she came with him and it was like being with a family through the glass.

You never saw Esme again for those twenty-two years?

Well, four years after she left, in November '63, she was allowed to visit me again. They gave her a visa to visit me, and again four years later. They gave us a grand total of two and a half hours each time, spread over ten days. And then for the next fourteen years I didn't see her. That was cruel . . . Met her at the airport in Tel Aviv. She and Hilary were at the foot of the gangway and I was taken off the plane and hustled out of the airport. They took my passport, they collected my baggage. It was very strange after having been taken to Jan Smuts airport by the security police to avoid the crowds and to be hidden away. The same thing happened at the other end, but to let me get my breath, because the head of the Ben-Gurion airport security was originally a member of my daughter's kibbutz. So he could be called upon. Whatever I think of the Israelis as Zionists and oppressors, at some level there was a difference. Here the security police were actually looking after me. It was quite strange. Just as when I came to London. On 16 June 1986, marching in front of a march of protest, Youth Day, Soweto Day, and the British bobbies were protecting the march. I'm busy looking round and wondering when all hell's going to break loose, they're going to beat us up, because I just wasn't used to this.

What did it mean to be a Jew in prison?

Well, you see, in South Africa with its funny religious attitudes, to be a good Christian means that you must recognise the Jewish religion, which shares the Old Testament with Calvinism and so on. In the book of [Prison] Rules is a recognition of Islam and of Judaism and the High Holy Days and diet, if possible. And so I used to see the rabbi, and it was a calculated thing as well. He was very formal, Rabbi Katz. He was the rabbi of the Orthodox Synagogue in Pretoria and, being in Pretoria, he was very close to government, and he was very interesting because he showed all the characteristics of Jews in official positions who will behave correctly, even do some nice things, but show such fear. The Christian chaplains would chat about going on holiday, about how they went to such and such a country, they'd be warm. These are things people talk about, it's not news. We weren't allowed news, you see. The rabbi would walk in and he would say, 'We'll go through the abbreviated morning service. Open your prayer book, page 16', and each of us would take a turn and read, and we'd say, 'Rabbi, how are you?' He'd say, 'I'm fine.' That's it. And on one occasion, David Ernst had had medical treatment for an injured shoulder and couldn't come to meet the rabbi because he wasn't well. The rabbi was given a message that Dave Ernst sent his apologies, and he said, 'Oh well, let's get on', or 'Thank you'. He didn't say, 'Well, how is he?' or 'Give him my greeting' or 'Wish him better', or something like that. On that occasion, I said, 'You can't behave as spiritual adviser and not enquire about a

congregant, Dave Ernst, because of the rules. Either you see him or not. What sort of example does this set?' We had a different relationship after that.

Would he have been allowed to visit David?

If he'd asked. They would have made an arrangement. Any other chaplain would have. Now I must make one thing clear. The rabbi knew that none of us were practising Jews. There were times when I asked, 'Well, why was that word used?' One can be critical without dismissing it, but he said, 'Well, that's the word and that's it. Either you believe or you don't!' It's very strange. On one occasion somebody asked him about this and he said, 'The rules are that I am your spiritual adviser and that's all.' Now, none of us would have asked him to take out a message. I mean, none of the chaplains did. But there were some chaplains who, if you were ill, and your family didn't know, would make a way of letting them know, because that's human. How would you separate anxiety about your family from your spiritual condition?

He once apologised to me for not seeing me for over three months, because he'd been taking a party to Israel and he had his own congregation to deal with and so on. I said, 'Oh, you were in Israel. How are things? My daughter lives there in the Galilee.' He said, 'I'm not allowed to tell you.' I said, 'Is it safe or isn't it? I want to know.' So he told me, he'd been there, he had travelled and it was calm and I thanked him.

He could be so incredibly mean. I asked him once to give me some money for glasses and he did, but he never forgot that. He used to bring parcels at Rosh Hashanah and Passover, and of course we shared them amongst everybody. The most I ever had of a parcel was in the early months, when there was Turok, Tarshish, Goldberg and Strachan, and we were meticulous. I got three-quarters of my parcels, three parcels out of four. Later the whole balance changed. I was one Jew of seven political prisoners in later years.

I'm being unkind about the rabbi really, because I hate this niminy piminy carefulness. He wasn't allowed to give us sweets, but he was able to give us matzah. He would find a chocolate made to look like a matzah. And then one year, it was fruit juice. It was American, and I was called to the office. 'What does it say on this bottle, it's in Hebrew?' I couldn't read Hebrew, I didn't have a bar mitzvah. The official said to me, 'What's it say on here?' So I said, 'Fruit juice for Passover, non-alcoholic.' So he said, 'How did you know?' And I said, 'Because it says it in English on this side.' [Laughs] But he went out of his way to find things like this for us. If not him, then the Helping Hand [Chevra Kadisha] did this. There was a sort of resentment about it from our side because there were young Jewish soldiers on the border oppressing the Namibians and Angolans, getting the same gifts. Strange conflict.

The rabbi did help to get my Dad into the Jewish Old Age Home in Sandringham. And that's a bit ironic, given our attitudes to the organised Jewish community and the Board of Deputies. My Dad had his state pension,

that's all; he had nothing. In fact, he had accumulated something. People would give him money on his birthday, and he would put it away. Left me a thousand rand. Isn't that incredible? But once he got into the old age home, he was there six months and then died. Hilary Kuny, my main visitor in prison, my darling Hilary, came to visit me one Sunday. And then at two o'clock the same Sunday I was told I had a visitor. There had to be a problem. She used to phone Dad before coming to visit me and go and see him on the way home. He'd died that morning between her phoning him and getting there. It was time he went, he was old and tired, but with a mind so alert, so politically acute, it was incredible. And so she came to tell me about his death.

The day before I was released I was taken to see his grave. I'd asked, because I wasn't going to be in the country. The prison officials took me. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery, very funny that too, 'cause he'd wanted to be cremated, but Orthodox Jews don't cremate.[8] You're going to turn into soil, into humus, but you must be there for when the last Trump sounds and the Messiah comes. And the prison captain who took me with two sergeants stopped at the gatehouse, and he was told it was hallowed ground and then he came back with four yamekahs, and his staff said, 'What's that for?' He said, 'This is a place of worship. You respect other people's religion', and they put on yamekahs and I had to also. That's the irony.

We found the grave and... they left me alone, and I'll tell you my exact thoughts. 'You old bugger, you're still taking up space, making trouble as you did all your life.' And then I thought about it, I was actually incredibly moved. All the things I'd wanted to ask him that children never ask their parents, and that I would never be able to ask him again!

Then I thought back to his burial. Hilary Kuny, who was very close to Barney Simon, told me that Barney would read a piece for me, and I should choose it. I asked him to read Brecht's poem 'To Posterity: To those who come after'. Brecht talks about political struggle, and it ends something like [paraphrasing], 'We who wanted to make a world where man would no longer be an oppressor to man, We who wanted to make a world where man would be kind to man, didn't have time for kindness, and you who come after, When you think of us, think of us with forbearance.'

8 Denis saw Sam Goldberg's Orthodox burial as an annihilation of his father's individuality. Denis, stuck in jail, was unable to ensure his father's wish to be cremated was carried out. According to Hilary Hamburger (Kuny), Denis's father was old, abandoned and penniless. It thus devolved upon her to look after Sam as he grew increasingly frail. He would have died alone, from a harsh winter, had she not appealed to the Jewish community who found a place for him in Sandringham Gardens, a Jewish old age home. After eight months there he died, and the home arranged an Orthodox Jewish funeral for him. They were happy to release the body, but because there was no one else to pay for the funeral, they took care of it. Hilary believes it was ridiculous of Denis to expect the old age home which had physically looked after his father to both go against its own principles and foot the bill for an expensive cremation.

For me, Brecht sums up what I was trying to tell you earlier: political struggle costs. And it's not just the suffering of wives and children, or men and children, if wives go to prison. It's the cost of what it does to the activist too. You become narrowed, you focus on the struggle. You don't have time to be kind. You don't have time very often to broaden your interests, not while you're being active. You can when you're in prison or when you're in exile, but not when you're actually engaged in the struggle day to day. W B Yeats, writing about Maud Gonne, who was involved in the Irish Republican struggle (and who he loved to distraction), talks about the shrill voice that becomes more shrill, as it repeats the slogans and stops thinking, stops feeling. All right, he spoke out of unrequited love, but he spoke the truth.

The day I was sentenced, or the next day, my parents came to visit me. It used up my first visit of my first six months and my mother said she felt her life was fulfilled through me. I felt very proud, that in effect my mother was making me a comrade, not just a son. OK, we're a bit soppy about these things, but I think they matter, I think it's what life is about or, rather, life is about making it possible for people to feel, to live, to enjoy, to grow. The cost, for those who make it possible, is narrowness.

My brother and my father had had such an unhappy relationship and eventually to save his sanity, my brother split from him. Dad took unconscionable advantage of his son's desire to win his affection. (Thanks for the tissue; I'm sorry I weep so much.) After the State of Emergency in 1960, I broke with my brother and sister-in-law because they refused to take in my children in the event of my wife and I both being detained, and I felt this was unforgivable. Fear can't be acceptable. I'm wrong, fear is a very real thing, especially if you've grown up as my brother did in a home where there were police raids, and so on. What I should have done was say to them, 'I don't like the way you behave.' I simply cut them out of my life, and they cut me out of theirs. So that sixteen years went by, and then I wrote to him, sent him a Christmas card, nice Jewish thing to do, and put my address on it and he responded and we started writing. I then spent a year or more trying to persuade him to meet Dad. I thought it was important psychologically, that having established his independence, he'd be big enough to meet him again, but equally I needed Dad to meet with his elder son, my older brother, six years older, and make some kind of reconciliation, and acknowledge his really bad behaviour. Could never get them quite to do it. My brother saying, 'But meet Dad! I can't do that, I sat *shiva* for him ten years ago.'[9]

My brother has turned out to be a depressive and I understand the trauma now. He cut himself off, he pretended his father was dead. That's Dad's fault for making a choice so blatant, coupled with my brother's sense of rejection, of being sent away to the Sunshine Home. Eventually I got my brother

9 'My brother, who is not religious, spoke as if he'd already done his mourning for the dead, ie he'd washed his hands of my father.' [Denis Goldberg]

together with Dad after he was dead. He came out for the funeral, to comfort me, my brother who'd had no concern for me for all those years, who wouldn't go and visit my mother during the State of Emergency in 1960 because he was scared he would lose his job. And I must tell you, those fears were justified. My nephew, my brother's son, studied medicine. He then had to do his military training and when he finished basic training, they made him a sergeant. But a medical doctor is always a captain. He said, 'Well, I'm not practising as a doctor in the army if I'm just a sergeant. Why?' And they told him, 'You've got an uncle in prison for political things.' I mean, for God's sake! They made my nephew politically aware.

Please tell me about your decision to accept the offer that led to your release.

My attitude to it now is a little different from my attitude at the time. For a long time before I was released, I knew that there were negotiations for my release. All sorts of indications had been given to me. The prison officials were suddenly concerned about how I would adjust when I got out. 'Denis, look at the way your cupboard is sorted out, everything's got its place, no woman will live with you, you're so meticulous.' Hey, they should see my desk now. But you're put in close quarters, you have no space, and I had time and no distractions anyway. But the point is, they were saying, 'When you go out.'

A friend of ours, her name was Bubbles Thorne, a comrade from Cape Town, had been in England. She'd seen Esme. There were negotiations involving my daughter's kibbutz and it could not have been done without the agreement of IDAF [International Defence and Aid], who put up money for airfares, and IDAF wouldn't have agreed if the ANC hadn't agreed.

Bubbles, on the way home from London to Cape Town, stopped off in Pretoria to visit me and said, 'You know all this talk of you getting out, this is authentic.' Very carefully chosen, but you can hear it, 'authentic', not 'genuine', not 'real'. In other words, there's approval for it, so I knew this.

You mean from the ANC?

Well, yes, she was telling me there must be. Then Hilary Kuny had drawn up a memorandum through Dennis Kuny and Raymond Tucker, which she presented to Kobie Coetsee [then Minister of Justice]. I tell you, this is very significant, because Coetsee said to her, she had reminded him of his political duty to re-examine the situation of politicals with life. Within a few months of my release, he was talking to Nelson inside the prison. I'm saying that I was part of a process. When Chester Crocker met with Pik Botha on some island off the coast of Africa, it was clear that the United States and Britain and others were demanding the government release the political prisoners and get on with it. Proximity talks over Angola, Mozambique were all taking place. The Soviet Union was breaking down, the United States wanted to settle

Angola and Namibia and they wanted change to protect their positions. And then P W Botha said he was offering Nelson Mandela his release. This is what came out, and the next thing was that he added conditions.

My daughter's kibbutz had set up a committee to agitate for my release. My daughter had been a volunteer on Kibbutz Mayan Baruch which was founded mainly by South African Jews. They asked her to join the kibbutz. She said, well, she's got a problem, she needs to visit me. So she had to have permission to leave the kibbutz every two years. But they had a rule: you can't go off the kibbutz except at five or seven year intervals. And so the kibbutz met and said not only did they want her to be a member, but once she was a member they would set up a committee to do what they could to get me out of prison, because it's a family, it's a collective, and my daughter's problems are then the problems of the whole community. It's a wonderful concept. I just wish that their politics were different in general.

And so they agitated for my release and when I came out, my God, was I made welcome and, yes, there was a sense of ease... I like cream cheese and I like boiled chicken wings. I mean, this is typically what we think of as Jewish cooking in South Africa, which comes out of Eastern Europe.

They used Israeli members of the Knesset, they used the Israeli Foreign Office, they got nowhere. There was a guy by the name of Herut Lapid,[10] who runs an outfit he calls The Kibbutz Movement Committee for the Rehabilitation of Offenders, or something like that. I think he's the sole member, president, secretary, chairman; typical kibbutznik thing. And I'm not sure whether he's an intelligence agent or not, but he gets selective backing, depending on what Israeli intelligence wants. There was an Israeli man who used his thirteen-year-old son as a pack mule for heroin in Thailand. They were captured and sentenced to life imprisonment. Herut set about getting this kid, by this time sixteen years of age, out of prison and he succeeded. He wasn't interested in the father. He said, 'That bloody bastard. If he could use his son that way, he can rot in prison.' But he got the boy out of prison to go and live on a kibbutz. What an incredible guy. He even got Palestinians out of prison because he thought they were wrongly convicted.

But suddenly Herut Lapid pitched up in the prison with access to me every day, contact visits, any length of time. I didn't know the details of this man's activities, but he'd flown to Britain, he'd found seven people in the British government, including Mrs Thatcher, to give P W Botha a letter calling for my release. It was going to happen, I'm convinced of it. Then PW put the conditions on it. I actually asked to be flown to Pollsmoor,[11] or wherever it was, to consult. I think I knew that Nelson would not agree [to the

10 Herut Lapid literally means 'freedom torch'.

11 Nelson Mandela and a number of other, mostly senior, ANC leaders were removed from Robben Island to Pollsmoor prison in 1982.

conditions]. I took a decision that I was not Nelson, but my contribution would be to speak around the world. And knowing the consequences, I simply decided in my own head that the conditions about not being involved in armed struggle or that I would not make myself liable for arrest were meaningless. Any conditions imposed under duress are meaningless. And I've never said it publicly before, but if Nelson [Mandela] and Walter [Sisulu] and the others had made that decision [to accept P W Botha's offer], then the political machine would have gone to work and justified that decision. I happen not to be Nelson. I made that decision.

I'm making it all very rational; it was a very emotional time for me. Later I asked Hilary Kuny why she drew up the memorandum to get me out. She said, 'Well, you were looking very frayed round the edges.' Hilary used to visit me a lot, all the time, she was my only visitor for many years. She visited me for fourteen years and I think I knew her for a total of two or three days. Shame, oh I liked her so much. She was so wonderful to me, and for me. She sat in on some of these visits with Lapid, she used to bring him over, but she wouldn't say anything. I asked her opinion, she wouldn't say anything.

I wanted out, I'd had enough of prison. I reckoned it was time to get out alive, and be doing things. I was finding it more and more difficult to bounce back, partly because my companions were not my generation. I subsequently heard from Kathy Satchwell.[12] She said, 'Denis, don't be worried about your release. Thabo [Mbeki] knew every step of the way what was happening.' And he had told her it was OK, and if she could get a message to me while I was in prison she should.

I still don't know if it was a right decision or a wrong decision, or how right or how wrong. I'll never know. I made the decision. I literally travelled to the point of exhaustion. That first year I was out of prison, I can't remember if I was away from home six months or more, or nine months, but I seemed to be always in aeroplanes and trains and buses or cars, all over Europe, flying to New York, flying to Spain, flying back to London. Jet lag? What the hell is jet lag? You just talk through it and then you go to bed for ten days to recover.

That sounds like justification, but because of the kind of responses I had to my release, yes, I have to tell you how I felt. Partly it's my own fault. Perhaps I simply should have come out, guns blazing, figuratively, and said, 'I did it, and I'm going to be in the Struggle and that's it.' But I needed the support of my comrades. I'm told that Oliver Tambo was in Dar es Salaam and people were being very critical of me and he heard a report of an interview I'd given in Tel Aviv just after landing. He turned to people and said, 'We haven't lost him, you know', or words to that effect. I know that in the camps in Angola, people said, 'Before you criticise, let's hear what he has to say.' I mean, after

12 Kathy Satchwell is an attorney well known for her human rights work on behalf of political prisoners, detainees, and others.

all, how could the Denis Goldberg Football Eleven[13] be named after a renegade?

When I arrived in London, I went to the ANC office from the airport. We got hold of Thabo Mbeki and six days later I was in Lusaka. And OR [Oliver Reginald Tambo, President of the ANC] set up a meeting of those members of the National Executive who were there and they questioned me; there was no holding back. They were sharp questions, but sympathetic and supportive. But they put me through it for a good hour before OR summed up and said, 'We welcome you back', and everybody agreed. Then they organised a press conference for me and it just snowballed from there.

In the end OR asked, 'Denis, why?' I said, 'Because the negotiations were going on, they reached a point where it was impossible to want to close the door again. And the question is, can I do any work now or not; that's why I'm here.' And it was agreed I would travel the world and talk.

The complexity of it was that when I arrived in Israel, I was treated as a hero. I was a Jew, the Israelis had been involved and they said I was going to settle in Israel. I don't know where they got it from. My family was in exile in Britain, and I was going to join them.

I want to tell you a story about being Jewish. I flew out on an El Al plane. I didn't want to be on a South African Airways plane, which is South African territory in the air. Why the Israeli plane? Well, I was going to Israel and I didn't want the plane to turn around and take me back again. Call me paranoid, but in prison you learn that the fact that you're paranoid doesn't mean they are not out to get you [small laugh]. The plane is packed. It's noisy. Israelis talk, they talk so loudly, they sound like they're fighting and killing each other when they're having a friendly, cheerful conversation. I had my first cognac. The 747 had switched off its engines, it was flying on my excitement.

Then I get a headache, and I say to one of the cabin attendants, 'I need some headache tablets, when you get a moment.' They run up and down comforting people, settling them, feeding them. Eventually, on the run, as she goes past me, she reaches into her apron pocket and gives me some Aspro tablets, and they're crumpled. I say to her, 'Can I have some water?' She says, 'Come.' Takes me to the galley to get water. She says, 'Why are you sick? Why have you got a headache?' I say, 'I've just got a headache.' And she presses and presses, until I say, 'I'm not used to crowds.' She says, 'Why?' I said, 'I've just come out of prison', and as she's giving me the glass of water, she says, 'How long were you in prison?' I say, 'Twenty-two years.' She freezes. She freaks out. She turns her back on me and picks up a little black-handled knife and starts cutting lemons. Her back is bent, her shoulders hunched, she's terrified and I can see her thinking, 'Twenty-two years in prison. Rape! Murder! My God, what have I got myself into?'

13 'Wally Serote told me he played in the team named after me in one of the ANC's camps in Angola.' [Denis Goldberg]

And then I very quietly drank the water down and I started taking out a cigarette. No smoking, but I took out a cigarette and she dropped her shoulder and she looked over it, and she said, 'What were you in prison for?' Because I think she realised, if you're a murderer and a rapist, you don't talk about it. I wasn't ashamed, you see. And I said, 'For conspiracy to overthrow the apartheid government by force of arms', and she turned round, the lemon in one hand, the knife in the other and she said, 'Welcome aboard our aircraft!' And Ellie, that's her name, sat and talked with me once everything calmed down, for hours and hours. And she said I must come and visit them and I phoned their home, her husband and her child had heard about me. I met a mensch, a human being, who just wanted to talk and be nice. Yes, it was very nice.

When I flew out, there'd been a hell of a controversy in Israel. A hell of a controversy, because I was accused of lying, that I was a supporter of the PLO, and that Oliver Tambo was the Yasser Arafat of Africa, you know that kind of thing. In fact, I'd been asked to talk about the ethics of armed struggle, and I agreed on condition that I speak about Southern Africa, and all my examples are from Southern Africa. Tom Segev, the journalist, was very controversial, he saw himself as a sort of trendsetter, but he used to misrepresent by his judicious use of quotes and non-quotes and putting his opinion in, where you're being quoted without quotation marks, and his opinions looked like yours. And this led to such a reaction. I think what happened was that this growing support for the ANC and anti-apartheid was something the right wing in Israel couldn't handle, 'because if you support the ANC in the struggle for national liberation, what the hell are you doing to the Palestinian people?' So they set out to get me and they did.

And what actually happened?

Oh, the newspapers did a complete somersault. I was the enemy, the liar. They said that I said any violence was justified. You could kill, you could rape, that kind of thing. In fact I'd done a very careful, ethical analysis in English, and they simply translated armed struggle, guerrilla warfare, war of national liberation, just war, anti-colonial war, as terrorism. One word. So there was no discussion after that... The media turned against me and the ANC and everything else.

On leaving, Esme and I were on the plane and I could see the cabin stewardess being very friendly and very, very generous to us in her care for us. When I got up to stretch my legs, she asked if she might speak to me. Had I said what I was said to have said? And I said, 'No.' She said, 'It's obvious you couldn't have.' And in fact the armed guard on the plane, they always have an armed guard, he came up. He said, 'You couldn't have said those things', and they both said they were concerned I was leaving Israel believing that Israelis don't think for themselves. I was fascinated. Again, there was that passive

acceptance of the given order, just like white South Africans, because not to accept it was painful.

How do you feel about living in London now?

Home means South Africa, but home is where the heart is, and right now, my heart is with my family. I do my political work, I work to advance the RDP through a charity promoting sport and health, and separately through taking investors to South Africa. But I have an eight-year-old granddaughter and a rising six-year-old granddaughter, and they are beautiful, beautiful people. And my little grandson, my daughter's child of just two, is gorgeous. And I like it when he calls me Grandpa and I like it when sometimes he just sits with me quietly, or plays with me. I said earlier I think if you're politically active, you participate in ripping your family apart. That's OK, but I don't see the necessity for it now. And if I can tell you Goldberg's aphorism: The granny loves the grandchildren (well, so does Grandpa a little bit, you know). The children are staying here. The grandchildren are here. They're British, it's unavoidable, it's a cost of exile. Much as I would like to be in South Africa, much as I can see myself chairman of this and chairman of that, people will survive without me. Oh! the aphorism: The bobba loves the grandchildren, and won't go; and I love the bobba, so . . .

RAYMOND SUTTNER

Raymond Suttner is a member of the National Assembly where he is also the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. He serves on the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party (SACP). He is a lawyer and academic by training, and in that capacity has held lecturing posts all over South Africa and has given papers at conferences throughout the world, as well as published extensively in scholarly, commercial and 'alternative' publications. Together with Jeremy Cronin, he authored *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*. Raymond worked underground for the ANC and SACP from 1971 to 1975, before being detained without trial in June 1975. After five months in prison, he was convicted of contravening the Suppression of Communism Act, and sentenced to seven and a half years in prison. In 1986 he was detained without trial under the State of Emergency regulations for twenty-seven months, for eighteen of which he was in solitary confinement.

The interview was conducted in parliament. His office has big windows with a beautiful view. He explained that 'When they allocated the rooms here, I believe that one of the principles applied was that no room without a window was allocated to someone who had been in detention... The assumption was that you should not be subjected to further solitary confinement. Or further sensory deprivation.'

Interviewed by Fran Buntman
27 October, 1 and 2 November 1994
Cape Town

Let me start by asking you to give a brief biography of yourself. What were some of the formative influences of your life? And I'm not asking you to focus on something Jewish unless it's naturally there.

I was born in 1945, which I suppose meant that it was on the eve of the defeat of Nazi Germany. Remnants of the previous support for Nazi Germany continued to exist in South Africa. I grew up in Cape Town and there were occasions when I encountered anti-Semitism, when schoolchildren didn't want to play with me because I was a Jewish child. Now, there are two types of reactions that one has to that: One is found very often amongst Jews in South Africa where they become obsessively concerned about anti-Semitism and devote themselves to the welfare of the Jewish people, and their political

concern is the concern of the Jewish people alone. Now I grew up with a concern for Jews. But I also grew up with a sense that if this was happening to Jews and I found it unacceptable, I surely could not find it acceptable to have this greater discrimination against blacks in general. And I grew up in a liberal family, members of the Progressive Party. And that commitment wasn't so much to the Progressive Party as a general commitment to humanism, to a concern for the downtrodden — for a sense of justice and a desire to see this injustice ended. It was also a commitment which I didn't set a limit on. I didn't realise at that stage, in my teens, that I would go to jail. But I definitely didn't exclude it. It was also a commitment which did not understand the difference between capitalism, communism and all those things, but was mainly directed against apartheid. So while I wasn't a communist until much later, I definitely didn't exclude a commitment to the Communist Party.

I remember when I was at university reading about Bram Fischer's[1] speech from the dock, how much I was impressed, and how I took his commitment as an example of what one should be prepared to do in support of one's ideals. When I was a schoolboy I went to the South African College School (SACS) and although I was very interested in politics, the ethos at the school — the dominant ethos — was that sport was everything. And there was not much value placed on moral qualities. And consequently I don't feel that the school contributed much towards my political or moral consciousness. I remember in 1960 after the Sharpeville shootings, we were called into the school hall and the principal of the school advised us not to use offensive words like 'kaffir'. And that was the extent of the political awareness, although there was considerable racism, especially from the Rhodesian students, as they were then known. I went to university where I increased my understanding of politics and got more politically involved.

1 Abraham Louis (Bram) Fischer (1908-1975) was a distinguished Afrikaner advocate who defended many of the leading opponents of apartheid, including defendants in the 1956 Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial. In stark contrast to the route he might have gone as a leading Afrikaans lawyer, he rejected the Afrikaner supremacist path and joined the (then legal) Communist Party of South Africa. He was also a member of the Congress of Democrats, which worked closely with, and in support of, the African National Congress. In 1966 he was convicted of violating the Suppression of Communism Act and of conspiracy to commit sabotage. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. He died of cancer in 1975. (Information taken from Gail M Gerhart and Thomas Karis, *Political Profiles 1882-1964*, Volume Four of Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn Carter, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institute Press, 1977), p 29.

Left:
Raymond Suttner (Photograph: Anna Zieminski)

I was essentially a liberal, but in my early years as a student some of my lecturers were detained in connection with the African Resistance Movement,[2] the white resistance movement.

And from that period — which was more or less the period of the Rivonia Trial — until the late sixties, there was hardly any presence of the Liberation Movement and I continued to be a liberal most of the time. Towards the end of the 1960s, I came to feel that liberalism was increasingly ill-equipped for bringing about change in the country. And I remember having to speak at a symposium on the future of liberalism and I concluded that it didn't really have a future in this country. I didn't have a contempt for liberalism. I still believe that liberal values are essential values and they're essentially humanitarian values. They were the only vehicle available in the sixties to pursue non-racialism. But I came to feel that there wasn't a strategy for change attached to liberalism in South Africa, it was essentially a way of preserving a sense of personal rectitude. And important as it was to have a morally correct attitude, it was not an end in itself. This led me on my road towards the ANC and the South African Communist Party.

I went to England to study in late 1969. Although I was going to study I was more determined to get in touch with the Liberation Movement, and to come back and do something illegal. Because I had concluded that there was nothing much that I wanted to do that was legal because it couldn't have an effect. I didn't intend becoming a communist but in my readings and my meetings overseas I came to believe that that was the correct course to take. And I came back in June 1971 and I had a lecturing job in Durban where I worked underground for the ANC and the Communist Party for four years.

I'd like to go back to Raymond, the young boy growing up . . . you said you were at a school that emphasised sport. Did you play sport or were you alienated by that? What kind of family did you come from? Were your parents born in South Africa . . .?

Sure. Just on the school first. I didn't find anything especially wrong with the ethos at my school. I had a leg injury so I couldn't play rugby, but I played cricket to the best of my ability. At a certain point of my life I would've thought that it was much more important to be a rugby Springbok than to be

2 The African Resistance Movement (ARM) was a shortlived attempt, mainly by whites, to use sabotage to undermine apartheid. It was separate from the Congress Movement's own attempts at sabotage. According to Hugh Lewin in his *Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison* (London: Heinemann, 1981), ARM originated as the National Committee of Liberation (NCL), and assumed the name ARM after the Rivonia Trial (in which Nelson Mandela and his co-defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment). Lewin describes the NCL as 'ideologically imprecise', noting that 'the orientation was, broadly, socialist, ranging from some members who were dissident communists through to those of us who had been members of the Liberal Party and who had become disenchanted with the Liberals' insistence on passive non-violent protest.'

a member of the ANC leadership or the South African Communist Party leadership. So I didn't really find fault with the ethos of my school, although it coexisted in my case with a fairly high consciousness of political events compared with other students. In fact this was early on — I remember about standard six, speaking — you know, you had to give speeches every now and again — and I explained why you had to vote for the United Party as opposed to the National Party. I don't think there was a Progressive Party then. So as a schoolboy I lived two lives: one was as far as possible a conventional schoolboy who would've liked to be a leading sports person in South Africa, but at the same time I had ideas that were not shared by others. I don't know if they were particularly well developed intellectually, but they were moral ideas.

And I remember being in arguments with a whole lot of people . . . In one of these arguments Johan Simons, son of Jack Simons [and Ray Alexander],[3] was staring at me and laughing, seeing this hostility that I was having to beat off, as I was defending certain political ideas.

Laughing in the sense that he'd experienced that?

No, I don't think he was politically conscious. Or, let me say, he was politically conscious but he wasn't as active as I was. His parents were, but he wasn't. I remember he was just amused by what was going on.

Then as regards my parents — you know the thing about closeness to your parents. People can go through the whole of their lives and think they're very close, and in fact not be very close. I had elements of very great closeness and elements where we were not so close. And I would say I owe a lot to them for the moral values, which were not in the first place values about politics. They had to do with personal attitudes like unselfishness. I remember often being upbraided for doing something that was selfish or dishonest, and having instilled in me a sense of the importance of honesty and unselfishness. My father was not a well-known person, but he was a very honest person. He communicated that honesty very clearly. Both my parents imbued me with a sense of unselfishness. And these are values that I like to think are not ones restricted to commitment to a political organisation, but are ones that should affect one's relationships with women, with other human beings, not just in politics but in personal relationships as well.

I grew up in a family of five children: two brothers and two sisters and I was the eldest. And we had a lot of debates. After a while the debate did not feel to me as being at as high a level as I would've liked, because I became a university student and I suppose I was a bit arrogant about my beliefs and my learning and so forth. But I think what I do owe to my family is the basic core values. They never taught me about [Marxist political theorists Antonio] Gramsci or [Louis] Althusser . . . They taught me about honesty and unselfishness which I

3 See interview with Ray Alexander, pp 23 - 47.

think is the core of my beliefs and the fundamental reason why I went to jail, which is a very important experience for me.

Were you the only one in your family who went to university?

No, three went to university.

Were your parents born in South Africa?

Yes. My grandparents on my father's side came from Lithuania and my mother's side from England.

Was there anything religious about your background? Did you go to shul, have a bar mitzvah, light candles on a Friday night, anything like that?

Yes, we did those things, but in my view it was sporadic, and I don't think that my parents were actually very religious. My father was once President of the Beyt El Congregation in Melrose, Johannesburg.

Which shul was that?

It was a Reform shul, now defunct.[4] I said to him: 'What are you doing this for? Do you really believe it?' He said, jokingly, he does it for business. I don't think he did it for business, but I think it was as much a social, cultural thing as a religious thing.

I really would very much doubt that either of my parents were believers. They were probably agnostics or atheists, so I don't think that there was that heavy religious atmosphere.

And I mean, lighting candles – my brother does it with his kids. You know I think the thing with Jews in South Africa is that there's a very small percentage who are actually believers. Although there's a larger percentage who go through the motions of going to shul, lighting candles and fasting (on Yom Kippur). I mean, I don't fast. And my parents... they fasted in the beginning but I don't know if they continued fasting. I don't feel that they pressurised me to be a religious person.

The humanistic values that you describe, did your parents attach any Jewish significance to that? I don't think one has to, but one can.

No. I think that they were aware of being Jewish, but they didn't see their political actions as being a result of being Jewish.

4 It is now a gym.

Where in your life have you felt most acutely Jewish?

I think I've felt most acutely Jewish in the face of anti-Semitism. But I'm saying that with a sort of debt, in the sense that I've heard Freud said that 'I will be Jewish as long as there's anti-Semitism'. I am Jewish. I'm fairly culturally aware of being Jewish, but I don't wake up in the morning as Raymond Suttner saying 'I am Jewish'. I don't have a real high consciousness of being Jewish. Others seem to have more consciousness of my being Jewish than I do.

And I have never felt that I should marry a Jew. I don't have a problem with marrying a Jew but I've never felt I must. Most girlfriends that I've had have not been Jewish and my present girlfriend is not Jewish.[5] She's not white either [laughter] which is making it even worse... [more laughter].

Anyway, I felt Jewish in prison. I felt Jewish in a funny sense that because you're Jewish you got a parcel once a year. And it was very important for the prisoners to have a full quota of Jews so we could share out this parcel. And the rabbi once told me it's the one place that more people claim to be Jewish than elsewhere because they want to get this parcel.

Can you tell me a little bit about what it means to be imprisoned? And maybe also talk about the differences between being detained without trial and being imprisoned as a convicted prisoner.

Someone once said: 'No detention is the same'. And I've been in two types of detention. And detention is not like sentence. Now, in the first detention my main objective was not to tell them certain things, and their main objective was to get me to tell them those things. And the only way they could try — and in general they were not able to get the main things out of me — was to torture you, with electric shocks... It was terrible.

But what's interesting is the alternative to torture is in some ways much worse than torture. The alternative of betraying others is in some ways much worse. And I was able to go through a night of torture and not tell them what they wanted to know. What I was interested in was your capacity to control events. I think a lot of my experience in jail was that you have to retain your subjective consciousness. It is a situation where the odds are stacked heavily against you. But I found in terms both of detention and imprisonment that I — and in the case of other prisoners, when I was with others — was mainly able to control the course of events.

I was able to determine the moment when I was tortured by provoking it early on when I was strong. Because I didn't want them to suddenly hit me from behind or when I wasn't expecting it, or something like that. So that was one thing: people think of a prisoner as being powerless, but even with the

5 Now Raymond's wife.

balance of forces stacked against you, prisoners do have a certain capacity. And I think you have to use it in your favour.

The other thing is when you ask yourself, do you have any doubts about your belief, you don't have a chance to test it, until you're confronted with situations like that... [They tortured me for] three or four days if I remember correctly, but it was most intense in the beginning. Because they wanted to try and arrest others before they skipped the country. I had recruited two people. Looking at it now with the benefit of years, I can in some ways understand that they cracked very easily. One was Lawrence Kuny, the other one was a person called Jennifer Roxburgh. They became state witnesses against me.

When you say that with the years you came to a better understanding of that, were you very angry and pained?

No, I wasn't. You see my attitude is, has been, that we would never accept someone being a state witness, and I took a very hard line about that. Not because these people gave evidence against me.

But the other day I spoke to someone who had been a state witness whom I had cut quite short, and I said to him that I had been rethinking these things. I think that one must have room for allowing people to be re-involved. I learned this particularly from doing work on Chris Hani. One of the people I interviewed told me how he had re-integrated people who had actually at a certain point spied, or done activities like that. And he had actually given them a second chance. And I think one must be prepared to give people a second chance. We all make errors. The question is, even if it's a serious error, has the person genuinely tried to mend his or her ways?

Please tell me about prison, and what it means to talk about it.

There's an assumption that one's prison experience is so painful that one might not want to talk about it. And I think this might well be true of someone who has been plunged, against all expectation, into the prison situation. And is so traumatised that they will never recover or that it's too painful to talk about it. Now my experience, and the experience of most people who were in jail with me, was that we want to talk about it. And we always do talk about it. In fact, a lot of my life seems to be informed by my prison view of the world. In so far as it was traumatic — and it was very traumatic, especially the second time — the fact is that you expect something like that. When you're engaged in illegal activities, which I did the first time around, you know the price you're going to pay is possibly going to be torture and imprisonment. And in South Africa it was an important way of aligning oneself with the majority of South Africans. Becoming South African in a very profound sense of identifying oneself substantially with the goals and aspirations and sufferings of ordinary people by undertaking some of that suffering yourself.

After the first three months of your imprisonment in Pretoria Central, in which you were kept in isolation, you were moved together with other white male political prisoners. What was it like finally to be with people — especially more or less like-minded people? And what was life like in Pretoria Central?

Yes. We're now talking about eighteen years ago. What I think is true of my entire experience of prison is it's a very morally and socially significant experience. In the first place you form a community when you're with others, and you have to decide whether you're going to form a collective or whether you're going to each go your own way.

The people in Pretoria Prison operated as a collective: shared everything. I heard stories about when one or two of them were made 'A group', that is, the highest level of so-called privileges, after about fourteen years. They then shared amongst twenty or so of them, a tin of coffee, and ended up getting one teaspoon each a month. It was a bit like primitive communism when I was there.

We would share the little that we had. Although in the long run just about all of us became A group, and it became quicker after a while.

But more importantly, you couldn't have a situation where any individual just did what they like: approach the authorities about this or that matter. We would always consult about everything. The result is that it's imbued in my personal behaviour now. It's been ever since I came out of prison, everything I do I always consult. And if you didn't consult you might have, in fact, done something that led to the whole social life of everyone being prejudiced.

Because we consulted, because we planned very carefully and meticulously, we basically controlled elements of the prison. We always used to say, 'They locked us up but in most other aspects of the prison we are in control.' It's a bit of an exaggeration because they used to censor our literature and so forth. But it was a very important community experience. Obviously there were some people that one was closer to than others. And I developed very close relationships or friendships, one of which still endures with Jeremy Cronin. I was also close to David Rabkin who got killed in Angola. I was close to everyone, but worked particularly closely with those people through the years.

Pretoria Central was intellectually a very stimulating experience. We would have seminars every week and we'd also form little groups which would go through books, and anything that you read in prison you really absorb. But there were a lot of moral things. It's a bit like a marriage. Except that you can get a break from one another in a marriage. We had to see one another every single day. I really learned a lot about human relationships when I was in prison. I think you can tend to be a bit rigid, because the conditions of your survival demand very tight discipline in some things. I find I'm very anti-social; I think that's because of prison. I don't like going out and things like that. I like to return to my cell at night undisturbed. And what

used to happen very often is we would be under attack from the authorities – over one or other issue – and because we were a collective we could withstand this, we could rally around one another. I remember we would have some bereavements, things like this, the support that we gave one another was always very important. But of course there were also tensions, because when you're with one another all the time it can be a very tense situation.

When I left that prison experience in 1983 I didn't think of it in a negative way. I think that it did have a negative impact of which I was unaware. I say this because in the second detention I felt in some ways much more aware of a sense of depression. Which possibly had affected me in the first – must naturally have done so – but I was less aware of it then. So that I think that the first imprisonment was deceptively easy. But it was also easier in the sense that I had this companionship, and I grew a lot through it. Then when I came out, my contribution academically was really improved by the experience in jail.

Tell me about being Jewish in prison. You had already referred to the fact that you'd get food parcels. Was that at Rosh Hashanah or Paysach, or both?

Both. Let me just say first of all, being Jewish was not a highly significant part of my consciousness in prison. (It was a significant thing in the early days of my being a schoolchild.) We used to meet with the rabbi every now and again. And it was not highly pleasurable. Once he got very upset because we were not prepared to say some prayer.

We felt that it was hypocritical of us to do that when we didn't really believe. It was different to just meet and talk with him and hear what he had to say. We were not prepared to say some prayer. And then he says 'But you're prepared to accept the food parcels', which made us very angry, because his attitude – and the Jewish religion's attitude in general – is whether you are a believing Jew or not, they regard you as one. And they regard it as necessary to bestow this food parcel on you, which we got at Paysach and at Rosh Hashanah. And I met the same rabbi again and he made me very angry.

What's his name?

Isn't he in Pretoria? Katz or something like that.[6] He came to see me when I was in detention, and I was then into about my twenty-sixth month [of detention without trial] and I was in about the sixteenth month of solitary. And he started to come every single day.

And then he reminded me how we wouldn't say this prayer. So I just said to him, 'Look here, I'm finding it difficult enough to be in detention. To have the additional burden of seeing you every day is not one that I want, so I'd

6 Rabbi Sydney Katz has since passed away.

rather not see you at all.' He was whining to me about how Denis Goldberg never contacted him and he did such a lot for him, all this sort of nonsense. So I said to him, I just don't want to see you. And I think he started to panic because he liked saying to people how he does these things for us – and he insisted on seeing me. So I said, 'Just don't come every day. Once a week or once every two weeks.' Much as I didn't want to be in solitary, I didn't want to see him either. So that was unfortunate: that particular rabbi who we had seeing us was a bit of a pain in the neck. I don't like it when someone does something and then they're on about how they did this for you and they did that for you.

When you were interrogated, or when you had to deal with the security police at any point, did you ever have anti-Semitic slurs thrown at you?

When I was detained the first time I think that being Jewish was as much a crime as being a communist. They were very obsessed with my being Jewish, absolutely obsessed. Because the two were equated: being Jewish and being communist. So there was a high level of anti-Semitism. I remember one night they left me in the police cells as if they were going to leave me to rest, and suddenly you hear this hell of a noise: banging of car doors, saying that they're gonna come and *donner* this *fokken Jood*: fucking Jew. And so the Jewish part was very prominent in their thinking. Returning again to the theme that I said in the beginning, that Freud says somewhere that he's Jewish as long as anti-Semitism constitutes him that way. My Jewishness was relevant to the detainers. For the people who detained me my being Jewish was an essential element of criminality . . .

Was being Jewish in any other way relevant to your imprisonment?

We would get Jewish New Year cards. And then we would talk about it. David Rabkin[7] was more immersed in Jewish culture than I was, but we were not believers. And our Jewish identity was developed in the sense that we had an awareness of being Jewish . . .

7 According to Ronnie Kasrils, in his *Armed and Dangerous: My Undercover Struggle Against Apartheid* (Heinemann, 1993), David Rabkin originally came from Cape Town. His parents, 'an enlightened couple', emigrated to England after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. He married Sue Morris, a woman from London, and together they were deployed by the ANC in South Africa (soon to be joined by Jeremy Cronin). They wrote and distributed ANC leaflets until 1976 when they were charged under the Terrorism Act. David Rabkin was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. In 1985, '[h]e died in an explosives accident . . . on the last night of his training in an Angolan camp . . . David was buried in Luanda. Joe Slovo and Chris Hani delivered the main orations . . . [T]he camp where David had died would be renamed after him. I spoke at a memorial meeting in London, and Raymond Suttner, who had spent several years with David in prison, addressed a secret gathering of comrades in Johannesburg.'

Would you speak for a moment about David Rabkin.

David Rabkin is — was — would've become — a great South African leader. He was very, very principled, a very strong individual.

So strong-willed, that when I — we — had an argument with David Rabkin, Jeremy Cronin and myself, we'd have to take him on two at a time. He was a very, very fine comrade. That is why he volunteered — when he could've had an easy life, a relatively easy job as an intellectual — he volunteered to join Umkhonto we Sizwe. And that's how he died, in an accident. But in prison David Rabkin was a very strong, very powerful figure, helping to direct the thriving cultural life which we had. We built as much of a cultural life as we could and David was central to this, editing a journal that we used to produce once a year. And writing a lot, he used to write a tremendous amount. He'd write fiction and non-fiction. Many of his essays that he wrote for Unisa were kept by a professor at Unisa, Pierre Hugo, who wanted to publish them. I don't know if he's done it. And he also wrote little novellas and short stories. What I remember very much about David Rabkin is his youngest kid, who is now nineteen or twenty, was born while his wife Sue was in detention. We would watch these kids growing up from their photographs. And they'd come twice a year with his parents to visit from London. And you'd hear this shrieking of children's voices. It's something that you don't hear in a prison. And so the kids were as much a part of our imprisonment as they were for him. We shared those things. It was very hard for him. He really felt terrible about his kids growing up outside.

We were all culturally Jewish but I think David had studied Judaism more carefully than, say, I had. And he'd studied Jewish cultural history — shtetl culture — in a way that I hadn't done. He was a literary student, he had a PhD in English literature. And part of it was the result of his studies, but partly a self-conscious choice.

Please tell me about your experience in the Emergency detention. Many people felt that your being white was actually putting you at a disadvantage, because it meant that you did not even have the companionship black detainees may have had.

Yes. Let me say this: paradoxically, white imprisonment also, in some ways, has disadvantages because you are a smaller group. The smaller the group you are in prison the less weight you carry. So I think people on Robben Island[8] may in some ways have had a better situation than us.

The second time round, I think they were very angry with me. They couldn't find something to charge me with but they felt I was guilty

8 From 1962, Robben Island maximum security prison housed most of the black male political prisoners in South Africa. It is probably best known as the prison where President Nelson Mandela was incarcerated (until 1982, when he and other leaders were moved to Pollsmoor Prison). In fact, probably about two to three thousand black (African, Indian and Coloured) men were incarcerated there as political prisoners between 1962 and 1991.

nevertheless. So this created a sense of frustration. And I think there was a sense of vengeance on their part. It wasn't good enough for them that I had been in jail for eight years before, they wanted to keep me as long as possible the second time. I think they also wanted to beat me up and I managed to bring an interdict to prevent that in the beginning.

The first three months I was on my own but then after a while others drifted in and out — but after a year no other whites were with me. And I was on my own for the remaining eighteen months of my detention. And this was something which I don't know how many blacks experienced: I was having to be in solitary confinement because of the segregated nature of detention. It was a lot more difficult than the previous time. For the first few months the experience that I'd had as a prisoner before helped me, guided me, in dealing with prison. But after a while the experience was of such a traumatic kind, and so depressing, that I did not have guidelines. But what I knew is that whenever I was offered the opportunity of a sort of deal, I would always make sure there was no signing away of my commitment. One of the reasons given for my continued detention was that I was resolute in my conviction.

And it was very important to be resolute because I was one of the leaders of the UDF [United Democratic Front] in jail. It was very important that one set the example of being unprepared to make concessions which negated the reasons why you went to jail.

How was your family affected by your various imprisonments? Were they able to give you support, or was detention such that the work of outsiders couldn't really make a difference?

I think both detention and ordinary prison is in some ways more difficult for someone outside, because they in a sense are powerless. And they do try to give as much support as they can. In many cases they did manage to rally a lot of support which I think assisted in my release, also assisted particularly in the first imprisonment in improving our conditions: my mother was very effective then. But the detention was enormously difficult, and it was very difficult for people to know exactly what the day-to-day nuances were. I think it was important for me to be directing what people were doing. And, in fact, what was visible to the public was only part of it. I used to smuggle out letters to a girlfriend, who knew what I wanted done.

And this was the key way of communicating, rather than open letters and so forth. In some ways the open letters would just get censored, people wouldn't know what they could say and what they couldn't say. And public statements were often not what was required at the time. Family was very supportive and they did their best, but it was a difficult situation because communication was difficult for me to make. And the security police were incredibly difficult and vicious and aggressive.

You know, something that is very important is people tend to think of one being a victim only. And one of the ways I sustained myself in both detentions was by taking control over my environment. It happened to such an extent in a detention which was so traumatic and difficult, that every day I used to give the warder who looked after me a list of what he had to do in the day. And he'd come back with one thing ticked off and another thing ticked off, and I'd say, 'Well, what do you mean this is ticked off? Where's the newspaper, where's that, where's this?' Even the officers used to say: *'Het jy sy lys gekry?'* Did you get his list?

An important thing that political prisoners develop is a capacity to rock the boat: to create problems for the authorities. The second time around they feared me as an intellectual and as a lawyer. One of them said to me, 'With these ordinary prisoners, I just tell them to get into their cells. But you, it would be the United Nations and the United States, and the Supreme Court, so I'm not prepared to do that.' So they were quite scared. And the point is to keep them scared. And to keep the warders feeling that they must be more worried about angering me, the prisoner, than they should be about angering the major who is a more distant figure in some way.

How did you smuggle the letters out?

Ja, that I'll save in case I ever get detained again. We had a way of smuggling them out. I don't think I'll be detained again, but I want to think before I tell secrets like that.

What is your attitude to detention without trial under the new government?

I'm completely opposed to detention without trial and to capital punishment.

I know the Chevra Kadisha also visited you.

Oh, Mr Jackson.[9] He was a nice chap. You see, the thing about Mr Jackson is that he also came and tried to sort of speak religiously and I used to listen and so forth. But he recognised that we could form a human relationship. And he had been a prisoner-of-war and being a prisoner-of-war is very similar to being in detention, where you don't know when it's going to end. He used to tell me how they used to steal things from the mail and things like that. So that there was an element of companionship that we were able to have. There were two priests in detention with me at one stage, and I remember him once saying to them: 'Speak to this chap, I've not been able to open my prayer-book once' [laughter]. We got on fine. He'd come every two weeks, or something like that.

9 Simon Jackson was the Prison's Visitor for the Chevra Kadisha.

And the security police and the prison authorities didn't give you any problem about him coming?

No. They used to sit in, in the visits in Pretoria. But I don't know if they sat in in the Johannesburg Prison. It was much more relaxed in Johannesburg Prison. Basically, the criminal ethos was the dominant ethos at the prison. The values of the prison were the values of the criminal. And there was a very corrupt attitude in the prison as a whole. So they didn't really care what I did as long as I didn't escape, and as long as I didn't cause trouble for them. So they didn't mind. If Jackson had wanted to he could've smuggled things to me, because they weren't really watching.

Did you ever suggest that to him?

No, I wouldn't have wanted to embarrass him. I don't think he would've smuggled anyway. I used to smuggle things but not with him.

Among the many groups who called for your release were Jews for Social Justice that was emerging around that time in Johannesburg, and an Israelis Against Apartheid group that emerged in Israel. How do you feel about that kind of religious or ethnic organising?

You see, what I feel is, as the person who was the object of this attention, what I would've liked if I was a rugby player, is to have Rugby Players Against Apartheid uniting around me. Academics did some things for me as well, so that it was a question of people who could identify with me in some way. Although my self-identity as a Jew was not highly developed, people whose identities as Jews were highly developed found that this was a peg on which they could get involved.

Some people, because they felt ashamed that Jews had done so little against apartheid, wanted to identify with an [organisation like JSJ]. It's like some vicarious form of commitment — or actual form of commitment. So I didn't have a problem with that. I myself never organised in that way although I was involved to some extent with Jews for Social Justice.

Do you think collectives — whether ethnically based or organised around some other unifying principle — should strive to sustain themselves?

I think collectives need to define themselves in a way that isn't static. To be called Jews for Social Justice is an enduring title, but the meaning of it must alter from time to time as the conditions change. For example: if one was once in a pressure group in relation to detentions, things like that, it may be that one now needs to redefine oneself in relation to transformation and democracy. And I think it's very important for collectives to associate themselves with the most progressive trends in the development of the situation.

In the case of South Africa it's a process of democratisation and transformation which is by no means complete, which is only beginning. And I think one has to ask oneself how best one can contribute towards these things. What we achieved on April 27th is what is known as representative democracy: electing for the first time people to represent other people. But that's only part of democracy and transformation hasn't really reached ordinary people. In many cases we are finding here in parliament, if we want to make ourselves accessible to the public and make it possible for the public to reach us, it's necessary to have intermediary forces. NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and other forces which can act as go-betweens facilitating that interaction between the public, ordinary people, and ourselves. But I think one needs to redefine these collectives in a dynamic way: relating in a changed way to a changed situation. I'm not thereby trying to give a hidden meaning, suggesting that you shut down your offices because now we've got democracy and all you do is assist the ANC.

What I'm saying is there are broader things than the ANC. There are broader things than this parliament, there are broader things than the government, there is a broader aspiration that we have for democracy and transformation, and people have to see how best they can contribute towards that. And that doesn't mean becoming a functionary of a government or a ruling organisation.

If a Jewish organisation were to come to you and say: 'We're redefining ourselves in the new South Africa', what kinds of advice might you give them? How can they define their roles appropriately, both for the constituency they represent and the broader community?

Well, my answer to this relates to my answer to the previous question. The Jewish community has to ask itself: what resources do we have which can be used to assist this? And this is generally interpreted by the Jewish community as related to financial resources. And certainly financial resources is part of the answer. But the Jewish community has within it a high concentration of skilled people of a variety of types, who can decide whether their skills are going to be used to empower themselves only in individual endeavours, self-enrichment, self-satisfaction and so forth. Or decide whether community empowerment is only the Jewish community, or whether it's the South African community.

I know there's been a debate amongst Jews for a long time, particularly Zionists, as to whether they are Jews and South Africans: Jews first or South Africans first, Zionists and what not. Now my feeling is at this moment that if one defines oneself as a Jew, one should also define oneself as a South African. And I think the reality that one lives in this country — even if you do think you want to go to Israel one day — you are simultaneously operating in a South African reality. And the question is: are you operating in that reality in a

way that advances progressive humanity's striving for universally acknowledged human rights, transformation, a better life for all?

I think no one can object to that phrase 'a better life for all'. And the question is whether the Jews are going to contribute to a better life for themselves only, or whether the conditions for that better life for Jews is related also to a better life for others.

The conditions under which people have become wealthy in South Africa have borne some relation to the impoverishment of the majority of South Africans. We haven't directly exploited — you and I — black South Africans, but the conditions under which we as individuals have had certain opportunities, have also been the same conditions that denied those opportunities to other people. So what I'm saying is: let us now ensure that the opportunities that we have had are put to the service of ensuring others now have those opportunities and possibilities in their lives. And that's the direction in which I believe the Jewish community should look. An inward-looking spirit should also be outward-looking — should be complemented with an outward-looking sharing with other communities. Not charity.

Going back to the issue of collectives: do you think that some collectives have more legitimacy or more value in society than others?

I believe in the Freedom Charter, and the Freedom Charter places considerable weight on the right of all people to pursue their culture, their language, their religion. I don't want to say this one's more important than that one. I think people realise themselves, define themselves, in a number of different ways: as a professional if you're a professional, as a worker if you're a worker, as a speaker of a particular language, as a person who practises a particular culture. If you say that something's less important, in some ways you're implying that it's not necessary to practise it. And we believe that all these things are necessary to practise. That it's necessary for people to realise themselves in these different ways.

You and Jeremy Cronin wrote a book, Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter, ***in 1985/86. One of the clauses you highlight is the right to religious freedom, which I think was valuable and important. In that book you illustrated what you were saying with interviews with various people. You included Christians and a Muslim religious leader, but —***

[Interrupts] Yes, no Jewish ones. I think this is an important criticism of that book. But I think one must recognise that when we were working in 1985, there were not any prominent Jewish religious figures advocating or supporting the Freedom Charter.

I remember being very interested when I read some literature from Jews for Social Justice in the Western Cape, where there was theological argument in favour of liberation. This is relatively undeveloped amongst Jews. You'll find

individual rabbis might well have expressed themselves morally at one or other time against detention or this, that and the other. It was not, however, part of a well-developed theological presentation as you find amongst some Christians, like the Institute for Contextual Theology and so forth. So that while I feel maybe we should've tried harder, I think it's important to realise that this is a gap in the Jewish contribution in South Africa, that there hasn't been a well-developed liberation theology. Or theology against apartheid. References to Jews trekking out of Pharaoh's Egypt come more often from non-Jews. They come more from Christians, from Independent Churches, things like that. Nowadays you hear it much more often. I mean 1986, go and look at your press. Go and look at the religious contours of the country. Basically there were very few rabbis doing that.

Why do you think the South African Jewish community — or at least sections of the community — failed to develop in that kind of direction? When, for example, sections of the United States Jewish community, and the Israeli Jewish community, and many other Jewish communities all over the world have developed a sophisticated and deep argument for using Jewish values to support various liberation struggles or human rights politics?

You know, I'd not like to offer an answer to such a complex question without thinking it out. Something you said about 'Jewish values': I'm not completely sure that there are uniform Jewish values. We used to argue there were Jewish values when we wanted to get people to join organisations like Jews for Social Justice. But I think that amongst Jews in South Africa there are contradictory values. Maybe there are some shared values but I would find it very difficult to define these. Maybe you can extract them from religion. But those same values are used in South Africa by Jews for an extremely self-centred approach. If you go and meet with Jewish organisations, they're obsessed with protection of Jewish community; Jewish private schools; sending money out of the country to Israel; the special place that Israel has in the hearts of Jews — or allegedly has in the hearts of Jews; etc etc. I can't explain all of this. All I know is that there is a very uneven way in which Jews have responded to non-Jewish issues in this country. They've tended, until very recently, to be very supportive of the general social order. And while there was, around the period of the mid-eighties, a development towards opposition to detention and States of Emergency and things like this, the Board of Deputies for many decades was very supportive of the regime. Now for politeness and so forth, when one meets with them you don't drag these things up all the time. But I must say, I don't think that there's a uniform Jewish ethic which has informed people. If there is, it's been capable of a variety of different meanings, and some of those meanings have been interpreted in a very ethnic, egocentric way.

All faith communities have different sectors within them with different tendencies. Why do you think that the Jewish community didn't at least have a tendency to develop that more radical challenge to the status quo, from a Jewish framework per se?

The Christian churches, as far as I'm aware, are predominantly black in their membership. And that means that the membership to whom your theology had to respond is primarily the oppressed majority. The membership of the Jewish community, Jewish religious bodies is, in fact, a minority amongst a minority that has been privileged. So that to do what I have done in my life has actually been to act in a way that is contrary to my immediate socio-economic interests. Now, very many, a disproportionate number, of Jews have done that. And I think that's because of the contradictory experiences that Jews have had. They're simultaneously part of an oppressive minority as well as being a minority that has experienced oppression or racism, and the threat of oppression. And the way you respond to that, I think I said in the beginning, is either in self-indulgent, self-protective concern just for yourself, or else in a concern about the phenomenon of racism and oppression, which may well lead you to oppose oppression and racism applied to anyone. Now that's the route that I took but that's not the route that the Jewish community in general took. And I think that the reasons are explicable by the objective placing of the Jewish community as not part of the oppressed in South Africa. I'm not talking about their subjective consciousness. The objective positioning is primarily as a part of the white community.

I just want to check that I understand you clearly, and that any reader would understand you clearly. You have no objections to Jews opposing anti-Semitism as with any other form of racism, but what you're criticising is the narrowness of opposing anti-Semitism to the exclusion of the broader racism that was happening in the country.

Sure. Just as I expect people who are against anti-black racism to also be against anti-Semitism, I would hope that Jews would be opposed to racism in general.

What are your feelings towards the Israel of 1994?

Well, my position towards Israel has not changed for a very long time. And that is that I believe in recognising the right of existence, self-determination of the state of Israel: its historical reality. Simultaneously I believe the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination which has to be realised through meaningful political institutions. The right of Israel to exist is not the same as to occupy parts of Syria, or the right to exercise various forms of harassment against non-Jewish sections of the population of Israel itself. So for a very long time I've supported the right of existence of the state of Israel. I don't say

within secure borders because secure borders can mean the Golan Heights, all these things which I don't agree with.

Has being Jewish ever been an issue for you within the ANC?

No. People don't realise I'm Jewish although it's not really a factor. I know that for many people who are very conscious of being Jewish it is an important part of their identity. Now the way in which one is defined in the ANC is not by religion, so I don't know if many people know I'm Jewish.

Do you think if they did they would care?

No. I mean if you look at it, Joe Slovo [at the time of this interview Joe Slovo was still alive] must be one of the most popular people in the ANC and he's Jewish. Ronnie Kasrils is very popular and he's also Jewish.

I'm not a Jewish activist myself. Being an activist who happens to be Jewish is more correct for me. It's very hard for me to put myself in the shoes of someone who defines themselves as a Jewish activist. All that I can do is suggest constructive ways in which that can be channelled. But I can't put myself in the shoes of someone who is a Jewish activist. I regard my participation in a project like this as important because, in so far as people identify with some of the things that I have done, I want to explain the reasons for my choices: the psychological factors that went into it, part of which is being Jewish.

Going back to your various imprisonments: to what extent do you feel you've still been left with an emotional or physical legacy that has damaged you, and that you are living with and dealing with now?

I think the thing about dealing with a form of privation or sensory deprivation, or whatever you want to call detention or imprisonment, is the mechanisms that you use for adaptation can become mechanisms that stay with you after the reasons for adaptation are removed. For example, I quite like being on my own, reading on my own, being locked up at eight o'clock. I have done so much in my life being locked away after eight o'clock. In some ways I find it quite difficult to be in a relationship where I have to relate to someone else, meet their needs, because for so long I had to try and keep myself together by reading. And I find I have a degree of resentment at the happiness I have [small laugh] in being in a relationship.

That happiness is simultaneously denying me something which has been very important to me. Or denying me the amount of time that I can provide for it. In so far as I have been affected by detention — particularly the last detention — it continues to have an effect on me. I still get quite tense. I have to exercise every single day. I still have problems with sleep. I think that everyone who spent more than two years in detention has got various after-

effects like that. Or most people I've spoken to have had one or other after-effects. In some cases they're not conscious of it and they don't always relate it to that. But later they do.

How do you think we as a country — and that means individuals and the nation as a whole — need to be dealing with this legacy from the past, especially in so far as it's hurt individuals in very real ways?

Well, I'm not going for any counselling at the moment. I don't have any problems with psychoanalysis, psychotherapy. It's just that one has to find some person in whom you have complete confidence and who can meet your particular needs. And I think we need to counsel a lot of people. But the trauma that detainees have experienced is really a species of a broader trauma which has been inflicted on the majority of South Africans. I happen to be amongst part of the minority who experienced some elements of this trauma. But what I experienced in a limited period is a species of trauma that blacks have experienced the whole of their lives. And in fact I believe that some of this trauma is continuing.

My girlfriend is an African, and she is encountering a lot of racism in Cape Town. I think one has to realise that you may have had elections on April 27th but that doesn't remove racism. A lot of people still believe — it may be especially because this is the Western Cape but I think it's true of the whole country — that a lot of whites have not adjusted to the degree that is compatible with democracy. What I think in regard to racism is that the ANC needs to initiate a broad-based campaign against racism, and a number of organisations of civil society, including Jewish organisations, could associate themselves with such a campaign.

MAXINE HART

Maxine Hart trained as a social worker, and now works as a change management consultant for Nedcor. Throughout the 1980s, she was active in a range of extra-parliamentary groups that opposed apartheid, including being a founder member of Jews for Social Justice. In 1984 she was detained without trial and later charged and convicted for furthering the aims of the then banned African National Congress, through such actions as reading and distributing banned ANC publications. She was released on a suspended sentence, but redetained in 1986 at the start of the State of Emergency. Soon after her release from that detention she went to Manchester University on a British Council Scholarship where she studied for and received her Master of Education degree. She is currently chairing a restructuring committee in the national department of Welfare. Maxine is married to Jim Smith, founding editor of *The Star* Business Report.

In the interview, when asked how her family responded to her politics over the years she said:

> I was always the 'communist terrorist' in the family. When the ANC was unbanned, I'd have my conservative cousins say, 'Oh, I had lunch with Cyril today.' And I would say, 'Cyril who? Cyril Cohen or Cyril Rabinowitz?' 'Oh, Cyril Ramaphosa!' All of a sudden it became fine to be part of it. So I think that for me captured it. I said to them all . . . 'Isn't it funny that all of you accused me of being the terrorist in the family, and now you are the ones who are trying to curry favour with the very people who you accused me of working with?' . . . I cannot hide the fact that I feel morally superior [laughter] . . . I certainly feel morally superior and I would do it again without any qualms . . . I have no personal regrets and that's why, despite events like the detention, I didn't come out fundamentally damaged.

Interviewed by Fran Buntman
10 January 1995
Johannesburg

Left:
Maxine Hart (Photograph: Gisèle Wulfsohn)

When and where were you born?

In 1959, in Orange Grove. I was born and bred in Johannesburg and now live in the same little area as thirty-five years ago. I was brought up in a very ordinary way. I went to government schools, first to Linksfield Primary School and then to Waverley Girls' High School. I am not from a well-to-do family, so I spent most of my childhood having to work in my father's printing factory. It was almost obligatory that my sister and I worked during school holidays. Our parents weren't at home during the day, so basically we brought ourselves up on the streets. It was more open than it is now. We had a nice neighbourhood, with other kids, and we used to play a lot together in the streets.

What were my prime influences? My family was quite Jewish. They kept kosher — my mother still does. I had a religious granny who came from Russia and we used to have to go to shul with her every Saturday morning. So unfortunately shul became a punishment because that was my mother's way of getting free time when she dropped the children off, so she could go to the hairdresser and do her own thing. So my experience early on was of quite a Jewish family, but my sense of it was punitive because it obstructed other things I wanted to do.

Did you have a bat mitzvah?

Ja, at the Ninth Street Shul in Orange Grove. I used to go to *cheyder* in the mornings before school. There used to be Jewish classes at ten past seven, before school started, to learn Hebrew. I didn't learn a lot of Hebrew, just very basic skills. I can read Hebrew but I don't understand it.

And politically, were you aware of what was happening in the country?

Not in a conscious way. My family weren't political, so it wasn't a liberal family as such, it was quite apolitical. But I remember my father — he died when I was fourteen — used to tease me and call me a 'Little Helen'. It was obviously some reference to me being a bit liberal when I was a kid — I was little Helen Suzman. So obviously there was something, but I can't remember what the prime issues were other than on a human level. I remember that when working in my father's factory — it was only a small factory — I used to stick up for some of the coloured staff there. So it was a very emotional, liberal, response to people.

Then I went to Waverley Girls' High School which was not political either in any way, other than that there was one history teacher, Pam Christie, who was a little bit more alert. She was my standard seven, eight and nine history teacher. She had quite an impact on me, forced me to think a bit differently, but I can't remember exactly what the content of it was. Ja, so there wasn't

anything that stands out as primary in my early years, other than a gut response — I couldn't understand why things were like they were.

You said your grandmother, your mother's mother, was born in Russia. Where were your other grandparents born?

Poland. I didn't know them, they died when my father was young. I didn't get much information about them, other than my surname shouldn't be Hart. When my grandfather came from Poland they heard Hart at the customs and made our name Hart. He was Hicht. My father died when he was quite young, and my father's side of the family are quite superstitious; they don't want to talk about people who are dead so you can't get much information out of them. I know more on my mother's side. My Granny came out here in 1920. And her life had quite an impact on me in the sense that she had been through quite a lot of repression and suffering. They'd been through pogroms, and she'd been separated from her mother for two years when she was fourteen.

The Russians under the Tsar put Jews on trains and they wouldn't tell them where they were dropping you off. So she was on a train with her mother. At one point the train had stopped at a station and the station-master said the train was going to be at the station for quite a long time and she could get food. But when she came back the train was gone and no one could tell her where the train had gone to, or where her mother was. So she landed up in a Red Cross camp in Petrograd, like a refugee camp. The Red Cross helped trace her mother which was very difficult. Eventually she found her mother in Siberia.

What struck me when I started university was that her life was no different to the migrant workers in South Africa. Her life involved being sent to places, moved, having her family get broken down, just like migrant workers here. She was quite pro-Lenin, because Lenin was kinder to the Jews, so she used to talk favourably about Lenin. But she didn't like the Tsar because in her memory the Tsar had been much more oppressive to the Jews.

Was she ever politically involved in something like the Bund?

No, she said she was too scared, but that her brother had been. And she used to tell me her one brother used to go to Lenin's rallies. But she didn't get involved because she was too scared.

What led her to leave the Soviet Union?

Her father had come here in about 1912 and then he sent for her much later. But when he sent for the family the mother had died of pneumonia in Siberia, so he sent for my granny and two of her brothers — well, he sent for all the family but some of them went off to Europe and two of them came here. So she came when she was twenty and went to the town of Marquard in the

Orange Free State. Her father taught Hebrew and gave *cheyder* lessons to the kids. In fact last year I went to Marquard and there's one Jewish family left there and my grandfather died in the back of that family's shop — that little shop was where he taught *cheyder* lessons.

My granny's maiden name was Freed. She married a Kretzmer. She was sent to Johannesburg when she was twenty-three because she was told she had to get married. She was considered very old to be unmarried. She landed up marrying her second cousin — because she was considered on the shelf [laughter].

How did her life experiences — experiencing Tsarist oppression, appreciating Lenin because he was better to the Jews than the Tsar had been — how did that affect her and the way she saw things in South Africa?

She never saw the relationship. She didn't think about the similarities at all. Her experiences were as a Jew, and her consciousness was solely around Jews and things Jewish.

Were your parents both born in South Africa?

Ja, my father was born in Yeoville and my mother was born in Jeppe.

Tell me a little bit about why you chose to study social work and about your life at that time.

When I was little I knew I was going to be a social worker. I didn't have a clue what it was, but I had decided I was going to be a social worker. So it was almost a naive thought that if you were nice to people things would be all right.

So I didn't have any anxieties or angst about it at all. I went to university straight after school. I enjoyed the course. I was not involved in student politics on campus. I got very involved in my social work. The most fundamental impact for me then, as a part-thinking adult, was my practical social work. In 1978, when I was a second-year student, I was sent to Eldorado Park. I was working with ordinary, normal schoolchildren. Our practical work was to run groups for kids at school. It was then that I had a fundamental shift in thinking. Because I'd always felt certain things were not fair or not right but when I was there it became absolutely obvious here were very ordinary, decent kids who just were not allowed to have ordinary, decent lives. So it was from that point on that I became more politically aware, not having any understanding other than from a humanist point of view that things were not right.

Then in 1980, in my fourth year of social work, we could choose where we worked and I went back to Eldorado Park. That was the start of the school boycotts. The eighties were for me the period where there was no choice of

what needed to happen and where I would stand. I had no internal dilemma of what was right for myself and South Africa.

What did that involve practically?

It shifted through the eighties. At that beginning point I was getting very involved in the community. I took a job in Eldorado Park, and for the next six years worked in that community. There was the launch of the UDF [United Democratic Front] and the anti-election campaigns in the early eighties. So I felt quite part of that community, aligned with the community in myself. That was the way I expressed my opposition to what was happening at that point. Then I got a bit older and I thought 'but that isn't helping', and maybe I needed to be part of other things as well. And that's when I became involved in organisations. I think the launching of the UDF gave space to be part of the bigger picture. Before that I didn't feel aligned to other organisations. I didn't feel aligned to student politics, I didn't like the nature of it — it was a fairly gut reaction; I just didn't like the way people behaved [laughter]. The UDF opened up opportunities and spaces to get more involved.

You had also become involved with the ANC. Had you formally been recruited into an ANC cell?

It depends. How formal is formal? I mean, I had been recruited. My personal experience was not one of very clear organisation. I think that for the people in exile that I'd come into contact with there was a desperation and wanting to do anything irrespective of what the implications would be. It was almost that as long as something had been done then it would be fine. So I think when errors occurred and if things were not managed carefully it was probably rooted in people feeling quite desperate.

Please tell me about your first detention and trial.

It was '84. Having been a part of working in that community, I became close to quite a few people in that community, including a guy who went into exile. We had a close relationship and he joined the ANC in exile and then I became more involved in the ANC. I was arrested and detained in September 1984. Working with the ANC felt like a fairly natural progression; it was a logical involvement in my head.

They charged me for furthering the aims of the ANC, for distributing, reading and destroying ANC pamphlets, and having communication with alleged members of the ANC. The charges were quite bizarre. I think it's only with hindsight and history that you can laugh at it. About ten years later it's quite funny, given the turn of history.

Then I was charged. It was clear the state had a spy. In retrospect, it was a very significant learning experience for me because the spy was a black person. The ANC subsequently arrested him in Lusaka. When I was in Britain two years later, there was an article in the *Weekly Mail* with the confessions of seven government spies, and he was one of them.

What is his name?

George Mabaso. I'd be curious to know where he is now, but that's another story. At that point the state just needed a neat, clean case. I was charged, then given three years' suspended sentence for five years. That was in '84. The State of Emergency was declared in '86, when they again detained me. It was 12 June 1986. That was the second detention. The security police were very angry at the time and their first words were, 'Oh, you think you're a big deal because you got a suspended sentence.' It was one of the first political cases that got a suspended sentence. For them the suspended sentence meant they didn't win that case. I was detained for two and a half months, but I was in solitary the whole time. I was held in John Vorster Square and Diepkloof — Sun City. You see, for me my ANC activities weren't the fundamental points because I didn't see that as making a major contribution. For me, the involvement inside the country, what would have been called legal activities, were more profound than those activities. I was always uncomfortable raising the ANC work to the most primary level because for me the other involvements were more primary. The state raised it to a primary level — I never did.

What was it like to be detained; how did you cope?

Look, it was four and a half months. It's all distanced now. Whatever coping means — I coped. Obviously I felt lucky because I was only in for four and a half months. I prepared myself for a minimum three-year jail sentence and was hoping for a two-year jail sentence. So when I came out after four and a half months with a suspended sentence I felt extremely lucky, which I was. I felt lucky and guilty at the same time. Because other people had been sent to prison on similar types of charges when I came out. So it kind of distorts how you deal with it afterwards. Because if you feel — and I think that it is always like that after a trauma — you're the only survivor of a plane crash, you're supposed to be lucky for your life, you're not supposed to feel sorry for yourself.

In retrospect, I think it was quite traumatic, it was a life-shifting experience. I wouldn't want it to happen again — but given that it did happen, it was one of the more profound life-learning experiences. From that point I've integrated it into a philosophical life perspective. I was quite conscious even at the time that I was not going to become bitter because of it. If I became bitter then I was the only one who was going to suffer with it, no one else was

going to be concerned with my bitterness. So I spent a lot of energy on not being bitter which was useful because it gave additional human dimensions to the prison warders and improved my ability to deal with them. I saw them as captive as I was — in fact more captive than I was. I had prepared my departure speech to be made to the prison. I didn't know when I would be released but it didn't matter. When the court released me I insisted on going back to Diepkloof to make my parting speech to them.

I think everyone thought I was mad. I said, 'Major, I'm free and you're still here.' And she said, 'What do you mean? I work here.' I said, 'Yes, but I'm free and you're still here.' She's probably still there and so are many of the warders still there, and I'm not. And so I think it was quite a profound learning. You learn about your own limitations, your own defences, who you are as a person.

Was being Jewish relevant to your detention?

Yes, in the sense that the police were a bit scared of Jews. For them, the Jews are the chosen people. I was in detention over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and I refused to allow them to interrogate me on any of those occasions and they respected that. And on Yom Kippur I fasted and they were a bit anxious that maybe I was going on hunger strike. I think they pride themselves as being religious themselves as Christians. Jews have a particular meaning in their lives and I think it's because they don't understand Jews or Judaism properly. They let me have access to a rabbi and they let me take in Jewish prayer books, and I took the Kabbalah[1] and all sorts of books, so it gave me access to much more reading than I was officially permitted. Because you're only allowed to have a Bible. But they let in Jewish reading material too. It also allowed me to have extra visits, by seeing the rabbi. I must say, I did use being Jewish.

I would say to them, for example, 'You tell me you're Christian and you respect religion. Well, then, you have to respect my religion.' So I would talk to them about religious freedom because if they believe in religious freedom then they had to respect my being Jewish.

Who was the rabbi who came to visit you?

There were two rabbis. One I fired. I don't even remember his name. I think it could have been a Rabbi Groner but I've never seen him subsequently. Before he arrived I would find interesting points to discuss with him — ask him why there is the morning prayer that says thank God I'm not born a woman.[2] And then he went and told my friend that I had given him a hard time. I found it

1 A generic name for Jewish mysticism.

2 In Orthodox Judaism, women say 'Blessed are you Lord, G-d, King of the universe, who has made me in accordance with his will', while men say 'Blessed etc etc, who has not

extremely frustrating. I would rather have had him not come at all. He didn't want to discuss any topical issues, he just wanted to come and give me a prayer and say goodbye — and I said that wasn't really what I wanted. I think he was really just a little out of his depth. Then Rabbi Ganendi came and he had a much better angle on it, he didn't come and preach to me. He used to bring me amazing readings; he brought me Victor Frankl and a lot of that genre. He picked Jewish philosophical writings about suffering, and the meaning of life, and how you strengthen yourself within adversity. So I used to really enjoy seeing him because we used to get into some good discussions. He had more depth as a human being.

Was he sensitive to what was happening politically in the broader sense, as well as what had happened to you personally?

I think so, ja. I met him a few times afterwards. He was obviously grappling with the political situation because he emigrated a few months after I came out of detention. I don't say it was me. He obviously had some political sensitivity. I remember him saying that meeting me in detention was quite significant for him, he was trying to understand what was happening to me.

Did you know Rabbi Ganendi from before?

No. He'd been at the Ninth Street Shul where my bobba [grandmother] was a lifelong member, so my mother got him to come and see me. He was a South African guy, and I think he just had a better understanding. The first one was sent from the Jewish Board of Deputies. But then I had an unfortunate experience with another rabbi when I came out of detention. He's now dead, killed in a car accident. Rabbi Feufer was his name.

My brother-in-law is very religious, he used to go to his shul. So when I came out of detention Rabbi Feufer asked me to see him, because he had been praying for me. So I went to see him and Feufer basically told me that I had to account to God for my sins of murdering people.

The first thing I said was that I didn't know which God he was in touch with, and on what authority he knew how God was going to judge me. And he basically said, if you associate with people who are party to murder then you are a murderer. So I left. I heard afterwards he felt quite bad about this but it put me off formal religion from that point onward. It certainly had a profound impact on my attitude towards rabbis and religion.

Was it significant being a woman in detention?

Because I am a woman, they were very cautious never to let me alone with a male interrogator; they'd always have a woman there. So I think they

made me a woman', ie the more active mysogyny is left to the men, while women gratefully accept their apportioned lot.

followed the rules quite actively. They were very anxious about whites in detention. Very anxious about not being accused, I think because of Neil Aggett dying in detention previously. They were very sensitive to the DPSC [the Detainees' Parents Support Committee] and negative publicity. I think their sensitivity to me was because I was a white woman and I was a professional person. So they couldn't write me off as riff-raff. I had been a social worker for four, five years. From their point of view they couldn't write me off as quickly as a lefty [left-winger or politically progressive person] living in squalor. That would have been more comfortable for them. They used to keep trying to understand what kind of a lefty I was, in terms of their stereotypes. Part of that was that lefties don't shave their legs. They had very peculiar stereotypes... lefties are always shabbily clothed, or are physically dirty. In the same way that we have very stereotyped views of Afrikaners, they have very stereotyped views of lefties. So that's how they operate, that's how they would relate, based on their stereotype; it's probably how I relate to my stereotypes. Similarly, when they first came and picked me up, they started searching my flat and they commented on my clothes: *'dis 'n mooi trui'* — this is a pretty jersey. They kept talking about the clothes. They'd say, *'Nee, sy's 'n ander soort leftie'* [No, she is another kind of lefty] [laughter], or *'Sy's 'n skoon leftie'* [She's a clean lefty]. They couldn't work me out.

They said to me after a while that they had difficulty in understanding me. I hadn't been part of Nusas [the National Union of South African Students] and I just didn't come with the same history as whites who had been in detention previously. For them I was different.

Do you think that helped you?

I don't know if it helped or not. I think being a social worker helped me — having psychological literacy is a massive advantage in detention because you understand defence mechanisms, you understand vulnerabilities, you understand human responses and reactions, you understand manipulation, you understand communication.

I could understand their games fairly quickly, like the fairly stock threats that they made. For example, they'd threaten people that if you didn't co-operate they would leave you in your cell. So I used to suggest it to them when they used to get agro [aggressive] with me. I'd say, 'Well, I've got a good idea', and they'd say, 'What's that?' And I'd say, 'Why don't you take me to my cell? I'm very uncooperative, I'm a big liar, so take me to my cell.' Then they'd tell me, 'We'll leave you here for a long time.' And I'd say, 'No, that's fine. I've got no appointments, I've got nothing to rush to, so that's OK, keep me as long as you want.'

The one thing that was quite interesting on the Jewish side was that I said to them, 'What was my father?' My father had fought in the War of Independence in Israel in 1948. I said to them, 'What was my father, was he a

terrorist or was he a freedom fighter?' They knew it was interesting because Israel was the only country that had positive relations with South Africa. So if they said he was a terrorist then what were they doing having good relations with a terrorist country, and if he was a freedom fighter, then what was I? They wouldn't answer me initially. They said they had to think about it. A few days later they came back and said, 'No, he was a terrorist.' So it was easier for them — getting into that debate. The other interesting way the Jewish bit came in was that there's nowhere in the Old Testament where you can't stand up against the state; it's in the New Testament. I used to ask them to show me in the Old Testament where in the Bible, in biblical terms, what I had done was an affront. They couldn't respond to it at all. They said, 'It's in the New Testament', and I said, 'But I'm a Jew, I only read the Old Testament — so you'll have to wait until God judges us.' It used to freak them out totally. That's when they got very angry with me. The captain got very angry when I used God — when I was saying, 'I'll let God judge me, I don't need you to judge me. You tell me you're Christian. In the Bible which we both read, there's no reference to my crime. Then how's God going to judge you?' And that used to be very disturbing for them. We used to get into this kind of interchange, and then they'd lock me up for a few days.

Did they interrogate you most of the time before they charged you?

For a month, oh ja, solidly.

And did they play by the rules in that sense? Would they force you, for example, to stand endlessly?

No, they played by the rules. But I used to recommend punishments for them, which in psychological terms is a paradoxical injunction. If you don't want your kid to touch a hot stove you say, 'OK now, touch the stove', instead of saying, 'Don't touch the stove'. When you suggest the child can touch the stove then he doesn't touch the stove. So I used to paradoxically injunct them. Because I would make the suggestions, then the fun's gone for them. I used to make all suggestions: 'Why don't you hit me, you usually hit people, don't you, if they're uncooperative.' They'd get very upset. Because they never hit people, because they're the good guys.

How did this first detention compare to your second detention in 1986, under the State of Emergency?

It was completely different because I was extremely angry the second time. I suppose I'm quite peculiar because in a sense, while I didn't agree with the first detention, I could understand in their paradigm why I was detained. The second one was different. Firstly, they arrested me unfairly, and used a

subterfuge to get me to John Vorster Square. I was picked up at work before the Emergency had been declared.

It was declared at 12 o'clock that afternoon. And they picked me up at about 10 that morning. They told me that they were taking me to be questioned, they weren't arresting me. Then they locked me up in a room at John Vorster Square and waited till 12 o'clock and then told me that I was being detained. I just went mad at them. I was very agro towards them. At that point it was quite clear to me that they were on very weak grounds.

In '84 the National Party and the government had had their elections; they were in a fairly strong position. By '86 it was clear that things were not going well for them at all. By then there was a lot more mass resistance inside the country and the whole climate was quite different. And my attitude was very uncooperative, much more demanding. I knew my rights then, so I was more threatening: I'd demand to see the doctor, I'd demand a bed because I knew that there were beds in police cells, and I'd insist on seeing the major from the prison. I'd refuse to speak to anyone of lower rank. I insisted on a hot shower, because it was the middle of winter, and they'd take you to the police barracks for a shower. (It was in Hillbrow.) Gil de Vlieg and Sheila Brokensha were in detention too, and one of the black women who cleaned the cells told them about my successfully demanding things, and then they started demanding these things as well. But then it was because I knew what was possible. There were all sorts of things. I'd taken in reading material from the first day, and told them it was legal. They didn't yet have the rules because the rules of the State of Emergency weren't clear at that point. The whole thing was a different climate, completely different. I felt on legally stronger ground. I'd insist on everything, just demand. And then they released me after two weeks.

After two weeks?

I played a post-traumatic stress line. I put it on record with the district surgeon who was the same guy who'd seen me eighteen months before. So they used to come and check if I'd commit suicide. They used to say to me, are you going to kill yourself? And I'd say, not right now [laughter]. So they'd keep checking whether I was going to kill myself — post-traumatic stress, psychologists, all this stuff was just too much for them.

Earlier you said that your legal organisational involvement was actually more important as a contribution than what you were doing in terms of your affiliation with the ANC.

When you see how ridiculous the charges were — reading a pamphlet and then destroying it — you think, why didn't I do something much more profound for the same trouble? [laughter] So I didn't feel being charged with ANC activities had made any contribution, other than symbolically. But practically, I struggled with what was the significance in assisting a change

process. I suppose you struggle with all your activities; what makes a difference or not? My own judgement was that it seemed a bit lacking. You know, the stuff that they charged me with seemed a bit naffy.

What legal organisations were you involved in?

Initially I worked a lot with the anti-PC [Anti President's Council] campaign, and then I joined JODAC [the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee] when it was launched in 1983. Around that period I was working in Eldorado Park. We'd been part of working at the TIC[3] and the anti-PC and distributing pamphlets and having meetings; we'd have house meetings about not voting. The UDF would call these meetings, and UDF people came to meet with all the people I'd been with in Eldorado Park. So it felt that I was doing something a bit more practical.

I was part of JODAC before I was in detention. In 1986 we started JSJ (Jews for Social Justice), and then we started another organisation: Concerned Social Workers. The Social Work Association took action against me in July '85. (I came out in January.)

They wanted me struck off the roll for unprofessional conduct. But the reason I received a suspended sentence was because the magistrate said I had never abused my position as a social worker to further my political goals. But the social work body took action. Then we launched this organisation . . .

What was the result of that action?

They wanted one of three things; either that I be struck off the roll, or be suspended for a period, or get rapped over the knuckles for being a naughty girl.

And I said I'm not having any of this because I did not feel that it was unprofessional, there was absolutely no evidence of unprofessional conduct. There was a massive legal fight and they dropped the case, finally, after a couple of months. The professional body for social workers used their whole code of conduct against social workers. It wanted to blacklist social workers who had a criminal record. Concerned Social Workers argued what's a criminal record, a parking ticket is a criminal record, and so is a pass offence. It was clear they did not want any political people but they didn't say that, they framed it in criminal terms.

Please tell me about JSJ. How or why was it formed?

I think it was formed by a number of people that I came into contact with through JODAC for one, who'd had fairly strong feelings about being Jewish and felt that within the anti-apartheid organisations that was never given any

3 Transvaal Indian Congress – a UDF affiliate, a strong and active organisation conscientising the Indian community during the eighties.

expression. For them Judaism was a dominant force in their lives, it was a principle that had driven them politically. Also, their revulsion against apartheid was rooted in Jewish history. But in general anti-apartheid organisations that was never a factor. And so a lot of people with similar sentiments got into discussions. We first met in my flat — Rabbi Assabi was there — and there were quite a lot of people and immediately there was a massive amount of interest in it. There were over 500 people who came to the first meeting at Oxford Shul. Zac Yacoob[4] spoke. It was a massive and spontaneous meeting. For me there was a real sense that many of the Jews in South Africa weren't supporting the government and this was a way of expressing that. So it started in that way. I think it was very valuable. It did quite a lot to the Jewish community from a whole range of perspectives, even the Jews who were angry with it, it certainly made them think. What always troubled me was that Jews didn't want to stand up on a Jewish base. They believed that because the government had been nice to you, you mustn't raise any contentious issues because you might become oppressed. And my whole understanding was that the whole point of our history was against oppression. Here you had to hide that history, because for some bizarre reason if you don't you're going to bring on further oppression. I heard Alon Liel [the former Israeli Ambassador to South Africa] talk recently, and I was extremely impressed with him. He said the Jews who stood up against apartheid were the very Jews that were alienated by the Jewish community. That was my own experience. I was never particularly well-embraced in the formal Jewish community. My brother-in-law is an archetype of that. For him I'm bringing on anti-Semitism — 'Here we're allowed religious freedom and now you're going to tamper with religious freedom, and anyway it's not your struggle.' For me JSJ was quite comforting. I suppose I never rejected my Jewishness at all, I was never active in it, but I was never against it.

Do you think that you wanted to be able to express yourself as a Jew?

My Jewish genes, my Jewish history, my family history were quite steeped in Jewishness. I personally am not religious but I feel Jewish, whatever that means, maybe it's linked to some collective unconscious. I haven't got an articulation of it. I feel that my bobba, my father, were all strugglers in a particular way, we're all fighters. For me, it was important, I felt comforted by it. JSJ became more mainstream as it went on. As far as white organisations went it was probably less marginal than most other white anti-apartheid organisations in terms of its own community. On the other hand, we didn't develop those relationships with the rest of the mass democratic movement (MDM) sufficiently. But I think we brought the MDM into the Jewish

4 Zac Yacoob is a progressive lawyer and was a UDF and Natal Indian Congress activist at the time.

community in a way that I don't believe they would have been exposed to had we not.

So I think JSJ opened up the Jewish community. I don't know if it changed anybody. I'd rather say it gave people an opportunity to have access to things which I don't think they would otherwise have had.

How did you see the relationship between JSJ and the rest of the Jewish community?

From the perspective of seeing Jews as white, we had more 'ordinary' (in inverted commas) people coming to JSJ meetings than went to, say, meetings held by the UDF. The formal bodies in the Jewish community struggled with it because they wanted to be the only voice of the Jewish community.

The Board of Deputies, for example, didn't want their voice challenged and they wanted to be the sole spokespeople for the Jewish community. The fact that many of us thought that their line was not representative wasn't a factor for them. We rebelled against them. But I still think that JSJ was still more part of the white community than many other white anti-apartheid organisations.

After a period I think that the formal Jewish community realised that they couldn't just snap us away. It took about a year or two before they would acknowledge us. They didn't welcome us initially. There were other people in JSJ who had a much more significant role in bringing that part of the community closer to JSJ.

Franz Auerbach for one. Howard Sackstein was quite instrumental, as was Gary Lubner.[5] I was more connected with the MDM, so I could bring that side into it. But I certainly wouldn't claim that I brought the mainstream community on board.

In your opinion, how did JSJ fit in with the broader mass democratic process?

I think it had quite a profound impact. It contributed to Jews being actively included in the current ecumenical dispensation. Had there not been those contacts that had been built up, I don't know — I can't speculate how history would have turned. But I don't believe that, for example, a Chief Rabbi Harris would have been brought to South Africa if there hadn't been an

5 Franz Auerbach has a lifetime involvement in both Jewish and progressive South African causes (see interview on pp 537 - 563). In the mid to late 1980s, Howard Sackstein was variously vice-chairperson of Jews for Social Justice, and National Chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS). In 1993 he headed a joint ANC Youth League and SAUJS visit to Israel, thus bringing the first ANC delegation to Israel. Gary Lubner was a long-standing member of Jews for Social Justice, and its chairperson from 1988 to 1990. In addition, he and his family supported the development of the Consultative Business Movement, a progressive business group that worked with the anti-apartheid community.

increased sensitivity in the Jewish community. Recently Bishop Tutu acknowledged the positive role of JSJ at an award ceremony where Nelson Mandela's book *Long Walk to Freedom* was awarded the Paton prize.

Talking about the founding of JSJ: I think at that point any opposition that was coming from within the white community was very welcome. There was not that I was aware of an ANC call to go and organise in the Jewish community, but that the Jews became a voice against apartheid would certainly have been welcomed and seen as part of the broader mass democratic movement, as was the case with Concerned Social Workers or doctors or other groups. But I think we certainly raised the issue of Jews because I think before people saw Jews as ordinary white South Africans, and there was no differentiation other than there were a couple of individuals who happened to be Jewish and who happened to be part of the anti-apartheid movement.

I think that Jews on an individual level were involved way beyond their numbers in this country, or disproportionate to their numbers. But from the mass point of view I'd guess the Jews are white South Africans. Jews as a body don't deserve any special place, in my view, not from their behaviour.

Please tell me about your year in England.

In '86 and '87 I was out of the country. I got a scholarship to do my Master's in Education in Britain. I hated it. I was miserable the whole year. If you go away for a long time, you must want to be away, and I didn't want to and it was almost like I was too messed up and I was scared and my friends were all going into detention. I had just come out of detention. I didn't want to go back into detention and I didn't want to go into hiding. It was almost like I felt I had no option. I remember buying a suitcase only the day before I left because I couldn't even bring myself to own one. And I started buying furniture before I left [laughter] — then I had to find places to store it! It was almost like an insurance policy to come back.

What are your feelings about the Jewish community now, in early 1995 [when the interview took place]?

They've gone into their corner. They live in a corner.

What do you think and feel about Israel? You haven't really referred to Israel at all, except to say that your father had fought in the War of Independence. Was Israel part of your family's consciousness growing up?

Israel wasn't a major part of my consciousness. Ironically, although my father fought in the war he was not big on Israel. He went there as a Zionist but I don't think he came back as a Zionist. But I don't know, I was too young to engage him on it. But he didn't push it and he never went back to visit. I can

only make my own assumptions that maybe he was no longer a Zionist and maybe it was the nature of the war.

I don't connect in Israel. I've been to Israel, it's not my country. I feel connected to Africa, to South Africa, this is my home. When I went to Israel, it's like, ja, they're Jews but I didn't feel emotionally attached. Plus, I didn't like what the Israelis were doing either. I feel there is more in the last year, two years, in Israel, that I feel proud about. It's quite interesting because it's the same right-wing Jews in South Africa who support the most right-wing elements in Israel. And the ones that opposed fighting apartheid in South Africa, they would oppose the left in Israel, and so we South African Jews are saddled with a very conservative strain which supports conservatism here and elsewhere.

How are you feeling more broadly about politics, society and life in South Africa?

I'm a little bit disturbed, I haven't seen strong leadership, I haven't seen strong government. Consensus and reconciliation is all very well, but it would be very encouraging to see some strong government. But I don't see it. So maybe it will shift, maybe it's the nature of the Government of National Unity — I'm prepared to give it the benefit of the doubt but I'm also prepared to say, though, that the longer that this kind of non-leadership goes on — when I say leadership, I mean authoritative decision-making — the more we slide. But I don't have any desire to go anywhere else, so I feel it's a common destiny I share with this place. It has problems, ja, but we're all in it together.

So the whole twelve, fifteen years, ja, I'd do it again. And even though you kind of moaned that we spent a lot of our time at meetings, it was very dynamic. In a sense I suppose I do mourn the idea that life is bigger than yourself. The problem now is non-involvement, now you've become bigger than life. Before, life was bigger than us. When your priorities start shifting, they're not always comfortable.

I feel I was privileged to have opportunities in the anti-apartheid struggle which many South Africans just never had. I don't know if it's timing or if it's circumstantial, but I really do feel that it has helped me connect with being a South African and I feel quite sad for people who've never had that opportunity. We were often arrogant and quite patronising to people who we thought weren't OK. If I did anything differently, maybe my attitude to those people might be different. Maybe they just never had the opportunity that I did. And I look at young people today and I think they're not going to have that whole dynamism. I don't mean we should go back to that, but to be part of this change process — it's a once in a lifetime opportunity and I think going to work for the IEC (Independent Electoral Commission), as nuts as it was, put that whole period in a nice neat box, although it's not so neat.

I can't complain at all. I think I've had opportunities that people of my age and experience internationally would never have had access to. So from a personal point of view, I'm very privileged. I feel lucky.

TEACHERS AND PREACHERS

'... They asked him, who are the real guardians of a state? He said, the teachers...'

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Chagiga, 6 A

אמרין לון ומאן אינון נטורי קרתה ?
אמר לון ספרייה ומתנייניא

תלמוד ירושלמי, מסכת חגיגה ז:

None is a prophet in his own town

(Algazi, Ahavat Olam)

אין נביא בעירו

אלחזי, אהבת עולם

FRANZ AUERBACH

'We hope one day to persuade you to our point of view . . .'

Franz Auerbach, who celebrated his seventieth birthday in 1993, is probably one of South Africa's most eminent educators. A Jewish refugee from Nazi Jew-hatred, he immigrated to South Africa in 1937, and qualified as a teacher, a profession he practised for nearly twenty years. During the course of his teaching career, he pursued further studies, doing extremely valuable research into the questions of prejudice in the teaching of history and of black education in apartheid South Africa. Much of this influential and original research has been published, and has exerted a powerful influence on changing educational attitudes in South Africa.

Dr Auerbach has served a wide variety of professional, cultural and social organisations, always chiefly as an educator. His strong and committed leadership has been recognised many times — he has served as President of the Transvaal Teachers' Association, the South African Institute of Race Relations, the South African Yad Vashem Foundation, and was Chairperson of Jews for Social Justice. His dedicated services to education and his fearless, untiring and outspoken opposition to apartheid over many decades has been recognised by the award of the Gold Medal of both the Transvaal Teachers' Association and the Johannesburg College of Education. Always closely involved in Jewish communal affairs, he has served on various councils and sub-committees of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies since 1982.

Interviewed by Joseph Sherman
28 April 1995
Johannesburg

Would you start by telling us something of your background?

I was born in Germany in Frankfurt on Oder in 1923, but we lived for the most part in Wuppertal Elberfeld which is in the Rhineland, where my father was born and my grandparents lived for about forty years. We were there until 1934 when we left for Luxemburg.