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Conflict of Color: White Activists in the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History from  
The College of William and Mary

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## **Abstract**

Throughout the trials and tribulations of the 1950s and 1960s, white anti-apartheid activists rose to the call of duty and took a stand against injustice, taking a stance that others refused to take. They threw themselves into the fire, serving jail sentences, going underground, and suffering great hardship as they separated from their families and friends. When imprisoned and exiled by the national government, they soldiered on, more resilient than ever. These activists provided an invaluable service to their country and to their fellow citizens of Africa, and many of their lives were forsaken for the cause. But above all, they achieved their aim: a free and democratic South Africa equal to all.

## **Key Words**

Afrikaner/Afrikaans

ANC (African National Congress)

ANC Youth League

COD (Congress of Democrats)

*Contact*

Congress of the People

CPC (Coloured People's Congress)

Defiance Campaign

*Fighting Talk*

MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe)

National Party

PAC (Pan African Congress)

Progressive Party

Rivonia Trial

SACP (South African Communist Party)

SAIC (South African Indian Congress)

SANAC (South African Native Affairs Commission)

SANNC (South African Native National Congress)

Treason Trial

United Party

UDF (United Democratic Front)

Voortrekkers

## Conflict of Color: White Activists in the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement

### Introduction

The National Party's general election victory in 1948 marked the beginning of an era of racial apartheid that would define South African history for almost half a century. Apartheid, meaning *apartness* in Afrikaans, was a policy of racial separation that affected all aspects of life including where individuals could live, where they went to school and their instruction, who they could marry, and where they could work. Apartheid had its origins in racial segregation in the country, which can be traced back to the beginning of colonization. The Dutch East India Company formed a settlement at Cape Town in 1652. From that year until 1807, sixty thousand involuntary immigrants from Indonesia, India, Madagascar, and Eastern Africa arrived in the Cape Colony to build infrastructure and cultivate the land, helping to establish an economy based on slavery in the region.<sup>1</sup> By 1795, the British took a stake in the country, occupying the Cape, and two thirds of Cape Town's population was enslaved. Even though enslaved individuals comprised the majority of the population, they made up the bottom rung of a three tiered caste system centered on religion. Christian Afrikaners comprised the first caste, the Khoisan servants, who already existed in the Cape and competed with Afrikaners for land, comprised the second caste, and slaves, the majority of whom practiced Islam, comprised the third caste. The economy changed when slavery was outlawed in 1834. In the next year, Afrikaners known as *voortrekkers* left the Cape colony in search of more land.

In 1838, the *voortrekkers* confronted Zulus near the Ncome River in the KwaZulu Natal. Fighting ensued, and the *voortrekkers* created an enclosure with their wagons. Though severely

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Vinson, "Making Slavery, Making Race" College of William and Mary In-class Lecture, 9/1/2009

outnumbered, the Afrikaners' guns were too much for the Zulu. The battle was thereafter called the Battle of Blood River in reference to the Zulu blood which turned the river red. The victory was a confirmation for Afrikaners and for their descendants that they were God's people. Moving inland, settlers discovered diamonds near modern-day Kimberley in 1869. Gold was later discovered in 1886 near present day Johannesburg. In order to be profitable, both the diamond and gold mining industries required a large-scale inexpensive labor force, which they found in the Khoi and Bantu speaking African population of the country. Afrikaners and British fought for control of the mines. Yet by 1903, production in the mines had dipped due to labor shortage. In order to ensure that there would be an adequate labor force, British Lord Alfred Milner facilitated the importation of Chinese and Indian workers. Milner, along with other young administrators, formed the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC), which sought to create laws that politically ensured white rule while economically ensuring enough Africans to make up for losses in labor. The commission members held several assumptions that guided their recommendations between 1903 and 1905. First, that South Africa's races were separate and hierarchical; second, that these races had to remain separate so as to prevent racial admixture, and thus white degeneration; third, that Africans should remain rural, tribal people; and fourth, that cheap available black labor was essential for economic growth.

The commission's recommendations became the basis for future segregationist legislation regarding land, the economy, and politics. In 1913, territorial separation limited African ownership of land to seven percent of the country, and designated African reserves. This law outlawed African ability to purchase land in non-African areas by making land scarce, undercutting African agricultural self-sufficiency and encouraging African labor migration to cities and to white-owned farms. This system created an abundant labor force for both white

farmers and mining magnets, and also ensured limited African competition since they now had inadequate access to land. SANAC also had key economic recommendations to regulate African labor and housing. The Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 established segregated living areas in cities, called locations or townships, to separate Africans from the white population. Pass laws controlled the influx and movement of workers in these areas. Unemployed Africans in the townships were returned to their rural homeland, and a color bar enacted with the Mines and Works Act of 1911 allowed for different pay scales between whites and blacks, even if they performed the same job. Politically, the Native Affairs Act of 1920 established a department of Native Affairs to better administer segregationist policy and oversee Africans. The Native Administration Act of 1927 gave the department the authority to act on its own in all issues regarding Africans, and the Representation of Natives Act of 1936 abolished the Cape African franchise. These segregation laws forced African workers into a system of migrant labor, moving between workplaces where they had no rights and rural homes where they could not support their families. These segregationist laws were the basis for apartheid.

Africans responded by forming the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, which was a national organization prompted by the general African disenfranchisement in the Union of South Africa and the specter of the Native Land Act. The Congress initially called not for an end to white rule, but for equality for all, irrespective of color. It also sought unilateral black franchise, the repeal of segregationist legislation, and basic educational and economic opportunities. Since South Africa self-governing was a domain within the British Commonwealth, British parliamentarians could override domestic legislation that the South African government passed. Attempting to capitalize on this technicality, SANNC sent three deputations to England in 1912, 1914 and 1917. When the British declined to intervene,

SANNC traveled to the Versailles peace conference in 1918, though they were not admitted. Returning home, in 1919 SANCC employed Gandhi's non-violent methods and protested against the pass laws, although police broke up their protests. When polite protest did not work, members turned to civil disobedience including strikes and slowdowns.

In 1923, the SANCC changed its name to the African National Congress (ANC), and leadership within the organization was revitalized at the beginning of World War II with the election of a new president, Alfred Xuma in 1939. Xuma believed that the ANC should work together with other like-minded organizations such as the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), which also called for universal political rights. He also believed that the ANC should move from polite protest and civil disobedience to a policy of non-cooperation with the government. Under Xuma's leadership, the ANC presented South African prime minister Jan Smuts with the document "Africans' Claims in South Africa", which demanded full citizenship rights and fair distribution of land for Africans, as well as the abolition of racial distinctions in legislation. Outside of the ANC, urban black workers formed trade unions in the 1940s. By 1946, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) had 158,000 members organized in 119 unions.<sup>2</sup> The period between 1939 and 1945 saw over three hundred strikes on the part of African workers.<sup>3</sup>

Fears of growing African demands and resistance added strength to the white government's racist resolve in South Africa. Daniel Francis Malan, a minister of the main Afrikaner church in South Africa, the Dutch Reform Church, founded the National Party in 1933. When the National Party came to power in the general election of 1948, it expanded on

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

South Africa's segregationist laws, creating the laws of apartheid, and ruling the country until 1994. Between 1949 and 1953, the national government enacted the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, which banned marriages between whites and non-whites; the Population Registration Act, which mandated that each racial group have an identity card, including Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites; the Immorality Act, which banned sexual relations between whites and any other racial group; the Bantu Education Act, which gave the government the ability to control the curriculum of any school in South Africa and established minimum education of basic math and Afrikaans for Africans; the Group Areas Act, which empowered the state to designate any part of South Africa as white or black only; the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, which mandated public segregation of buses, trains, hotels and parks; the Suppression of Communism Act, which banned any ideology that was counterintuitive to state laws; and the Abolition of Passes and Documents Act, which created one national pass system that gave employment history and residence, mandated a curfew, and led to the annual arrest of 100,000 Africans.<sup>4</sup>

The National Party won the 1948 election because the white citizenry of South Africa voted it into power. In its campaign, the National Party portrayed itself as the only safe solution for white voters who were against integration, giving the misleading argument that the ruling United Party called for integration. Whites and blacks lived and operated in separate spheres, and the majority of the white electorate wanted to maintain that separation. For the most part, whites lived comfortably, and blacks did not. Whites wore collared suits and ties, carried briefcases and drove expensive cars supported by their large incomes. Blacks migrated into the city to wash those cars and maintain the homes and lifestyles of whites. Though this picture was not absolute,

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Vinson, "Main Premises of Apartheid" College of William and Mary In-class Lecture, 10/1/2009.

it was certainly the norm. Harboring underneath the daily lives of whites who benefited from the system was a mind-set which supported their way of life, which Anglican priest Trevor Huddleston exemplified well in his autobiography *Naught for your Comfort*: “The truth is that the overwhelming majority of South Africans of the ‘white’ group have no conception whatsoever of human relationships except that based on racial domination.”<sup>5</sup> Huddleston believed that white South Africans were completely ignorant of the quality of life of black South Africans, and that this rang true not only for the white citizenry but for the members of government as well. Ultimately, the white citizenry of South Africa could be described as privileged and utterly oblivious to the plight of the blacks around them.

Yet, not all South African whites lived in blissful ignorance of the problems of apartheid. The injustices of the system disgusted and repulsed a few brave whites, who decided to join the struggle that Africans had waged for generations. These individuals shed the privileges given to them by the apartheid government and dedicated their lives to combating injustice while fighting for their vision for the future, a free and democratic South Africa for all. Their participation in the anti-apartheid movement is unique in that they were willing to take risks and give up everything - go to jail, live an underground existence, flee into exile away from their home country – all for the movement they believed in and a cause they had not been forced to commit to, given the whiteness of their skin. Ultimately, it was due to the stories of individuals such as these that the fight against the apartheid regime was not simply a black versus white issue. It became a fight in Oliver Tambo’s words not against a people, but against an oppressive system. It was due to these white activists that previously all-African organizations such as the ANC opened their doors and became multi-racial. For these reasons, their participation should be

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<sup>5</sup> Trevor Huddleston, *Naught For Your Comfort*, 17.

recognized and analyzed in an academic context. I have chosen to profile a select few white individuals in the anti-apartheid movement, not because their participation was any more heroic or magnanimous, but rather because their backgrounds and racial identities made them unexpected anti-apartheid activists. The majority of South African anti-apartheid historiography focuses on black South Africans. I hope to integrate whites into the story, setting the stage for an invaluable academic inquiry into South African history.

In this thesis, I seek to answer several questions about the involvement of these individuals. What led them to make the decision to act, and what led to these individuals' identification with the goals of the African majority? In what ways did they make an impact on the anti-apartheid movement, and what resources did they utilize and bring to the movement? How did they react to political and social ostracism, and how did their involvement change once in jail or in exile? Ultimately, were their visions for South Africa realized? I argue that whites who participated in the anti-apartheid movement were unique given that they rejected the privileges that their white peers enjoyed and made drastic personal sacrifices to resist laws which did not directly affect their daily lives or well-being. I also seek to argue that their involvement was critical to the successful formation of multi-racial organizations and the ultimate development of a non-racial democracy in 1994.

I am not the first scholar who has had an interest in this subject. Joshua Lazerson, an American who holds a doctorate from Northwestern University wrote *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid* in 1994, and his work aligns with my interests. Glenn Frankel of *The Washington Post* also makes an attempt to answer the same inquiries in his 1999 work *Rivonia's Children*. The book chronicles the lives of several notable white anti-apartheid activists who in some way played a role in the Rivonia Trial of 1963, the "trial of the century"

which put Nelson Mandela in prison for life. Both scholars, however, are missing key components to the story. Though they outline the actions of activists during the 1950s and 60s, when the movement was in full swing, they do not examine the continued activism of these individuals in the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. The movement completely changed for activists in the 70s and 80s – instead of attending meetings and organizing protests, increased government suppression kept activist involvement behind bars and outside of the country. It is imperative to analyze where they were and what choices they made at this stage. Both scholars also are missing a viewpoint from today. Now, sixteen years after the end of apartheid, only one of the activists discussed in this thesis is still alive. Without these leaders, where is the country today? Have their visions for a free and democratic South Africa been realized? The key difference that sets my work apart is that I seek to incorporate the 1970s through the present.

This thesis aims to examine the actions and participation of white anti-apartheid activists Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Lionel ‘Rusty’ Bernstein, Helen Bernstein, Lionel ‘Bram’ Fischer, Denis Goldberg, Joe Slovo, Patrick Duncan, Trevor Huddleston, and Helen Suzman through the 1950s and 1960s as they set the foundations of political and social action against the apartheid regime and reacted to the state of emergency and bannings; in the 1970s and 1980s when in exile, jail, or underground; through the 1990s and the period of dismantling and reconciliation, and finally, up to today. These activists had different ideologies and backgrounds. Many were steadfast communists, but others were pragmatic liberals. Many were also children of Jewish immigrants and had a predilection to grievance by a subordinating power, while others were children of the Afrikaner minority and thus, born into power. Some had militant parents who passed down a predisposition to fight injustice. For instance, Joe Slovo fought in World War II and contributed to saving the world from Nazi domination. Yet, despite their differences, all held

a special hatred for the apartheid regime, all desired non-racial democracy, and all had white skin. Their skin color was something that they either used to their advantage on occasion in accordance with the resources they could give, or which forever burdened them with a sense of guilt.

In analyzing their participation, several aspects of these activists and their beliefs are important to recognize. First, they envisioned the removal of the racist regime and a redistribution of power to the people. Though they were a part of different groups and organizations, there were intersections in their political thought, and they had similar goals and values. Activists like Helen Suzman were classified as “liberal” and believed in a qualified franchise where only certain educated and property owning blacks could vote, whereas activists like Joe Slovo and Bram Fischer were communist and believed in full equality between the races and ‘one man, one vote’. Though communists in the nature of their ideology were willing to go the farthest amongst the whites in terms of siding with the objectives of black African organizations, liberals like Suzman played a key role in advocating for blacks in Parliament by exposing conditions in townships and arguing against apartheid legislation.

Second, their hope for South Africa transcended racial division. They worked with all-African groups such as the African National Congress; whose membership was initially all-African and who operated under the belief that South Africa belongs to all who live in it. They, like Coloured and Indian political groups, believed that the country needed to operate under a democratic system of government in which individuals of all races had a voice. Their vision for South Africa was articulated in the Freedom Charter drafted by white communist Rusty Bernstein.

Third, it is important to examine the different ways these individuals lived out their ideals. White activists lived the life they hoped to create. “Racial mixing” for the activists in social and work settings was not uncommon but the norm. Activists invited individuals of all races over to their homes for dinner, social gatherings, and parties. They worked alongside individuals of all races politically, attending meetings and debating with activists of all colors under the multi-racial umbrella of the Congress Alliance.

Fourth, their activism had different phases in response to government oppression that forced many into jail and exile. Early on, they could publish works and make public speeches voicing their dissent towards the apartheid regime. As the government became increasingly repressive, it banned these activists and placed them on house arrest. This did not stop their activism, and individuals went underground to continue their political work. Government repression stemmed from the belief that white activists were “monstrous, untenable, evil. [They] must not only be defeated, but crushed, extirpated and buried forever deep down the mine shaft of national memory.”<sup>6</sup> The nationalist government understood why blacks fought against them, since they suppressed African rights. But whites held all of the privileges of the system – why would they fight the privileges the government had given them? The national government also believed their legislation was not only justified, but necessary in maintaining social order and the separation of races in the country. Activists who fought against them were not only guilty of treason; they also represented a threat to the order and racial separation: inequality in which the government so firmly believed.

Fifth, it is important to examine the legacy and impact these white activists had on the anti-apartheid movement itself. When they joined ranks with politicians such as ANC President Alfred Xuma and Youth League members Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela in the early 1950s,

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<sup>6</sup> Glenn Frankel, *Rivonia's Children* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 60.

they were a minority: not very many whites subscribed to the cause. However, as these whites began to protest, speak, and organize, other whites followed suit. In the early 1950s black South Africans were unwilling to allow whites into their organizations, arguing that whites could not truly understand the plight of black South Africans. But as white activists such as Bram Fischer and Joe Slovo sacrificed through jail and exile, black South Africans began to understand and appreciate white solidarity. Though the ANC had called for inter-racial cooperation since 1912, many members questioned white sincerity and complained that white involvement would have traces of paternalism. These white activists influenced formerly racially exclusive organizations to become inclusive, intensifying the non-racial movement and plans for a non-racial state in the 1970s and 1980s.

Lastly, it is crucial to analyze the extent that white activists were able to attain their shared vision, despite the setbacks thrust upon them by the racist apartheid regime. Though the country is democratic today, the socialist system that so many communist activists strove for has not been realized. Poverty is rampant throughout the country and the trappings of the racist regime still exist. However, though the economic transformation of the country is still forthcoming, the political freedoms that came with the 1994 election brought black South Africans the right to vote, the freedom to organize, and freedom of movement, conscience and religion: all freedoms that white activists had fought for and ultimately had won for their country.

## Section 2: Fighting Against Apartheid, 1950s and 1960s

### Chapter 1

#### The 1949 Program of Action to the Treason Trial of 1956

After the National Party's election, the ANC sought to take a strong stance against the country's new apartheid legislation. Along with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, ANC president Alfred Xuma created the ANC Youth League in 1944. This new organization "believed that Africans would be freed only by their own efforts. The Youth League aimed to involve the masses of people in militant struggles."<sup>7</sup> The Youth League sought to reinvigorate national organization and develop popular protests against the government's policies of segregation and discrimination. The Youth League drew up a plan for a 'Program of Action', which called for multi-racial organizing and greater civil disobedience through the use of strikes, stay-aways, boycotts, and mass meetings. The ANC accepted the Program in 1949 in response to the election of the National Party.

The first major campaign of the Program of Action was the Defiance Campaign. The Defiance Campaign was a multi-racial, non-cooperative, non-violent protest against apartheid legislation and saw the jailing of approximately 8,500 black Africans and their allies.<sup>8</sup> It targeted the removal of the apartheid laws enacted from 1949 through 1953, including the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, the separate representation of Voters Act, the Suppression of Communism Act and the Bantu Authorities Act. It was another stage in a progression from polite political activism to disobedience. At the center of the Defiance Campaign was none other than Patrick Duncan.

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<sup>7</sup> Ilya Lyubinskiy, "A brief history of the African National Congress," *African National Congress Home Page*, <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?include=docs/misc/2010/umzabalazo.html> (accessed March 27, 2011)

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Karis, Gwendolen M. Carter, Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 4.

Patrick Duncan was destined for political success. As the son of a former governor-general of South Africa, his privileged family background gave him access to connections and powerful positions in South African politics. On the day of his birth, one of his father's colleagues sent him a telegram welcoming the birth "of a future Prime Minister."<sup>9</sup> Duncan did grow up to become a great leader, just not the type that his father had imagined. Born in Johannesburg in 1918, he entered the Diocesan College for Boys in 1932, nicknamed "Bishop's". It was at Bishop's that Duncan experienced his first qualms with white South Africa: "He was intolerably bullied; he was small, he was clever, he liked speaking French, he had little self-confidence, he was late in reaching puberty, and above all else he could not play games."<sup>10</sup> Though he was limited physically, his mental faculties were not affected and he began to take on a critical interest in world affairs. Duncan's study of the Abyssinian war and disagreement with the policies of Italy's fascist right-wing regime led to a brief bout with socialism, but it did not continue once he attended Winchester College and Balliol College in Oxford, England. He was instead disinterested in joining the communist group on personal rather than ideological grounds: "I went up to Oxford hoping to be very active in the Left Wing, but I went to one meeting and that was enough to put me off. I just didn't like the other Communists and I didn't go again, probably on snobbish grounds."<sup>11</sup> At Oxford, he founded the Oxford South African Club, and while on holiday in the summer of 1938 he took a tour of Germany and arranged to work in *Arbeitslager*, a work-camp, for three weeks. Looking back, he saw his time at the work-camp as one of the turning points in his life. "I smelt for the first time the evil stench of totalitarianism", wrote Duncan, "I wore the swastika badge, the jackboots, and the uniform of

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<sup>9</sup> C.J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), xii

<sup>10</sup> Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> "Interview of Patrick Duncan by Cyril Dunn", as seen in Driver's *Patrick Duncan*, 17.

the Reichsarbeitsdienst. I worked like a Trojan for the ‘New Germany.’”<sup>12</sup> Though his German co-workers were friendly and tried to convince him of the righteousness of the cause, he was not swayed by their point of view. “I was just as determined to let them see the beastliness of Hitler. I kept a detailed diary, and today...I am proud to turn back to that diary and see that I did all in my power to stop the most evil government in the World’s History.”<sup>13</sup> Ten years later, with the election of the National Party in 1948, Duncan decided to involve himself directly in South African politics. Duncan argued that “Our Parliament today is a White parliament, and can do no more than the White group itself can do...My politics will be extra-parliamentary acts not forbidden by the constitution, and, as far as lies in my power, they will be just.”<sup>14</sup> He felt that since Parliament was made up of all white members it could not justly serve the aims of black South Africans in South Africa.

Duncan instead took to other forms of political activism. He initially tried to join the ANC but was denied membership because of his skin color – at that time the ANC was still comprised of all-African members. This must have been extremely frustrating to Duncan, who aligned closely with the ideas of the ANC. He still disagreed with Marxism and the policies of the communist party. Having studied it at the London School of Economics from 1949 to 1950, he found that Marx contradicted himself and that Marxism itself was intellectually defunct. Feeling that there was no party he could join that aligned with his interests, in 1952 he thought of forming his own party – an ‘All People’s Party’ that would bring together all elements of opposition to the apartheid regime, including Congressmen, Liberals, and even Communists. His idea was revolutionary at the time and did not attract enough support. He was simply ahead of

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<sup>12</sup> Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

his time, since a party similar to this one would be formed in 1983 and called the United Democratic Front. He above all else did not want to work in a whites-only organization. Duncan wanted to join a party that not only had black leaders within it, but that had enough so as to ensure that membership was really non-racial. He met with one of the founders of the Liberal Party, Alan Paton, who agreed that the party needed to increase its black membership. Duncan then decided to join the party in 1955.

In 1957, Duncan formed his own newspaper, *Contact*, which was to be an expression of his own views. The newspaper would advocate opposition to totalitarianism, would advocate against socialism, and would promote the cause for immediate, universal suffrage and the cause for a mass-membership of the Liberal Party. Duncan later decided to leave the Liberal Party in 1963 on the grounds that he no longer agreed with its position of non-violence. In that same year he joined the Pan African Congress (PAC), finding acceptance despite his white skin. Ironically, the Pan African Congress was formed out of a schism with the ANC and its members were the former ‘Africanist’ members of the ANC who disagreed with the collaboration between ANC leadership and sympathetic Indian and White organizations. In its formation the PAC hoped to “harness the power of black people as a coherent national group, without any white sympathy or guidance.”<sup>15</sup> Duncan held close ties with many Africanists and debated with them constantly. However, the decision to admit Duncan was not unanimous among PAC members. Although three members of the PAC’s National Executive signed off on his membership, others thought that Duncan could never entirely understand what it was like to suffer as a black African. Ultimately, Duncan was admitted because of the resources he could provide: he had considerable political ties throughout Africa, America and England and could raise funds for the PAC.

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<sup>15</sup> Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 163.

Duncan's involvement in the Defiance Campaign was not immediate. He knew that his participation, especially if he were to go to jail, would attract a lot of attention from the South African public, and thus contemplated it extensively. In making his decision, he sought out the advice of others. First, he consulted Gandhi's son, Manilal. Like Duncan, Manilal knew what it was like to have a famous father and never ending spotlight, and Duncan was immediately drawn to him: "Many people found Manilal a pale shadow of his father; but Duncan, who understood what it was to be the son of a famous father, and admiring the Mahatma above all men, found himself much in sympathy with Manilal."<sup>16</sup> Duncan disliked the term 'defiance' and like Manilal, believed South Africans should practice *satyagraha*, a non-violent form of resistance. Though he found Manilal's advice helpful, Duncan yearned for another perspective which he sought out in Anglican priest Trevor Huddleston.

Trevor Huddleston was born in 1913 in Bedford, England. Ordained in 1937, he joined an Anglican monastic order, the Community of the Resurrection in 1939. He was appointed the priest in charge of the community's mission in Sophiatown, Johannesburg in 1943. As a priest, he was extremely supportive of the ANC and its campaigns against the Bantu Education Act and the Western Areas removal scheme, arguing that any government doctrine based on race or color prejudice is "An affront to human dignity and 'ipso facto' an insult to God himself. It is for this reason that I feel bound to oppose not only the policy of the present Government of the Union of South Africa but the legislation which flows from this policy."<sup>17</sup> Huddleston was called back to England in 1956, and though he only spent twelve years in South Africa, he made a tremendous impact on the anti-apartheid movement.

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<sup>16</sup> Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Huddleston, *Naught For Your Comfort*, 16.

In May of 1952 Duncan traveled to Rosettenville to stay with Father Huddleston and assist in his campaign against the forced removal of the inhabitants of Sophiatown under the Western Areas Removal scheme, and to try to connect with ANC supporters in the Transvaal. Above all, he sought the guidance of Huddleston as a friend. Huddleston served as a mentor and example to Duncan, influencing his decision to join the Defiance Campaign. Duncan's participation in the campaign created a nationwide media frenzy. The Johannesburg *Star* first announced his involvement on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November with the headline "Sir Patrick Duncan's son joins defiance body."<sup>18</sup> Quickly, Duncan realized that through the media, he had an opportunity to share his beliefs and hopefully recruit other whites to the cause. The *Star* released his statement, which argued that South Africa was approaching the greatest crisis its history. "If White South Africa turns today to naked force to preserve the present caste system it will be held responsible by history for the race war that will probably destroy our country."<sup>19</sup> Patrick Duncan's statement and involvement marked a pivotal point in the movement. Not only did Duncan's presence garner national publicity and attention for the Campaign, it also gave the movement new strength. His decision to join sparked a wave of other white activists joining the cause. Just a few days after Duncan, four whites from Cape Town, including Albie Sachs, the son of a prominent trade unionist, joined the Campaign. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December Bettie du Toit, a trade unionist, Percy Cohen, a dentist, and Freda Troup, a writer, agreed to join Duncan. Soon after that four other Johannesburg whites agreed to join as well.<sup>20</sup> Up to that point, the participants in the movement were perceived as an indistinguishable amalgam of individuals. But Patrick Duncan was visible, and along with the other whites formed a new group of individuals

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<sup>18</sup> "Sir Patrick Duncan's Son Joins Defiance Body", Johannesburg *Star* as seen in Driver's *Patrick Duncan*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> Driver, *Patrick Duncan*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

of all races who garnered attention from white newspapers which granted them interviews, thus spreading word of the cause.

The impact of Duncan's allegiance to the cause did not go unrecognized by its leaders. The Joint-Secretaries of the Campaign, Ahmed Cachalia, a prominent Indian and strong supporter of the *satyagraha* campaign and Walter Sisulu, secretary-general of the ANC, issued the following statement: "Mr. Duncan has shown great foresight in taking this brave stand... We hope that this will have wide repercussions among Europeans in South Africa and arouse maximum consciousness for right and justice." They argued that the participation of Duncan and others would "help...avert race antagonisms."<sup>21</sup> The stories of whites like Patrick Duncan would teach black South Africans that not all whites sided with the apartheid regime, thus establishing the foundations for multi-racial membership of political organizations. With the support of ANC leaders and the spotlight of the nation centered on him, Duncan went on to make what was arguably the most substantial move of his political career.

On December 8 1952, hobbling on crutches from a car accident a few months prior, Duncan led a procession of approximately forty defiers into the Germiston location about 15 miles outside Johannesburg – seven of whom, including Bettie du Toit and Freda Troup, were white. Duncan's physical standing at the time made him an interesting choice to lead the defiers into the location. His selection may have been deliberate, as a photograph of him entering Germiston on crutches became an iconic symbol of white resistance. Duncan walked slowly on his crutches, to which he had tied the African National Congress' colors of green, yellow and black. Police were at the march, and arrested the defiers for not having the necessary permits to enter the location. The march into Germiston garnered both national and international attention.

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<sup>21</sup> *Advance* (Cape Town), 4 December 1952, as seen in Driver's *Patrick Duncan*, 96.

The South African Newspaper *Indian Opinion*, founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1903 published two photos of the arrest, with the caption “Mr. Patrick Duncan with Mr. Manilal Gandhi on his right and other resisters walking through the street in the Germiston location.”<sup>22</sup> American publication *TIME Magazine* also published an article on the event, arguing “Most white South Africans seemed to disapprove of Duncan’s action. Reproving him for ‘deluding the Negroes,’ the liberal Johannesburg *Star* coldly observed that passive resistance, by frightening the whites, ‘strengthens the hand of reaction and repression.’”<sup>23</sup> Regardless of whether the attention was positive or negative, the international media turned one small march into a multi-racial fight for liberty and justice.

In court, the prosecution charged Duncan and the other defiers with intending to “cause Natives to resist or contravene any law or to prevail upon them to obstruct the administration of any law.”<sup>24</sup> The court found all the defiers guilty, and Duncan was charged a fine of £100 or 100 days compulsory labor.<sup>25</sup> After the proceedings, Duncan made several statements to the left-wing newspaper *Fighting Talk*. When asked if there is any prospect of peace and security for European South Africans, he replied, “This state cannot be built by any one group, not even by a white group, acting alone. It can only be built by a cooperative effort by South Africans of all races.”<sup>26</sup> Duncan’s words wisely predicted the future of the non-racial movement. He continued, “I have found such cooperation and comradeship in association with the defiance campaign. The leaders

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<sup>22</sup> “News of the Defiance Campaign”, *Indian Opinion*, vol.51 (1953), *Digital Innovation South Africa*, <http://disa.ukzn.ac.za/webpages/DC/ipjan53n1.pdf> (accessed March 30, 2011)

<sup>23</sup> “South Africa: New Recruit”, *TIME Magazine* (1952), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889556,00.html> (accessed March 30, 2011)

<sup>24</sup> “The Resistance Campaign, The Riots, And Action Taken By The Government And Others”, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1952-1953*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> “The Change is Coming, Says Patrick Duncan”, *Fighting Talk*, vol.11(1953), *Aluka*, <http://www.aluka.org/action/showContentImage?doi=10.5555%2FAL.SFF.DOCUMENT.1816.6172.011.003.Mar1953&p=1> (accessed March 30 2011)

of the campaign have given the few whites that have joined so far a most wonderful welcome.”<sup>27</sup> Later on, he would have misgivings about the way the proceedings went, believing that he and the other defiers should not have had a lawyer in a political case and that they should have pleaded guilty. But he had made an imprint, crutch-by-crutch, in the history of the movement: His actions “caught the popular imagination of Africans”, and he is remembered by former ANC members today “not as Duncan the Governor-General’s son, nor Duncan the Liberal, nor Duncan of *Contact*, nor Duncan the white PAC member, but Duncan who joined the Defiance Campaign on crutches.”<sup>28</sup>

The Defiance Campaign led to further campaigns against apartheid laws such as the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Education Act. The campaign brought groups like the ANC and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) closer together and fueled the need for new activist organizations. As Patrick Duncan made evident, white activists could not join groups such as the ANC whose membership was racially exclusive. Many whites who wished to get involved in the political opposition of apartheid found a way through the South African Communist Party, which believed in basic rights and freedoms for all citizens of South Africa regardless of race. The national government banned the South African Communist Party in 1950, and those who had belonged needed a new outlet of participation. Sensing the need for that outlet, the ANC along with the SAIC created the Congress of Democrats for whites to join. The ANC and the SAIC hosted a planning meeting for its creation in November 1952 and invited white activists who represented several different points of view to attend. Eighty-eight white activists from the

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<sup>27</sup> “The Change is Coming, Says Patrick Duncan”, *Fighting Talk*, vol.11(1953), *Aluka*, <http://www.aluka.org/action/showContentImage?doi=10.5555%2FAL.SFF.DOCUMENT.1816.6172.011.003.Mar1953&p=1> (accessed March 30 2011)

<sup>28</sup> Various conversations between Tom Lodge and former Congress members in South Africa and Lesotho, May-June 1976, as seen in Driver’s *Patrick Duncan*, 100.

Transvaal, Natal, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth were present at its creation.<sup>29</sup> One of the main organizers of the COD was Lionel ‘Rusty’ Bernstein.

Rusty Bernstein was born in 1920 to a middle-class South African family. He became politically active during his college years, joining the Communist Party in 1939. Professionally, he was an architect, but his real calling and success came from his two loves: politics and prose. He became the editor of the left-wing magazine *Fighting Talk* in 1953, which focused on resistance by South Africans to the suppressive legislation and actions of the national government. Loved and respected by his colleagues, he was a fair man with a serious demeanor who always chose his words carefully. In his autobiography, Bernstein’s comrade Joe Slovo described Rusty during their period of detention together in 1960 as follows: “He was that rare political animal for whom either self-aggrandisement or adulation were anathema...[His] incisive and fresh writing style reflected a mind uncluttered by dogma and cliché.”<sup>30</sup> Though he was heavily involved in politics and at the center of the Rivonia arrest in 1963, Slovo felt that Rusty may have steered his course differently if given the opportunity: “I always felt about him that if he granted himself the right to choose he would have opted for the quiet life...But reason and the social compassion in him deprived him of choice.”<sup>31</sup> Rusty’s wife, Hilda Bernstein, was also politically active while maintaining her duties as a mother to her family. Born in London in 1915, she came to South Africa in 1934 and joined the Communist Party in 1940. Through her involvement in the party, Hilda met Rusty, and the two married in 1941. She ran as a member of the communist party for the Johannesburg City Council on a whites-only ballot in 1943 and won, serving from 1944 until 1946. While in office, Hilda focused on attaining improved housing for

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<sup>29</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Joe Slovo and Helena Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (Randburg: Ravan, 1995), 133.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

Africans. City officers saw her as a nuisance, deciding to redistrict her into a more conservative constituency that did not re-elect her. Hilda later joined the Congress of Democrats along with Rusty and as whites; they could work together with other organizations under the umbrella of the Congress Alliance. The Alliance was comprised of four separate organizations with members of different races – the ANC, the SAIC, the CPC (Coloured People’s Congress) and the COD. Here, white activists were given the opportunity to negotiate change side by side with fellow citizens of all races. The organization of the Congress Alliance and the whites who belonged to it paved the way for the creation of non-racial organizations later in the 1970s and 1980s, the ANC accepting members of all races into its ranks in 1969.

It was quickly decided that in order to move forward and amass political support, the Congress Alliance needed to organize a large political gathering of like-minded individuals from all over the country. ANC leader Professor Z.K. Matthews suggested the idea for the gathering at the group’s 1953 conference. The Alliance appointed a small subcommittee of activists, including Walter Sisulu, Rusty Bernstein, and Joe Slovo, to take part in organizing the conference. Slovo was a political animal, brilliant, unique, and wholly committed to the liberation struggle. Born in 1926 in Lithuania, he immigrated to South Africa with his parents in 1934 to escape Jewish persecution during World War II. The family moved into the suburb of Doornfontein, which Slovo described in his unfinished autobiography as “the lowest rung of the Jewish residential ladder.”<sup>32</sup> His family relocated from one boarding house to another, and Slovo remembered that the immigrants in the boarding houses affected his political views, influencing him towards socialism. After serving alongside allied forces in World War II, Slovo became a lawyer and joined the Communist Party of South Africa in the 1940s and assuming a position on

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<sup>32</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 28.

its central committee in 1953. Joe was “a handsome but pudgy extrovert with curly hair and a gambler’s brash smile”<sup>33</sup> and was, above all, incredibly taken with his future wife, Ruth First.

Born in Johannesburg in 1925, Ruth was the daughter of two radical socialist Lithuanian parents who started her political involvement at an early age by taking her to Sunday night political meetings on the steps of Johannesburg’s city hall. Ruth joined the Communist Party of South Africa as a student at the University of Witwatersrand. After college, she became a journalist. Working for left-wing publications such as *The Guardian* and *Fighting Talk*, she sought to expose the effects of segregation and apartheid on African life and labor. Ruth married Joe in 1949, embarking on a roller-coaster relationship complete with infidelity. Ruth was beautiful and well-dressed, known as the ‘designer activist’ by her contemporaries: “She loved Italian shoes, French perfume, Greek restaurants and European cinema. She wore expensive clothes and carefully applied makeup and saw no conflict between her politics and her sense of style.”<sup>34</sup> Despite her composed exterior, she was a woman teeming with insecurities: “She felt she always had to be better, smarter and faster than her male comrades. To outsiders she projected great personal strength and self-confidence, even arrogance. But those who knew her better saw that the façade covered a profound sense of vulnerability.”<sup>35</sup> She continuously relied on Joe’s reassurance and commitment to stand tall, regardless of their disagreements.

In organizing the Congress of the People, Joe and Rusty’s subcommittee saw the need for the creation of a manifesto, a document that the movement could stand behind and support. This document was to outline their vision for a free and democratic South Africa, and thus had to be created in the most democratic fashion. They issued a call across the country, asking individuals

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<sup>33</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

to write-in and describe what demands they would like to see in such a document. Though white South Africans brought cash and freedom of movement to the process, Africans did the real leg-work of collecting the ideas of individuals all over the country. Tens of thousands of handwritten recommendations came in written on scraps of brown paper bags, torn pages from school exercise books and pieces of cardboard. In his autobiography, Slovo paraphrases the implications of this amazing amount of participation well: “South African history had never before that moment (or indeed since) seen such a groundswell of democratic expression by plain and ordinary people.”<sup>36</sup> At the very basic level of creating the Freedom Charter, its creators visualized and carried out an incredibly democratic process, thereby operating under the same kind of democratic system they wished to live under in the future. Rusty presented the first draft of the Charter, and it quickly became the driving force of the movement: “Suffice it to say that the Freedom Charter has become one of the key inspirations of new generations of revolutionaries and that the ruling class considered it a treasonable platform for the violent overthrow of the white autocracy.”<sup>37</sup> The Freedom Charter was seen throughout the anti-apartheid movement as the key manifesto of the struggle.

When Slovo and Bernstein’s subcommittee finalized the Freedom Charter, the Congress Alliance was ready to hold its mass meeting. On June 26<sup>th</sup> 1955, over 3,000 delegates traveled across the country for it. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act allowed for new ministerial powers, including the ability to ban persons for five years from public office, the ability to investigate any organization and declare it illegal, and the ability to liquidate assets of any organization and deny participation in any organization. The Minister of Justice banned many of the leaders who were instrumental to the organization of the Congress under the Suppression of

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<sup>36</sup>Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 89.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Communism Act, and thus they could not sit on the platform. The national government denied banned activists the right to be active participants in a specified list of legal organizations, deprived them of the right to publish written work, restricted their movements, and prohibited them from attending any type of gathering. Though banned and unable to publish written work, Rusty and Hilda Bernstein focused their efforts on continuing to write as long as possible. In her autobiography *The World That Was Ours*, Hilda writes, “This was not through bravado or mere habit of defiance of such laws; it was simply that we believed we had something which should be said out loud, and the fewer people who were prepared to say it, the more important that we carry on and circumvent the silencing ban.”<sup>38</sup> Even though silenced, Rusty and Hilda’s defiance and resilience guaranteed they would not remain quiet. Rusty and Hilda also found the concept of not being able to spend time with their friends under the definition of ‘gathering’ unthinkable. Though Hilda was convinced they would try to get around it, she realized that the new law held increased potential danger. Knowing that time was running out before they too would be banned, the Bernsteins went over to have dinner with their friends the Cachalias, fellow anti-apartheid activists, and “a coldness lay over the evening that could not be dispelled by the hot food. We could not know it was the last time we would be in their house, but, as in everything we did then, we were under the constraint of waiting for something inevitable without knowing exactly what it was.”<sup>39</sup> The definition of “gathering” was so narrow that had Joe Slovo and Ruth First not been able to get a pardon from the Minister of Justice, “Ruth and I would have constituted a criminal conspiracy merely by being together”, given their respective banning.<sup>40</sup> That they would not see each other was an altogether ludicrous assumption for a married couple.

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<sup>38</sup> Hilda Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours* (London: Persephone, 2007), 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 85.

Police circulated the area at the Congress of the People, creating a hostile environment by collecting the names and addresses of the individuals in attendance. The meeting organizers carried on nevertheless, beginning with the presentation of the Isitwalandwe award, the ANC's highest honor, which was given to activists for their leadership and service to the anti-apartheid movement. The ANC gave the award to Father Trevor Huddleston in recognition of his many years of honorable and selfless service to the cause of the anti-apartheid movement. Father Huddleston rose to accept the award, which Chief Albert Luthuli, the president of the ANC, and Yusuf Dadoo, the president of the South African Indian Congress, received as well but because of bannings neither could be present. Huddleston accepted the award and expressed regret concerning the absence of his fellow recipients, "I don't know whether it is to be blamed on the part of our friends, the police, or not, but the fact is I am here. The Minister of Justice is very well represented here in the background and I hope they have a happy afternoon to see if they can spot some of their friends in this large gathering."<sup>41</sup> Despite the tense mood of the meeting, with the police swarming through the crowds, Huddleston was able to crack a joke and cheer up the mood of the people in attendance.

After handing out the awards, the Congress set out to accomplish the task they had met to complete: approving the Freedom Charter, clause by clause. Though police attempted to interrupt, the Congress kept on, and activist Helen Joseph read to the crowd the section of the Charter demanding houses, security and comfort for the people.<sup>42</sup> The crowd roared its assent in agreement with every clause. Some of the most significant clauses included that all people shall

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<sup>41</sup> 'Document 10, 'Police Record of the Congress of the People, Kliptown, Johannesburg, June 25-26, 1955' as reproduced in Thomas Karis, Gwendolen M. Carter, Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 187.

<sup>42</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 204.

govern, that all national groups shall have equal rights, that all shall be equal before the law, and that all shall enjoy equal human rights.<sup>43</sup>

The police surveillance at the Congress foreshadowed the repressive iron fist which was to clamp down on the country and turn South Africa into a police state. Only a few months later, on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1955, the largest nationwide raid in the history of the country took place. The raid was an effort on the part of the Special Branch of the police to collect enough evidence for a ‘super trial’ of sorts to convict all subversive individuals across the country. Armed with search warrants authorized to seize anything which might be in violation of the Suppression of Communism Act, police descended upon homes across the country and no individual was safe. Under the police raid, some 1,000 or more police searched about 500 people, including Father Trevor Huddleston, in their homes and offices.<sup>44</sup>

Joe Slovo gives a personal account in his autobiography of what it was like to be the subject of a police raid. With two revolutionaries living under one roof, it was virtually impossible to rid the house of subversive material. In order to keep illegal papers from view, Joe created a secret compartment in his desk where he and Ruth could hide their materials. Slovo’s children knew about these hiding places, and remained nonchalant as police searched. The police “failed to spot the false compartment, and Shawn’s ever-so-slight wink of triumph when they began putting the drawers back stayed with me as a warm memory during the subsequent period of separation from the family.”<sup>45</sup> Police continued to raid the homes of different activists until they determined that they had enough evidence to take the activists to trial.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 68.

<sup>45</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 120.

This ‘super trial’ came sooner than anyone thought. On December 5, 1956, police knocked on doors in all parts of South Africa and arrested over one hundred individuals on charges of high treason and other offenses. By the end of the arrests, the total number came to 156: two-thirds, or 104, were Africans, 44 were Whites and Indians and 8 were ‘Coloureds.’<sup>46</sup> Among those arrested were Helen Joseph, Joe Slovo, Ruth First and Rusty Bernstein, who were accused of being part of a “country-wide conspiracy”, inspired by communism, to overthrow the state by violence.<sup>47</sup> The trial lasted over three years and ironically enough, instead of disbanding those accused from meeting as they had intended, the government instead created the longest continuous meeting in the history of the movement. The accused met every day in the pews of the court room and passed the time not only listening to their case, but making plans for the future as well.

Helen Joseph, one of the defendants in the treason trial, founded the Federation of South African Women in Johannesburg in 1954. The Federation sought to unite all women of South Africa, secure full equality for all women regardless of race, and ensure the protection of women and children. Like the Congress of Democrats, the Federation of South African Women became an adjunct of the Congress Alliance, but it was unique in that its membership included women of all races. In her autobiography *Side by Side*, Joseph remarked on the organization: “This time I was not a white woman doing things *for* black people but a member of a mixed committee headed by a black woman. It was different – and better than anything I had ever known before.”<sup>48</sup> Helen was born in England in 1905 and in 1923 started her term at King’s College at the University of London. Joseph later came to South Africa in 1931 to live with a friend from

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<sup>46</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 81.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Joseph, *Side by Side* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 5.

her college years whose father owned a preparatory school for boys in Durban. She became a social worker for Coloureds in Cape Town in 1949, and began to recognize the need for political action. Like Rusty, she helped found the Congress of Democrats and later served as its national vice-chairman. In 1956, Joseph, along with fellow Federation of South African Women members Lilian Ngoyi, who was African; Rahima Moosa, who was Indian; and Sophie Williams, who was coloured; organized a mass demonstration on October 27<sup>th</sup> at the Union Buildings in Pretoria to demand the repeal of unjust laws concerning forced removals, the new passes soon to be issued to African women, Bantu education and black poverty. The demonstration was one of the most substantial moments of her political career, and Joseph was involved in every aspect of it from picking up women in several townships to inviting organizations such as the Black Sash<sup>49</sup>, a non-violent white women's resistance group, to attend.

In her autobiography, Joseph gives a detailed insider account of what it was like to be a defendant in the Treason Trial. Joseph sat in the dock of the courtroom at the trial and gave a statement, meeting with fellow accused activists to prepare, including Farid Adams of the South African Indian Congress, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Duma Nokwe of the ANC, and Leon Levy of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. The day she was to give her statement, Joseph was nervous and Mandela asked her to play the game Scrabble, a gesture she later recalled with infinite gratitude as he was attempting to calm her nerves: "I relaxed then and became conscious of the warm support and affection of my fellow accused. I knew that I belonged with them, they trusted me and I must speak for them. I must not fail them."<sup>50</sup> With newfound confidence, Joseph took the stand and gave her statement, arguing that only economic

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<sup>49</sup> The Women's Defense of the Constitution League, commonly known as the 'Black Sash', whose members wore during silent protests as a symbol of mourning for the destruction of the Constitution.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 90.

and moral pressure from outside and within South Africa would end apartheid. In making her statement, Joseph had proclaimed before a court of law her unyielding and steadfast support of the movement.

The national government interned the defendants during the trial, and the white defendants received far better treatment than black defendants. This was especially unnerving to activists who stood against racial barriers and divides. Joseph commented on the inequality in her autobiography. The Special Branch also arrested Joseph's close black friend in the Federation of South African Women, Lillian Ngoyi. Joseph and Ngoyi spent countless hours together during the trial – they sat together in court and rode in a van to their cells together each day. One day in court, the judges ruled that the proceedings should be adjourned for three weeks. Returning in the van to their cells, Lillian had an outburst. She yelled at Joseph and said “‘You are better off with your pink skin!’ It was true...my pink skin brought me a bed, sheets, blankets. My food was better. I had a sanitary bucket with a lid. She had an open bucket covered with a cloth. I learnt to hate my pink skin but I could not change it nor expiate it.”<sup>51</sup> Later on into the trial, authorities removed the white defendants from the prison and separated them from their black allies into racially divided prisons. To make matters worse, the white prison facility was new and infinitely better than the black one. “It had to be accepted because there was no way to reject it... I had to go to court everyday to meet my friends, my fellow accused, knowing that my conditions in gaol were so much better than theirs. Lillian had indeed spelt it out – I was better off with my pink skin.”<sup>52</sup> Ngoyi's proclamation haunted Joseph for many years to come because of its bitter honesty.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 88.

The Treason Trial went on for three long and arduous years, and was heavily taxing on those involved. Both Rusty Bernstein's architectural firm and Joe Slovo's law practice suffered financially since they were detained in trial. It was a defining moment for white activists as they were forced to reckon with themselves. As their livelihoods and personal lives crumbled around them, they had to question whether they were still committed to the movement. Ultimately, the State could not provide adequate evidence for its prosecution and the trial ended. The white activists returned to their previous lives with a different outlook on life and the movement. Joseph describes her post-trial feelings in her autobiography. Joseph returned to Johannesburg, "To my comfortable home in a white suburb, to my comfortable white life, my well-paid white job and it all seemed unreal. Lillian's bitter cry 'you are better off with your skin' was haunting me again... it made no difference that I did not choose to be white."<sup>53</sup> This pervading sense of white guilt would remain with Joseph throughout her remaining years as an activist in the movement and affect her tremendously. Other activists felt a similar sense of white guilt. Though they could not change the color of their skin, they could attempt to level the playing field – a fact which drove many to commit to the anti-apartheid movement.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 116.

## Chapter 2

### From Sharpeville in 1960 to the Rivonia Trial of 1963

The year 1960 would mark a turning point for white South African activists with the killings at Sharpeville, which sent the country into a state of emergency and ultimately led to the decision by leaders of the Congress Alliance to turn to armed struggle. On March 21, protestors gathered at Sharpeville in an effort to protest the racist pass laws in South Africa. As of 1952, every African in South Africa had to carry a pass detailing, among other information, their employment history, residence, place of origin and tax payment history. The only way out of carrying a pass was to be from an urban area, to have lived in the same township for fifteen years and to have worked for the same employer for ten years. It was almost impossible for an African to qualify under all of those restrictions, and thus virtually every African had to carry a pass. Anti-pass demonstrations were common, and had been going on under the ANC's supervision since the World War II era. Whites did not have to carry passes, and by participating in the demonstrations they were making sacrifices for a cause that did not directly affect them. Still, they felt that the oppression of one group equaled oppression of all groups in South Africa. Just four years earlier, Helen Joseph had organized along with other Federation of South African Women members the massive anti-pass march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

The PAC, however, was against white involvement in the campaigns. As mentioned earlier, the PAC had split from the ANC due to disagreement over multi-racial involvement in the anti-apartheid movement. Both the ANC and the PAC took up separate anti-pass campaigns in 1960, and the PAC's anti-pass campaign began at Sharpeville. Eyewitness accounts differ as to the day's events. Some attested that "the crowd was unarmed, amiable, well-mannered, and

unaggressive”<sup>54</sup> and that the size of the crowd was between 3,000 and 10,000 individuals. Police accounts differ, stating that “the number of people was much larger (official reports placed it at 20,000), that many were armed with sticks and other weapons, and that the crowd’s mood was hostile, aggressive, and volatile.”<sup>55</sup> Regardless of who was right, the facts remain the same: the day left 69 Africans dead and 186 wounded. The Government answered with increased repression, swiftly declaring a State of Emergency on March 30<sup>th</sup> that banned both the ANC and the PAC and detained nearly 2,000 political activists of all races, including Rusty Bernstein, Hilda Bernstein, Joe Slovo and Denis Goldberg, a fellow Communist and comrade in the movement. In the 1950s, the activists had space to engage, freedom to meet, and the ability to protest. All of this would change with Sharpeville and the State of Emergency.

Many activists went to jail during the State of Emergency. Slovo argued that by later standards, he had an easy time in detention: “We were really not in any serious predicament. The mood was relaxed and almost festive; we had done nothing legally culpable, and this fact still counted then in South Africa.”<sup>56</sup> The mood was so relaxed, in fact, that one day Joe even walked straight out of prison. Though he was intercepted only ten meters away from the entrance, Joe’s testimony supports the argument that the standards were relatively lax in comparison to later accounts of prisoners from jail. Slovo was even able to establish a ‘think tank’ in jail as a way to continue political discussion within prison.

The State of Emergency led many organizations, as well white activists, to the decision to go underground or flee the country. Raymond Suttner, an anti-apartheid activist who was recruited to the South African Communist Party under Joe Slovo, in his book *The ANC*

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<sup>54</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 333.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>56</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 121.

*Underground in South Africa* argues that “There is something extreme and often hermetic in the demands on the life of the underground operative...The people concerned made harsh choices that often led them to pay a heavy price in their personal life and opportunities for personal fulfillment.”<sup>57</sup> Suttner argues that in order to succeed in going underground, activists had to repress their basic human need to communicate with others. Given the grueling and taxing realities, was going underground really worth it?

When leaders in the Communist Party of South Africa decided to bring the Party underground, changing it to the South African Communist Party, it changed the movement and paved the way for the underground organization of other groups: “To read or hear of what underground operatives were doing was a source of inspiration and courage. If some could do it, others felt they could too. Without doubt, the experience of the Communists in blazing this trail made it easier for the ANC to follow.”<sup>58</sup> However, the decision to go underground was not unanimous amongst party members. When it became clear that the National Party was preparing legislation to outlaw the Communist Party of South Africa, members met to discuss their options. They had two possible paths of action: “do nothing and wait for the curtain to fall”, or “claim to have dissolved and then reconstitute the party secretly as an underground movement.”<sup>59</sup> Bram Fischer was among the group of activists who did not want the Party to go underground. Bram pushed for the party to disband, arguing that otherwise individual members would face repercussions, either having to publicly denounce their membership or else face prison sentences. Joe Slovo disagreed, arguing that that was the wrong move politically. But the truth was that Bram faced much more risk than the others since he had a successful, respected and high paying

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<sup>57</sup> Raymond Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2008), 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

career as a barrister. Though the risk was great and he disagreed with the decision, once the party was formed underground, he became a member and took the same risk as the others.

After Sharpeville and the subsequent State of Emergency it became clear that drastic action and change were needed. Leaders in the Congress Alliance met to discuss a plan of action. Sharpeville started out as a non-violent demonstration and had obviously become violent. Police brutality and violence in response to non-violent protests could no longer be tolerated. Leaders of both the Communist party and the ANC began to discuss the move to violence. The ANC was reluctant to turn to armed struggle, and on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1961 Nelson Mandela made one last attempt at non-violent resistance. Mandela proposed a mass stay-at-home campaign to protest the white-only referendum concerning whether South Africa should break its ties with Britain and become a republic. The police and those in authority quickly moved to crush the protest, and before the strike even took place they arrested hundreds of activists, banned meetings, seized printing presses and passed legislation to detain suspects for up to twelve days without charge.<sup>60</sup> On the day of the strike, the government deployed armed officers to stand entrances of black townships. Though hundreds of thousands of Africans remained at home, Mandela was disillusioned by the government's massive repression of the strike. Meeting at a safe house in Johannesburg organized by Ruth First, he declared that non-violent struggle was over, arguing that "the government had deliberately created the atmosphere and revolution."<sup>61</sup>

The Communist party was much quicker to make its decision to move to armed struggle. Operating from underground, Communist party member Michael Harmel issued a paper stating that "traditional means of nonviolence were of no use in a system that treated legitimate dissent

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<sup>60</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 82.

<sup>61</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 647.

as an act of treason or rebellion.”<sup>62</sup> His argument for violence won support from party members like Joe Slovo, but others, such as Rusty Bernstein and Bram Fischer, were more reluctant. When it became clear that everyone in the party supported the move to violence, they realized they had no choice – they either had to join along with everyone or give up altogether. Fischer expressed his remorse to his oldest daughter Ruth: “Much as I don’t like this, we’re left with no other option. We’ve tried every other nonviolent means possible and nothing has worked.”<sup>63</sup>

Fischer, like Patrick Duncan, was a South African of famous birth who was destined for greatness. Born in 1908 to a prominent Afrikaner family, his grandfather was prime minister of the Orange River Colony, and had pushed through the 1913 Natives’ Land Act during his term as Minister of Lands. The act dispossessed Africans of their land, restricting 4 million of them to 8 percent of the country.<sup>64</sup> His father was judge-president of the Orange Free State Supreme Court.<sup>65</sup> Given his background, Fischer could have easily been a member of parliament’s leadership had he wanted to. Instead, Fischer chose a radically opposite life. While completing his Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, he went on several tours of the European continent and witnessed Nazism and Fascism first hand. Mary Benson, a fellow anti-apartheid activist and long-time friend of Bram commented on his draw to the Communist Party in her autobiography: “Only the Communist Party militantly opposed the spread of fascism abroad and at home, regardless of the risks. Only Communists were prepared to work alongside blacks and demand ‘one man, one vote.’”<sup>66</sup> It was for these reasons that Fisher, along with his wife Molly, joined the Communist Party in 1942, later serving on its Johannesburg district committee along with Hilda

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<sup>62</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 81.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Benson, *A Far Cry: the Making of a South African* (London: Penguin Group, 1989), 171.

<sup>65</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 4, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Benson, *A Far Cry*, 177.

Bernstein. Fischer studied law in South Africa and like Slovo, used his law degree to assist those in the movement. For example, he used his legal skills to help Alfred Xuma, former president of the ANC, revise the ANC's Constitution in 1943. Even as a communist, Bram was an inclusive person and always thought he could convert others to the party given the righteousness of its cause. Bram even tried to convert one of the main proponents of the apartheid system, Hendrik F. Verwoerd, to the socialist cause over lunch in the early 1940s in an attempt to convince him to join the socialist cause. On a personal level, Bram was extremely warm and inviting to others, handsome, and well respected – all qualities which attracted others to him.

Supporters of the armed struggle formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), meaning 'Spear of the Nation' in Zulu, and sought to initiate the move to armed struggle through a mass campaign of sabotage within South Africa. Through the use of homemade bombs and explosive devices, the campaign committed minor acts of sabotage towards any infrastructure that supported the apartheid regime: hitting targets such as buildings, telephone poles, and post offices. It was at this moment that the national government branded members of MK as communist terrorists. Yet almost everything about the operation was humanist, including its naïve belief that a few homemade bombs would change the policies of the apartheid regime.

On December 16, 1961, the members of Umkhonto we Sizwe implemented their plan for sabotage inside the country. The day held special significance because it was the anniversary of the Day of the Covenant, or the 1838 Battle of Blood River. That evening, bombs were set off around in the country in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth. A flyer announcing Umkhonto we Sizwe was posted in each city declaring the beginning of the sabotage campaign. The flyer, which Rusty as a member of the high command of Umkhonto helped write, stated that "The time comes in life where there remains only two choices: submit or fight. That

time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom.”<sup>67</sup> It went on to state that its members were still adverse to bloodshed and intended for their actions not to incite civil war, but to be a wake-up call to the national government: “We hope – even at this late hour – that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the Government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the Government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war.”<sup>68</sup>

On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Joe Slovo set out to attack the Johannesburg Drill Hall. He knew the building well, since it was where the Treason Trial had met in 1956. During the trial, he had sat in the Drill Hall lifelessly along with his one hundred and fifty five comrades, awaiting a sentencing that would ultimately never come due to lack of evidence. Slovo wrote about his experience on December 16<sup>th</sup> later in 1986 in an article entitled “The Longest Three Minutes of My Life.” He set out for the Drill Hall armed with a homemade explosive made by his comrade Jack Hodgson, a member of the Johannesburg Regional Command of MK. The bomb was made of potash and aluminum powder, an explosive combination when brought into contact with just a drop of acid.

Slovo hoped to ignite the great central hall of the Drill Hall, but upon entering the hall he encountered a setback, finding about fifty Black cleaners working in the room. Human casualties were not a part of the equation. The group had agreed that the bombs were intended solely as a message to the apartheid government; they could not and would not manifest in the form of death

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<sup>67</sup>Document 66. “*Umkonto we Sizwe*” (Spear of the Nation). Flyer “issued by command of *Umkonto we Sizwe*” and appearing on December 16, 1961’ as reproduced in Thomas Karis, Gwendolen M. Carter, Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 716.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 717.

notices and shattered futures. He had to find another spot to ignite the bomb – somewhere far enough away so as to avoid harming the janitors, but still containing enough wood to ignite quickly and accomplish the goal of burning down the building. Turning a corner, his eyes focused on and met his new target: a deserted office with large, wooden cupboards.

Upon entering the office, Slovo turned the bomb upside down to begin the ignition process. Suddenly, he heard a voice behind him. Slovo turned and saw a sergeant major who asked, “Can I do anything for you, sir?” Calmly, Slovo replied with a rehearsed story: his brother had recently received a notice of conscription, but was about to take an important university exam. The sergeant major asked Slovo to follow him to the office of exemptions. The sergeant reached to the door handle and, discovering it was locked, turned to Slovo and told him he’d have to come back the next day. Thanking the officer, Slovo turned away and went straight for the door. He walked briskly but not so fast as to attract attention. Turning the corner, he quickly took the can out of his duffel, discarding it immediately. Only then did the gravity of the situation become clear to him: “The three or four minutes which preceded this were perhaps the longest in my whole life.”<sup>69</sup> Though he had not met his goal of detonating the bomb, he had luckily narrowly escaped detection.

In implementing the decision for violence, whites proved to be of the utmost importance given their resources: “At that time only whites in South Africa had easy access to arms, only they were allowed to handle arms in the army, and therefore, in the practical sense, only whites could be military instructors for other members of MK inside South Africa.”<sup>70</sup> But Denis Goldberg, a Communist who was heavily involved in carrying out the armed struggle, disagreed

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<sup>69</sup> Joe Slovo, “The Longest Three Minutes In My Life”, *Dawn Souvenir* 7 (1986), *Digital Innovation South Africa*, [http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_displaydc&recordID=DaSI86.1681.5785.000.000.1986.5](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=DaSI86.1681.5785.000.000.1986.5) (accessed April 6 2011)

<sup>70</sup> Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View From Moscow* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2008), 15.

with the idea that whites should be military instructors. Denis Goldberg was born in 1933 to parents who were both members of the Communist Party. His parents, like those of Ruth First and Joe Slovo, were Lithuanian Jews who had emigrated to London to escape the anti-Jewish sentiment in Eastern Europe. As a child, the political affiliation of his parents had an enormous influence on the development of Denis' own political views. His parents subscribed to the workers' newspaper the *Guardian*, and as a child Denis read it: "I read about Africans protesting about the pass laws and burning their documents and going to prison for it. I read about poverty and how it was somehow connected to race in South Africa."<sup>71</sup> Denis also was accustomed to social mixing of the races from an early age. His parents welcomed individuals of all races in their home sometimes for meetings, but often to socialize over dinner. On his first day of school at age six, his parents warned him: "They told me that I should not get upset if other children or teachers called me '*Kaffirboetie*' ('Nigger lover'), Commie, or Jewboy."<sup>72</sup> Denis became immersed in his parents' political involvements, stuffing and addressing envelopes for the Communist party and listening to his father make speeches on public platforms about current political issues.

Goldberg graduated from the University of Cape Town in 1955 with a degree in engineering. During his college years, he met his wife, Esmé, the daughter of a Johannesburg political activist who had raised money for the Communist party and left-wing publications. Her father had worked with Tillie First, the mother of Ruth First. Esmé was a member of the Modern Youth Society, a non-racial youth organization, and Goldberg became active in it as well. Like Joe Slovo and Rusty Bernstein, he rose among the ranks in the Congress of Democrats and became a member of its Joint Executive Committee. The organizing committee of the Congress

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<sup>71</sup> Denis Goldberg, *The Mission: A life for freedom in South Africa* (Johannesburg: STE, 2010), 33.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

of the People assigned Goldberg to drum up support for the Congress in the Loyolo location in Simonstown. After Sharpeville, Goldberg was detained under the 1960 State of Emergency. He was known for having a good sense of humor, but just below the surface, he also had a constant need to be well liked and respected among his comrades in the movement.

As part of MK training, Goldberg taught young African recruits about electrical circuitry, how to make copies of pamphlets, and how to complete first aid. The training program was a success, and led to the idea of a six-weeks-long training camp. Due to his prior experience with the training program, Goldberg was appointed camp commander, though he was adamantly opposed to the idea. It was Goldberg's belief that it was necessary to create role models within the oppressed themselves, and thus the camp commander should be African. Goldberg wanted Looksmart Ngudle, a member of the organizing committee, to be commander instead. Looksmart could speak to all the recruits in Xhosa and English, and Goldberg believed that it was important to instill self-confidence and leadership among black Africans. Though Goldberg was overruled, he found a way around the decisions and made Ngudle field commander.

MK leaders hoped that their sabotage offensive would lead to the apartheid regime to internal examination of its policies. Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect, and the national government waged a war of increased oppression through legislation. Among the first legislative initiatives was the Sabotage Bill of 1962, which mandated a minimum sentencing of five years and a maximum death sentence for 'acts of sabotage.' The term 'act of sabotage' included anything from damaging property, possessing firearms, weapons or explosives, endangering law and order or hindering essential services, conspiring with others or encouraging them to commit such offenses, putting up a poster, going on strike, causing hostility between sections of the population, being on the premises of certain buildings unlawfully, painting a slogan on a wall, or

even slipping a leaflet under a door.<sup>73</sup> The most common result of the Sabotage Bill was house arrest. Many activists were confined to their homes; closed off to the outside world and cut-off from political activity. Hilda Bernstein detailed the effects of house arrest in her autobiography, *The World That Was Ours*: “Those under complete house arrest, twenty-four hours a day, were like prisoners forced to provide their own board and lodging... Only the eccentric becomes a hermit by choice. Who can live in a vacuum?”<sup>74</sup> Individuals placed under house arrest could not work outside of their homes and were prohibited from communicating with any other, similarly banned individual. This affected them tremendously as, for the most part, the majority of their friends were also banned. Activists’ homes were their cells, and they became their own jailers.

Helen Joseph became the first person to be placed under house arrest in South Africa in 1962. At first she received an overwhelming amount of support from the press and her friends and even had the “most wonderful Christmas Day of my life”<sup>75</sup> with visitors from all over the country. Soon the glamour wore off, however, and Joseph was left to face the grueling reality of solitary confinement in her own home. Many in her same position requested, and received, one-way exit permits to leave South Africa under the 1955 Departure from the Union Regulation Act. Once you were granted an exit-permit, you could never return to South Africa and you became a stateless person under international law. As the movement within the country came to mean either jail or exile, many left the country under exit permits: in 1965, 37 exit permits were granted.<sup>76</sup> While abroad, many activists attempted to continue their activism, but the government still banned their published works in South Africa. Unlike many of her peers, Helen remained in

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<sup>73</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 29.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph, *Side by Side*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> Study Commission on U.S. Policy toward Southern Africa, *South Africa: Time Running Out* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 75.

South Africa. She was committed to staying and fighting the battle on South African soil. Rusty Bernstein was placed under house arrest in 1962 as well, and it drastically changed both his and Hilda's home life. Their home was constantly monitored by the police, and if one of their children were to have a friend over and Rusty walked into the same room, it would mean jail for Rusty if the police saw it: "We dared not slip. That was what they came for, that was what they wanted. They didn't mind how often they came; time was on their side, sooner or later there would be a slip. Home has changed, it is no longer ours, it is no longer a place of refuge and relaxation."<sup>77</sup> Police surveillance of individuals such as Rusty Bernstein who were under house arrest placed activists in a constant sense of fear which stripped away their sense of normality in their own homes.

The repressive legislation did not stop there. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1963, the national government passed the General Law Amendment Act, commonly referred to as the '90 Day Act'. This law took away citizens' rights to habeas corpus, allowing police to detain a suspect without charge in solitary confinement for up to ninety days. It was intended to 'break the back' of Umkhonto and Poqo, the armed wing of the PAC, as Vorster later put it.<sup>78</sup> This legislation would be considered anathema to any democratic system of government, and was a last-ditch effort on the part of the national government to exert control over its subversive citizenry. Ultimately, the law was a landmark in the transformation of South Africa into a police state.

Increased repressive legislation coupled with the option of leaving South Africa on an exit permit posed a tough decision for activists. Many had to decide whether to stay or leave the country, when staying meant jail and leaving meant exile. Both sides of the question had compelling arguments. Many individuals chose to leave South Africa for different reasons. Some

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<sup>77</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Karis, Carter, Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 672.

left for practical reasons, arguing that they could make more of a difference abroad than they could make under the restrictions of the national government. Denis Goldberg outlines this point of view in his autobiography, *The Mission: A life for freedom in South Africa*, writing “Some of our comrades left the country after the end of the State of Emergency because it seemed we were in for much stronger suppression of protest...being banned from professional activities meant that they would not be able to earn a living.”<sup>79</sup> Others left the country for more personal reasons: “They felt they had no choice but to go, and some had been harassed enough. I am not too critical of them because I was beginning to feel that people give what they can of themselves at various times in their lives: courage and commitment are fluctuating things.”<sup>80</sup> Oftentimes, it was hard to remain noble and loyal to the cause when doing so meant facing social ostracism and political harassment.

Goldberg made the decision to leave the country on the advice of his contacts in the Communist Party and in Umkhonto who considered it almost certain that he would be arrested immediately and that he could possibly serve a sentence of up to ten years in prison. He later agreed to stay because Joe Slovo asked him to. Slovo met Goldberg at a hotel in Hillbrow and asked him to stay to investigate what weapons MK needed in the country. He agreed to stay so long as he was not in Cape Town where the police knew him well and he could no longer function politically. Slovo himself left South Africa later in 1963. Ultimately, those who decided to leave South Africa were faced with the implications of one harrowing fact: whites could leave the country, yet most Africans could not since they lacked the resources. When fighting for racial equality, was leaving a betrayal?

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<sup>79</sup> Denis Goldberg, *The Mission*, 74.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Those who chose to stay in the country would say yes. Rusty Bernstein, when questioned by his friends, made a compelling argument for staying inside the country which Hilda Bernstein discusses in her autobiography, *The World That Was Ours*: “Just by staying, even shut up in my own home, I achieve something; I don’t give way before I am forced to, I don’t voluntarily throw in the sponge. That’s exactly what the Government wants – it wants to be rid of all its critics; and I don’t see why I should cooperate with them.”<sup>81</sup> His friends countered that he should consider his family and his children. Rusty replied that he did and that he was thinking of the future of the country in which his children will have to live. Rusty argued that there must be some white people who take a stand against the apartheid regime by staying in the country. Throughout his argument, Rusty made one point very clear: that the decisions of others did not shape his own. Denis Goldberg, however, did the exact opposite, making his decisions at the advice of other people. He decided to leave South Africa at the command of others, and immediately doubled-back and decided to stay at the command of others as well.

Bram Fischer, when faced with the questioning of his comrades as well, also argued that he would stay inside the country. He argued that because most blacks did not have such an option – they lacked the financial means and the necessary travel documents – whites who fled were taking advantage of their skin color and its privileges: “Nothing was more of an anathema to Bram. Besides, he was an Afrikaner. South Africa was his home – he could not abide the idea of leaving, nor could he fathom how others could do so, no matter how bad things got.”<sup>82</sup> Just as Bram Fischer had alluded, things did take a turn for the worse in the country after the 90 day act.

Those who decided to remain in the country faced jail, but their confinement was altogether different from what Joe Slovo experienced. While Slovo’s jail had been a casual

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<sup>81</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 53.

<sup>82</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 93.

atmosphere and a ‘Think Tank’ like environment; jail after the 90 day act meant solitary confinement, psychological torture, and pressure to implicate fellow political activists. Ruth First was imprisoned for 117 days under the 90 Day Act in 1963, and her incredibly personal and moving memoir of her time in prison, *117 Days*, provides an in-depth look at what internment was like on a day-to-day basis for detainees: “Left in that cell long enough, I feared to become one of those colourless [sic] insects that slither under a world of flat, grey stones, away from the sky and the sunlight, the grass and people.”<sup>83</sup> Like Helen Joseph, Ruth also experienced the kind of racism in jail that she had fought so hard to combat in the outside world: “She would sit on her bed with her feet propped up while an African prisoner polished her cell floor. When the inmate finished, she would be handed a large aluminum bucket and told to fetch hot water for the ‘missus’.”<sup>84</sup> This type of prisoner-to-prisoner racist servitude was enforced by the prison warden, and Ruth was powerless in fighting against it.

On a basic level, political detainees were held in order to separate them from their colleagues and bar them from participating in the movement. Once in prison, however, there was a different reason to hold them: to get them to make statements and implicate their fellow comrades. Though activists could refuse, officials would constantly attempt to break them down through torture in order to have them submit to their demands. One of the avenues of torture was solitary confinement. In solitary confinement, prisoners were had no one to talk to, locked in a tiny cell and left to spend twenty-three hours a day contemplating their limited surroundings. Confinement left prisoners with nothing but their thoughts to keep them company. Ruth First argues that the situation was close to unbearable: “Anxiety about the outcome of the incarceration and the purpose of the interrogation sessions stripped the prisoner of the calm, the

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<sup>83</sup> Ruth First, *117 Days* (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 7.

<sup>84</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 156.

judgment, and the balance which were required to cope with continued isolation and the increased strain of interrogation sessions.”<sup>85</sup> When psychological torture places activist in a constant state of anxiety and terror, it is remarkable that they did not simply submit a statement for their release.

Though white activists were not always subjected to physical pain, the psychological effects of solitary confinement were torture enough. Soon authorities began adding other torture methods to her imprisonment in an attempt to add fuel to the fire and incite her to make a statement. Like they did with other mothers, the police used her children as a torture tool against her, calling her a bad mother. One day, an interviewer dangled the bait of her children in front of Ruth, and she snapped. He casually mentioned that he had read in the Sunday papers that her children were traveling out of the country, and she immediately became agitated, battering him with a series of questions: “‘I must see them before they go,’ I said. ‘Will you let me see them?’ ‘Why do you want to see them?’ he asked. ‘You have seen them already.’ I took a deep breath. ‘You,’ I said, ‘are a cold-blooded callous fish of a man.’”<sup>86</sup> Denis Goldberg’s wife Esmé was interned as well under ‘90 Days’ and Goldberg believes they used the same torture tactic on her, police threatening to take the Goldberg’s children and place them in a government orphanage so that they would never see them again. Time and time again, officers used Ruth’s children against her. They brought Gillian, Robyn and Shawn to the prison for visits. Afterwards, they would offer Ruth freedom to see her children on the contingency that she offered a statement.

The Special Branch, a police force created by the government to deal solely with anti-apartheid activists, conducted the most damaging form of psychological torture on Ruth. On her 90<sup>th</sup> day in prison, an interrogator from the Branch came to Ruth’s cell and announced, “I’ve

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<sup>85</sup> First, *117 Days*, 73-74.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

come to tell you to pack your things, Mrs. Slovo, I'm releasing you!" Ruth sat frozen and rebuffed, "I don't believe you... You're going to re-arrest me."<sup>87</sup> After the argument continued in this fashion for several minutes, the wardress finally convinced Ruth to pack her things and go. Ruth went outside of the prison to use a public telephone to arrange for a cab, and two men from the Special Branch approached her, re-arresting her for another period of ninety days. Ruth returned inside with them, remaining silent and composed. Though she had remained stoic throughout the whole process, inside she was crippled. She had experienced a full one hundred and eighty degree range of emotion and the surge of happiness she had allowed herself to feel when she walked outside of the prison only return to prison more catastrophic: "I sat on the edge of the bed, still in my navy outfit, and shook with sobs. My 'release' had been sometime in mid-morning; by late afternoon I was still sitting in the same position. The heaving of my shoulders had stopped, but a tight pincer-feeling was growing in my stomach."<sup>88</sup> The police had finally broken Ruth.

Faced with the repercussions of the event, Ruth was brought back to the reality of her imprisonment and remembered the offer the Special Branch had always taunted her with: "We're not holding you, you're holding yourself. You have the key to your release. Answer our questions, tell us what we want to know, and you will turn the key in the door. Make a statement and in no time you will be back with your children."<sup>89</sup> Ruth could no longer bear to sit and wait for things to happen around her, and she decided to change her circumstances by offering to submit a statement. Though she agreed, she told herself that she would only give the police the smallest bit of useless information, and that she would store away anything important which would provide trails to those still active "Into a strong-room section labeled 'NEVER to be

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<sup>87</sup> First, *117 Days*, 106.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 81.

divulged.”<sup>90</sup> She was only willing to give the police information they already had – dead-ends – but during the proceedings she realized she had made a mistake: “I was breaking down my own resistance. It was madness for me to think I could protect myself in a session like this, in any session with them. I had no idea what they knew, what contradictory information they had wrenched from someone else.”<sup>91</sup> By that time, the police had seen numerous political detainees in prison, finessing their questioning techniques. As tough as Ruth was, countless days in prison had affected her mental faculties. There was no way she could remain sharp in interrogation sessions with five trained officers.

On the day between Ruth’s statement proceedings, her mother visited her and provided her with the support she needed. While the supervising officer wasn’t looking, her mother whispered “Are you cracking up?” in her ear. When Ruth nodded, her mother looked her in the eye and replied “We’re depending on you.”<sup>92</sup> Ruth mother’s visit served as a reminder that her comrades in the outside world depended on her resilience. This re-invigorated and encouraged Ruth, keeping her from making a decision that she would have most likely immensely regretted. Ultimately, Ruth did not provide the police with any useful information, but soon she was overcome with fear that her comrades would find out she had attempted to make a statement and ex-communicate her: “I was in a state of collapse...for the gnawing ugly fear that they could destroy me among the people whose understanding and succor I most needed, and that once they had done that I would have nothing left to live for.”<sup>93</sup> With her husband away in exile, her comrades in the movement were the only semblance of family and support she had besides her

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<sup>90</sup> First, *117 Days*, 113.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

children. If she alienated herself from them she would have nothing left. Ultimately, Ruth was driven to the edge and attempted to take her life in prison.

Helen Suzman was able to help. In *Rivonia's Children*, Glenn Frankel rightly sums up the National government's feelings toward Suzman: "Helen Suzman was in many ways the National Party's worst nightmare: an articulate Jewish woman with an attitude."<sup>94</sup> Born in 1917, Suzman is known for her 36-year career in the South African parliament where oftentimes she comprised the lone opposition towards the legislation of the apartheid regime. Suzman taught Economic History at the University of Witwatersrand, and became interested in politics after studying the migrant labor system and the injustices caused by apartheid. First elected to Parliament in 1953 for the liberal Houghton district as a member of the United Party, she, along with her liberal allies who became known as the 'liberal wing' of the United Party, left the party after six years when it became increasingly right-leaning. Some of her liberal allies included Zach de Beer, Colin Eglin and Ray Stuart. The liberal wing joined the Progressive Party and when it came time for re-election in 1961, out of twenty-six Progressive Party candidates, Suzman was the sole individual from the 'wing' to be re-elected. The constituency of her district was an anomaly, comprised virtually of all white liberal Jews who supported her anti-apartheid policies. She would remain the lone official opposition to the National Party for many years.<sup>95</sup> For six years, she served as the only woman in a Parliament made up of 165 members. She was a firecracker who never took no for an answer and knew how to maneuver her way through the bullies and big-wigs to achieve her aims. Suzman comprised the single vote of dissent in Parliament against the 90 day act. Though she was not as left-leaning as some of the Communist white activists, she played a crucial role in Parliament, fighting for the improvement of race relations and ensuring

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<sup>94</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 98.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

equal opportunity. The national government could not ban her words since she was a Member of Parliament, unlike the words of communist white activists – a fact that placed her in the position where a Mandela or a Sisulu would have stood had they not been silenced. She fought tirelessly to keep democratic ideals alive, and her activism would not go unnoticed.

One day a famous, yet unnamed Communist phoned Suzman and pleaded with her to intervene in Ruth First's case by asking Minister of Justice B.J. Vorster to give Ruth an exit permit. Suzman agreed and was immediately phoned by Ruth's mother, who asked her to do nothing of the sort, arguing that black South Africans must know that white South Africans are prepared to suffer with them in solidarity. Suzman agreed to defer to Mrs. First's wishes, only to find herself on the phone again, this time with Bram Fischer. At this point Suzman was weary of the back-and-forth arguments regarding Ruth First, but Bram was able to win her over with his famous charm. On the phone, he said coyly, "Is that my favorite M.P.?" to which Helen replied, in her usual firecracker manner, "Come off it Bram."<sup>96</sup> Ultimately Bram was able to convince her to ignore the elder Mrs. First's wishes. Mrs. First herself eventually came around, admitting that Ruth was in a bad state and that someone needed to intervene. From Helen's years in Parliament, she learned to get what she wanted using sophisticated arm-twisting tactics, so she threatened Vorster with the political problem of Ruth First's possible suicide in prison. Knowing the negative impact such a suicide would have while he was in office, Vorster readily agreed to grant the exit permit, and Ruth First was released.

Life as many of the white activists knew it changed forever on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1963 with the Rivonia arrests. Members of the High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe were meeting at a large cottage on Rivonia farm in Lilieslief, north of Johannesburg. Among those present were Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada and Rusty Bernstein. Though Rusty

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<sup>96</sup> Helen Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 76

was officially under house arrest, he had been defying his orders by frequently meeting at Rivonia. That day, the leaders were meeting to discuss “Operation Mayibuye” (Operation Come Back to Africa), which was a plan for guerilla war and revolution. Members of the High Command realized that the few homemade bombs of the sabotage campaign would not foster real change in the government and that it was time for drastic action.

The first phase of Operation Mayibuye called for hundreds of activists to leave the country to train for guerilla warfare. At the end of their training, the activists would return to strategic areas in South Africa with minimal armaments, whereupon they would be integrated into the armed struggle. These preparations would be accompanied by campaigns of mass mobilization, including a national anti-pass campaign. At the time, Denis Goldberg was a member of the High Command’s Logistics Committee for MK, and was instructed to investigate the weapons and explosives the leaders would need in order to implement Operation Mayibuye. Goldberg laid out the vision for Operation Mayibuye in his autobiography, *The Mission: A life for freedom in South Africa*: “The plan envisaged 7,000 guerrilla fighters under arms inside South Africa, making ready to receive our returning fighters who were being trained in the People’s Republic of China, the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union.”<sup>97</sup> Joe Slovo was an ardent supporter of the plan. He left the country to arrange for external support for the operation, but leaders in the High Command disagreed about whether or it was the right course of action. Once they went to guerilla warfare there would be no turning back. At the same time, their current sabotage campaign was not making any headway in the country. They needed more time to weigh the pros and cons.

Those in the High Command knew that the police were aware of their operations. In order to remain covert, they constantly changed locations to throw the police off their track. At

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<sup>97</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 107.

their meeting a week before, discussions ran late, and since Rusty Bernstein's curfew under house arrest meant that he had to be home by six o'clock, the meeting was cut short without a consensus as to where the next meeting would be held. The leaders agreed to meet at Rivonia again the next week, and to cement out a different location at the following meeting.

Unbeknownst to them, the police would be waiting.

Working on a tip, the Security Police descended on the small cottage on the property at Liliesleaf and arrested all who were present. They also confiscated all of the subversive documentation in the house. That night, Hilda waited restlessly for her husband to return, to no avail: "I think – he should not have gone. The risk was too great. But it was risks all the time, there is no way of doing anything without risk; complete safety lies in complete immobility."<sup>98</sup> The leaders were taken to jail, and several other people who were not present that day were arrested as well, including Denis Goldberg and Nelson Mandela, who was arrested based on a tip to the South African police from the CIA. The arrest at Rivonia would have serious complications for those involved: "Rivonia is the place where their dream of revolution was forever shattered. The 1963 raid was their moment of truth. It destroyed their old order of comfortable, rather benign radicalism and thrust them into a new, dangerous and chaotic world."<sup>99</sup> Just six years earlier, during the Treason trial of 1956, the activists had been congregating jovially – knitting and playing checkers. Now, six years later, they would be on the witness stand fighting for their lives. The Rivonia trial was a the turning point for these activists, and many of those arrested would not see their families for more than twenty three years.

An ANC pamphlet entitled "SAVE THE LEADERS!" urged the release of the detainees. It stated: "THE PEOPLE'S LEADERS ARE ON TRIAL! Their crime? They dared to challenge

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<sup>98</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 6.

White supremacy, apartheid and injustice. They were determined to struggle for a free South Africa for all, regardless of skin colour...STAND BY THESE LEADERS!”<sup>100</sup> Bram Fischer served as the defense counsel which was an incredibly difficult position for him to be in. He knew that there was no way he could achieve a verdict of ‘innocent’ given the evidence police collected at Rivonia. Instead, he fought for a sentence of life imprisonment when he knew the prosecution sought death sentences for all the defendants. As the group’s defense counsel, Bram also placed himself at incredible personal risk. He was still heavily involved in Umkhonto during the trial and could have easily been linked to any of the defendants. He painstakingly tried to keep his involvement under wraps. Bram was so secretive that even his fellow lawyer on the defense team, Joel Joffe, did not know the extent of his involvement. Attempting to start a new sabotage campaign, Bram went as far as to smuggle out court documents, such as maps and other papers found at Liliesleaf, in order to hand them off to fellow comrades who were still operating underground. Bram was lucky enough that he was not among those convicted; he avoided court on the days where farmhands from Liliesleaf testified for fear that they would identify him.

One day, Bram came close to discovery when a witness in the court proceedings, a handwriting expert, was asked to identify the author of a document found at Rivonia. The expert linked the handwriting to Harold Wolpe. Bram asked to see the evidence before opening his cross-examination. After looking at it, he passed it on to Joel Joffe. Joffe, horrified, immediately recognized the handwriting as Bram’s. Bram calmly stated that he had no further questions for the witness, and dismissed him from the stand. Despite his calm demeanor, Bram knew that he only narrowly avoided the chopping block. Luckily, his comrades would as well: Bram succeeded in avoiding the death penalty sentence. Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Motsoaledi,

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<sup>100</sup> ‘Document 74. “The A.N.C. calls on you – SAVE THE LEADERS!” Two-page flyer issued by the ANC, October 1963’ as reproduced in Thomas Karis, Gwendolen M. Carter, Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 3, 768.

Mlangeni, Mhlaba, Goldberg and Kathrada were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Rusty Bernstein was found not guilty as there was not enough evidence linking him to Umkhonto.

After the Rivonia Trial, Bram had to travel to London for another case. While in London, he visited his daughter at her apartment. His comrades in the movement who were now in England met him there and pleaded with him to stay in England, but Bram steadfastly believed that he had to return to South Africa as a matter of “personal honor and political necessity.”<sup>101</sup> Bram argued that someone needed to return to help rebuild the underground communist party and reassure black Africans who felt they had been abandoned in South Africa that communists were still with them. “I’ve given my word,” he said over and over.<sup>102</sup> Maybe he was so adamant in his position because he had nothing left to lose: his children were older and settled elsewhere, and his wife Molly, the love of his life and his support system, had died in a tragic car accident just after the Rivonia trial. Did he become a rebel because he was on his own, without a family to take care of?

Bram soon went underground in South Africa. On September 23 1964, Fischer was arrested along with twelve other men and women on the charge that they were either members or supporters of the illegal Communist Party. The trial began on November 16 with Bram as defense counsel. On January 22 1965, Bram did not appear in court. Instead, he sent a letter to the magistrate announcing his intention to go underground. His close friend and fellow activist Mary Benson was at the trial, and she included Bram’s letter to the court in her autobiography *A far cry: the making of a South African*. Bram’s letter argued that as an Afrikaner, he should make some reparation for the misdeeds of his people: “If by my fight I can encourage even some

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<sup>101</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 287.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

people to think about, to understand and to abandon the policies they now so blindly follow, I shall not regret any punishment I may incur. I can no longer serve justice the way I have attempted to do during the past thirty years.”<sup>103</sup> The prosecutor called Bram’s decision “The desperate act of a desperate man, the action of a coward.”<sup>104</sup> Johannesburg’s *Sunday Times* issued a statement in respect to his decision to go underground. The editor commented that Fischer was “a paragon, the model of greatness and respectability” who, when young “had been regarded as a future Prime Minister or Chief Justice.” The editor claimed that the “tragedy” was that now Bram had become a “hunted fugitive ostracized by society.”<sup>105</sup>

Though many whites saw his decision as an act of delusion, many blacks saw it differently. They welcomed and appreciated his sacrifice. Prisoners at Robben Island, including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, heard of his decision and threw their fists up in salute. Bram’s solidarity in the anti-apartheid struggle as an Afrikaner was especially important for black South Africans. He was a member of the oppressive group, yet he sided with blacks. For groups like the ANC and PAC, it would have been easy to make alliances with English speaking whites and condemn Afrikaans speaking whites. Yet people like Bram taught black South Africans not to make that distinction – that like Nelson Mandela later said in a post-prison speech, every community has its good people and every community has its bad people.

While underground, Bram assumed the persona ‘Max’ – dying his hair, growing a beard, and picking up smoking. Benson would arrange visits with Bram through intermediaries, and when she saw Bram for the first time she did not recognize him. Fischer was able to evade the police for two hundred and ninety days before he was caught. His last public act took place on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1966 when he addressed the Supreme Court of Pretoria in his defense. In his

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<sup>103</sup> Mary Benson, *A far cry*, 164.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

address, which was later published in pamphlet form by Mayibuye Publications, he stated: “It was to keep faith with all those dispossessed by apartheid that I broke my undertaking to the Court, separated myself from my family, pretended I was someone else, and accepted the life of a fugitive,” He continued by saying, “I owed it to the political prisoners, to the banished, to the silenced and those under house arrest, not to remain a spectator, but to act.”<sup>106</sup> Bram’s decision to go underground and his steadfast solidarity with black South Africans earned him martyr status within the anti-apartheid movement. He was found guilty and charged with life in prison. Ultimately, the Communist underground was effectively smashed when Bram was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was the last leader of the party left in the country. The leaders at Rivonia, including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and Denis Goldberg were in prison serving life sentences while other leaders in the party such as Ruth First and Joe Slovo were in exile.

If you do choose to go into exile, what choices do you make? Do you maintain your core principles? Ruth First and Joe Slovo had to consider their family in the context of jail and political action. Ruth’s time in prison had brought the importance of her children to her attention. She would never again be able to bear separation from them. Upon her release from jail, she struggled in deciding what course of action to take. Joe was already abroad in London, and Ruth wanted to reunite her family, “But she felt a terrible sense of guilt about leaving at a time when the movement was in crisis...the act of leaving felt to her like an act of abandonment and surrender.”<sup>107</sup> Ruth was paralyzed by the fact that leaving South Africa would mean no return. Through Helen Suzman, Vorster had granted her a one-way exit permit – not a passport. Ruth sought out the advice of Bram Fischer in deciding whether or not to leave the country. Bram was

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<sup>106</sup>Benson, *A far cry*, 183-184.

<sup>107</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 227.

supportive and reassuring. Though he was adamantly opposed to anyone leaving the country, he knew that Ruth had suffered a tremendous amount in prison and understood her desire to leave. Ruth booked a flight to London on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1964. She packed Gillian and Robyn's things – Shawn had already left for England with friends. Her mother would meet them in England as well at the end of the month. Hilda Bernstein drove Ruth to the airport. Hilda, in an interview with Glenn Frankel, remembered feeling abandoned: “Ruth and Joe had been such key members of the movement. Their optimism, their intelligence, their dedication, even their sense of fun had helped sustain her. They seemed to characterize the best of what the movement was about.”<sup>108</sup> Members of the Special Branch trailed the two women to the airport and followed them inside. Realizing they were being followed, Hilda and Ruth went to the ladies' room, where they shared a hurried goodbye- it was the only place the detectives did not follow them. Ruth met her husband in London, who was heavily involved in politics even though he was not in the country.

Pressure to leave the country was ultimately insurmountable for Rusty and Hilda Bernstein as well. The mood after Rusty's release at the Rivonia trial was tense. Day by day, more of their comrades were arrested by the police. It was only a matter of time before they too were taken in. Having already served jail time during the Rivonia trial, Rusty realized how much he needed to remain with his family. While in jail, Rusty could not be a support system for his children and could not help foster their growth into adulthood. If he and Hilda went into exile, his children could at least meet them abroad soon after. If he was sentenced to jail time, who knew when he would be able to be with his children again?

Rusty and Hilda decided to go into exile for the sake of their children. Resolved in their decision, they sought the support of their oldest daughter Toni first. Toni was grown and married, and had cared for her younger siblings during the Rivonia trial while Hilda had made

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<sup>108</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 230.

frequent trips to the court proceedings. Rusty and Hilda took Toni and her husband, Ivan, on a picnic to tell them the news of their decision. They responded with resolve, stating “It’s about time! We thought you just wouldn’t make up your minds until it was too late.”<sup>109</sup> Toni and Ivan agreed to look after the children, and Rusty and Hilda began making plans to leave South Africa. They separated, and each went into hiding. Before leaving the country, Hilda insisted that she see her children one last time. Meeting in a safe location in a park and dressed in a borrowed disguise, Hilda reunited with Frances, Keith and Toni. “I tell them we have decided to go away. We cannot go on living like this. ‘We are going to try and get to a safe place, and then we will send for you. Toni will look after you.’”<sup>110</sup> The children were quiet, overcome with sadness and fear. Before Hilda could explain, she noticed that a blue van has been watching them, and she decided it was time to go.

Rusty and Hilda crossed the border into Botswana by foot, leaving their children behind. Hilda described the pain many mothers feel in these circumstances in Raymond Suttner’s work *The ANC Underground in South Africa*: “Exile exacts its price not only from those who leave, but also from those who are left:...often without a word of farewell and leaving behind no money for material needs...their lives were haunted by the unresolved departure – not having said goodbye.”<sup>111</sup> Leaving her children in South Africa was one of the hardest decisions Hilda had ever made. However, she felt that she had no other choice, and that the best option for their family was to reconstitute themselves abroad. Once in England, Hilda and Rusty had to re-establish their life with new credentials. Their children met them abroad one by one – Keith first, then Patrick, and later Frances, Toni and Ivan. In England, Hilda continued to work in support of the ANC and was a regular speaker for the anti-apartheid movement in Britain and abroad.

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<sup>109</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 297.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>111</sup> Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 140.

Rusty's time in exile, on the other hand, was characterized by re-establishing psychological and physical normalcy. He had come too close to losing what was most important to him – his family – during the Rivonia Trial, and the psychological turmoil of that fact remained with him in London.

While abroad, many of the activists took to pen and paper when they could not be involved on the ground of their country. The act of writing itself became revolutionary. With the support of friends and colleagues, Ruth First began the painful process of writing a memoir of her time spent in jail, *117 Days*. The memoir recalls a dark time in Ruth's life – she came dangerously close to losing everything when she had almost produced a statement for the Special Branch, later attempting to commit suicide. Recalling those memories was especially difficult for Ruth, and her book was first published in 1965 in London and New York and later republished in London after her murder in 1982.<sup>112</sup> *The African Communist*, the magazine of the South African Communist Party, published a review of the book, writing “Some will feel she has been too calm and detached in dealing with an experience which must have been shattering and traumatic; but perhaps the very discipline and restraint of her writing are the qualities which have dispelled skepticism and won immediate acceptance of her account from the critics.”<sup>113</sup> While Hilda Bernstein was in Britain, she wrote and published a memoir as well, *The World That Was Ours*, which described her activist years in South Africa and centered on the Rivonia trial. It was initially published in London in 1967 and later republished in 1989 and 2007. These autobiographies, among others belonging to white activists, were banned in South Africa. They

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<sup>112</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 5.

<sup>113</sup> Peter Mackintosh, “Ruth First's 117 Days”, *African Communist* (1965), *Aluka*, <http://www.aluka.org/action/showMetadata?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.0001.9978.000.022.1965> (accessed April 7 2011).

were conscience-raising to people around the world, especially other whites, and provided personal and in-depth insight into the mind of a white anti-apartheid activist.

### Chapter 3

“Are we still in this?” Social and Political Pressures on White Activists

Societal and political pressures constantly caused white activists in the anti-apartheid movement to question their commitment to the cause. These pressures in their truest forms manifested in political ostracism, social ostracism, and strain on family – especially children, who were innocently thrown into the fray without choice and often suffered the most for it. Ultimately, activists looked to the cause and to each other for support when they needed it most.

In his book *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, Raymond Suttner, an anti-apartheid activist of the younger generation who studied under Rusty Bernstein and Joe Slovo, examines the implications of involvement on family and life for activists: “The relationship between a revolutionary organization and the individual – raising the question of the ‘personal’ – has a direct impact on individual conduct and individual judgment.”<sup>114</sup> Though Suttner’s argument involves the relationship between a ‘revolutionary organization’ and an individual, the same argument can be made for the relationship between a ‘revolutionary movement’ and an individual. The anti-apartheid movement had consequences for anti-apartheid activities much the same way as a revolutionary organization affects the individual.

Political ostracism was one of the elements of societal pressure that white activists had to endure, and no activist felt it more plainly or clearly than Helen Suzman. As a Member of Parliament, Suzman argued against the passage of countless pieces of legislation drafted by the apartheid regime, including the Terrorism Act which legalized indefinite detention without judicial review, the General Laws Amendment Act (90 days act), and the Sabotage Act. She remained for many years without a single peer willing share her stance. This was painfully evidenced on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, the day the Sabotage Act was passed. Suzman was the only M.P. to

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<sup>114</sup> Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 134.

contribute arguments in opposition of the bill, and she argued against it for a lengthy period of time, citing finally above all else her basic objection to it, which was that “it overrides completely every single fundamental principle of the rule of law.”<sup>115</sup> That day, it became clear that Suzman was not afraid to stand alone in every sense of the word. She called for a vote which involved a physical division of the House. Those in favor of passing the bill were ordered to stand on one side of the room, those opposed the other. One hundred and sixty-four men stood on one side of the room and Helen stood alone across from them. She defiantly stood alone, proudly staring her opponents directly in the face. Regardless of her unpopular views in Parliament, Suzman was re-elected year after year by her constituents from Houghton, a district that had a large number of Jews with liberal views on the voting role. During her election in 1966, Joel Mervis, the editor of the South African newspaper *Sunday Times*, issued an article stating that members of Houghton had a difficult decision on Election Day. Even though many may have supported the United Party and Suzman was now a member of the Progressive, Mervis argued that “Adherents of every party admire her for her courageous and intelligent showing in Parliament; and she is precisely the kind of person who deserves to be returned to Parliament.”<sup>116</sup> Her constituents in Houghton not only agreed with her views but also saw the importance of the role she played in Parliament.

Seven years later in the election of 1970, Helen was still the only member of her party to be elected to Parliament. Voicing her frustration, she exclaimed “Five more years alone with that bloody mob!” which was overheard by a journalist and published in *Life* magazine.<sup>117</sup> Later Suzman was forced to apologize for her comment in session. It was not the first time that

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<sup>115</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 106.

<sup>116</sup> Joel Mervis, “A Special Case”, *Sunday Times* 1966 as seen in Helen Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 61.

<sup>117</sup> Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 63.

Suzman had been at the epicenter of controversial statements made in Parliament. Four years prior on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1966 Prime Minister Verwoerd was attacked by a parliamentary messenger during session. Pandemonium ensued, and the Minister of Defense, Pieter Willem (P.W.) Botha, circled around the room, arms flailing and eyes bulging. His eyes locked on Suzman, and he shook his finger at her, yelling in Afrikaans, “It’s you who did this. It’s all you liberals. You incite people. Now we will get you. We will get the lot of you.”<sup>118</sup> Botha’s threat incensed Suzman, and not being the silent type, she decided to do something about it. She requested a formal apology, and when he gave a half-hearted reply, she exclaimed, “I expect you to control yourself. You’re the man behind the guns in South Africa. You’re the Minister of Defense. It would be a real sad day for all of us if you can’t control yourself.”<sup>119</sup> Suzman certainly was not afraid to speak her mind – a fact that her fellow members of Parliament found threatening.

Suzman was met with hostility not only from her fellow members of Parliament, but also from ANC exiles. She and Winnie Mandela received an award for human rights in 1984. When she went to the ceremony to accept it, she encountered hostility from the ANC exiles who were also present: “They made it clear that they did not regard a white liberal from South Africa, especially one who was an M.P., as an ally in the struggle for liberation.”<sup>120</sup> While Liberals fought for improved conditions for blacks within the country, until 1960 they supported among other legislation the idea of a qualified franchise. Members of groups such as the Black Consciousness Movement and the Communist Party took a much more aggressive stance than liberals, arguing for ‘one man, one vote’ within South Africa. Realizing this, Suzman admitted that she felt incredibly alone in politics: “We liberals were becoming a truly endangered species:

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<sup>118</sup> Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 69.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

for many years under attack from the right, we were now attacked by the left as well, especially by bitter exiles.”<sup>121</sup> Though faced with adversity, Helen Suzman used her position in parliament to her advantage, using it to raise many contentious issues to international attention. Ultimately, though she was alone, Suzman believed that she represented a point of view which still existed in South Africa, and that inspired her to carry on despite bullying and intimidation on the part of her fellow members of Parliament. Suzman also believed that her job in Parliament “was to provide an outlet, a means for expression, for all those people who were not prepared to conform to the bizarre practices known as ‘the South African way of life.’”<sup>122</sup> She would maintain these steadfast beliefs for the rest of her political career.

White activists in the fight against apartheid also faced pressure in the form of social ostracism as they became increasingly involved in the movement. Activists lived out the life they hoped to create not only in their ideology, but socially as well, a fact which made them an anathema to the white society which surrounded them. Denis Goldberg and his wife Esmé constantly opened their home to all their friends and comrades, irrespective of race. Rusty and Hilda Bernstein held similar beliefs and shared many happy memories of spending time with their comrades of all races in their home: “Years before when Nelson Mandela had first come to our house, one of the children ran into the kitchen shouting excitedly: ‘There’s a giant in the front room!’ After that, in our family, he was known as ‘the giant.’”<sup>123</sup> To activists such as the Bernsteins and the Goldbergs, hosting friends of mixed race in their homes simply was not an issue. Africans, Indians, and Coloureds were not only their comrades in the struggle against the government – they were also their friends. Why would they not come over?

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<sup>121</sup>Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 163.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 21.

Though all of the white activists lived this way, no one did quite like Joe Slovo and Ruth First. They were known in the movement for their parties with guests from all across the racial spectrum and copious amounts of alcohol. The majority of South African whites compared these gatherings to a ‘mixing of animals’, and sought to observe them as one might go see an exhibit at a zoo. The party the Slovos had in celebration of the collapse of the first indictment of the Treason Trial in October of 1958 was no exception. Tipped off by the police, photographers and a reporter from the Afrikaner daily newspaper *Die Vaderland* stalked the scene. They had no qualms concerning invasion of privacy, going as far as to enter the Slovos’ side yard and climb into their living room through an open window. One of the photographers jumped onto a table and started snapping photos. Pandemonium ensued, as it was illegal for alcohol to be served at a mixed racial gathering. The party goes quickly “poured their cocktails into the potted plants, slipped glasses under the couch or rapidly gulped the contents.”<sup>124</sup> The police soon arrived on the scene, and Joe stood on a chair, asking his guests to remain calm. All incriminating evidence had been removed at that point, and the party goes remained after the police left. Ruth and Joe later successfully sued *Die Vaderland* for five thousand pounds for invasion of privacy, donating their earnings to the defense fund for the Treason Trial.<sup>125</sup>

Try as they might to be ‘normal’, the way activists lived and the ideas they held separated them from the white citizenry surrounding them. Hilda Bernstein constantly had urges to live a normal life and join the masses, but to her that was virtually incomprehensible: “Holiday friends at the camping site would say something intolerably insulting about Africans; to remain silent was to be party to their attitudes. We spoke, and we were immediately set apart from all

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<sup>124</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 68.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

others.”<sup>126</sup> White activists constantly faced an identity crisis – belonging to a racial group which did not share their same beliefs, they struggled to navigate their way through society and create some sense of normalcy for their sake and the sake of their families.

Ultimately, with insurmountable pressures from society weighing down on them and their families, white activists looked to the movement and to each other for support. Suttner examines this phenomenon and cites Che Guevara, a fellow revolutionary. “Speaking of the demands on revolutionaries he claimed that the revolution demanded every hour: ‘The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside it.’”<sup>127</sup> True, it was hard for the activists to have friends who remained outside of the struggle. But their friendships were not limiting – they were, in fact, the life-support for each and every activist. When Hilda wanted to give everything up and run away, she eventually could not. She was too committed not only to the movement but to her fellow comrades as well. They were like a second family to her, abandoning them would have been similar to abandoning her own children. Hilda was not the only one among her comrades who felt that way. For the many white activists, “A rich network of friendship and trust arose that not only helped make worthwhile the personal risks of working against the government but made such work logical and inescapable.”<sup>128</sup> When their black comrades and friends such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu were risking their lives for the struggle, how could they give it up?

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<sup>126</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 18.

<sup>127</sup> Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 139.

<sup>128</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 44.

### Section 3: New Movement, New Choices: 1970s and 1980s

#### Chapter 4

##### Jail for the 'Lifers', Prison after Rivonia

For the activists arrested at Rivonia, the year 1970 marked six years of imprisonment. Living under the grueling reality of seven years of confinement, visits from outsiders quickly became especially important to white activists. Visitors were their link to the outside world and, quite simply, someone to talk to and a way to maintain sanity. Denis Goldberg, in *The Mission: a life for freedom in South Africa*, argues that while visits were a beneficial link to the outside world, they had a complicated emotional effect on prisoners. "Visits were not easy to deal with. It is quite unnatural to talk about everything in half an hour and at the same time try to rekindle the human contact... Your routine as a prisoner is totally disturbed."<sup>129</sup> As a coping mechanism of solitary confinement, Goldberg simply refused to allow himself to feel, building an emotional barricade around himself. He was visited by family members when they received approval. In order to visit a political prisoner, a request had to be made to the Minister of Prisons, who did not give them frequently. It took eight years for his children to receive permission to visit him, and ten years for his mother. One visitor who was not a member of his family, but who was in fact a stranger, had a significant impact on him. A friend of Denis' comrade Ivan Schermbrucker, her name was Hillary Kuny. Ivan asked Hillary to accompany Denis' father on a prison visit. "She was more or less my age, clever, very attractive and a great conversationalist. She spoke about her studies, her family and friends and her visits became a very pleasant break from prison routine."<sup>130</sup> Maybe she was such an asset to him because they could speak about random apolitical topics which took his mind off the struggle. As a stranger, her visits also lacked the

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<sup>129</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 145.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

pain that visits from his family members brought. The Minister of Prisons most likely denied the requests of his family members as a torture tactic against him. All in all, Hillary proved invaluable during Denis' internment: "[Hillary] allowed me to break down the emotional barriers I had constructed, letting me feel human again."<sup>131</sup> She quickly became a part of Denis' life-line in prison, keeping him sane.

Visits were also especially important to white activists on a political level, and Helen Suzman played a key role in the lives of those who were imprisoned. Suzman considered prison visits especially significant: "I was convinced that it was of paramount importance to make the authorities aware that someone was keeping a watchful eye on the prisons, and for the prisoners to know that somebody from the outside was interested in their welfare."<sup>132</sup> Suzman's visits became increasingly important when the Prisons Act made it virtually impossible for newspapers to look into prison conditions without prosecution. In 1965, the government prosecuted the *Rand Daily Mail* for publishing a series of articles about prison conditions, which was a violation of Section 44(1) (f) of the Prisons Act. The Act made it an offense to publish anything about conditions in prison without first verifying with prison officials that the facts were correct. Authorities would deny virtually anything that depicted them as less than picture-perfect, which made obeying the law pointless. With this development, members of parliament like Helen Suzman were the last thing prisoners had left.

Suzman worked to make conditions better for prisoners by listening to them and addressing their grievances. She visited Bram Fischer regularly in prison, where he served as a spokesperson for his fellow prisoners. When Fischer was dying of cancer in prison, Suzman went to see Minister of Police Jimmy Kruger. Suzman fought for Bram's dismissal from prison,

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<sup>131</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 145.

<sup>132</sup> Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 135.

arguing “The man is dying and it would be a very fine gesture of compassion if you would let him die at home and not in hospital or in prison.” Kruger refused, and Suzman replied “Phone his doctor and you’ll learn that he only has a couple of months left to live.”<sup>133</sup> Eventually Kruger made the call. Fischer was allowed to return to his family members, but it was too late. He died on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975. After the funeral, the government demanded that his ashes be returned to Pretoria Prison.

Helen Suzman was also able to visit Robben Island and hear the grievances of the black prisoners from the Rivonia trial who were interned there. When Suzman first visited with Nelson Mandela in 1967, he told her about his warder, who had a tattoo of a swastika and made it known to the prisoners there, stating: “Those are my political views and you will suffer for them, you Communists.”<sup>134</sup> Helen promised Mandela that she would do something about it. Returning from Robben Island, she requested a meeting with Piet Pelser, the Minister of Justice. She used her arm-twisting tactics again with Pelser, saying that she would reveal the existence of the swastika-tattooed warder in Parliament under his vote. He quickly said, “That’s dynamite, Helen. You mustn’t do that”, to which she replied, “I know it’s dynamite. It will be headline news all over the world.”<sup>135</sup> Helen certainly knew how to get what she wanted, because sure enough Pelser agreed to have the warder removed. Later, Mandela’s lawyer called Suzman on his behalf, thanking her. From that moment on, Helen made continuous requests to visit Robben Island. She was permitted annual visits to the White prisons, but permission to visit the Black, Coloured and Indian prisons came less frequently. Although she put in a request every year, Helen would not be allowed to return to Robben Island until 1974, seven years after her first visit. This most

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<sup>133</sup> Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 310.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

likely was due to the fact that she uncovered politically-charged facts, such as the existence of the swastika tattooed warder, in her first visit.

The question of escape was always on the mind of detainees, especially Denis Goldberg. In 1978, Goldberg was approached by two fellow Pretoria prisoners, Tim Jenkin and Stephen Lee, about the possibilities of escape. Goldberg had attempted escape before, and been the chairman of an escape committee in 1964 and 1965, though the plans were never realized. Goldberg decided to help the two prisoners and attempt to escape with them. Quickly the plan expanded to encompass more and more prisoners and became known as “The Great Escape.”<sup>136</sup> Goldberg believed that his escape would have great implications and make political headlines: “As I was the Rivonia man, the lifer, it seemed to me that the authorities watched me a lot closer than the other prisoners. My escape would be a great success for the ANC, a real slap in the face for apartheid because it would be a worldwide story.”<sup>137</sup> Ultimately, Goldberg was weaseled out of the plans since the younger prisoners believed that he did not have the necessary physical stamina. He begrudgingly agreed, and though he did not escape then, he still left prison before the rest of his comrades in the Rivonia trial through a ‘deal’ issued to him by the national government.

‘Deals’ ran rampant throughout the prison system, and white activists were constantly offered them. When offered, activists had to determine which meant more to them: the terms of the deal and what it offered or their allegiance to the movement. Early on in his detention, Denis Goldberg was given an incredibly substantial deal. Authorities offered him R 6000, a new passport, new documents and a new life – all if he agreed to become a state witness. He was adamantly opposed to the idea: “I made it clear that I would not be a state witness. They insisted

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<sup>136</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 193.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

they had enough evidence to hang me. I didn't care what they would do to me, I would never ever have dreamed of being a state witness."<sup>138</sup> Later on, however, Goldberg consented to a different kind of deal.

In 1985, the regime under the command of P.W. Botha offered all political prisoners, including those arrested at Rivonia, release from prison so long as they agreed to formally give up armed struggle. Earlier, his visitor and friend Hillary Kuny had submitted a memorandum to the Government calling for his release, making several arguments in support of her case, including that "He is today the longest serving White political prisoner in South Africa and the only White political prisoner to have been sentenced to life imprisonment."<sup>139</sup> Though Hillary's memorandum made clear that it was not issued at the request of nor under the instruction of Denis, it is interesting to note that as part of her argument she constantly referred to his "whiteness." Her references imply that it was an important distinction to make – a distinction which made the terms of his imprisonment less tenable than those of his fellow comrades convicted at the Rivonia trial. Denis was an anti-apartheid activist who had put his life at risk for the cause of racial equality in South Africa. Would he have supported Hillary's argument when it was in the name of his release?

Denis had spent almost twenty-two years in prison, and they weighed heavily on him: "I had not reached the limits of my endurance, though I was very tired of imprisonment. I was finding it heavier to bear and more difficult to bounce back physically and find the will to fight back against the daily encroachments on our prison conditions."<sup>140</sup> When given Botha's deal, he immediately turned to others for consultation, just as he had almost twenty years earlier when faced with the decision of whether or not to leave South Africa. His comrades were in a

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<sup>138</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 118.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

completely separate prison at Robben Island, and he had to wait for their answer for a considerable time. Nelson Mandela provided the best example of the path to take. Botha offered to release Mandela on the condition that he return to his Transkei ‘homeland’ and live under the surveillance of his nephew, who was an active collaborator in the apartheid regime. Mandela adamantly refused. Goldberg still sought out the opinion of his peers, and it finally came in the form of a message from Thabo Mbeki, who said “Tell Denis Goldberg that if he receives an offer, if he has to make a decision – there will be no criticism and we will understand.”<sup>141</sup> Nowhere in the statement from Mbeki was advice that he should accept the offer – it simply stated that his comrades would not criticize him if he chose to.

Goldberg ultimately accepted Botha’s offer, thereby agreeing to no longer participate in the armed struggle. He argued in his autobiography that his feelings about leaving prison were mixed. Younger comrades looked up to him as an iconic symbol of resistance. When they looked to him, it made it easier for them to break from white tradition. Goldberg argued that his reasoning behind leaving prison was his activist nature: “Being a symbol is one thing, but by nature I am a doer, an activist. I’m not a sitter...I wanted to get out and do things.”<sup>142</sup> He moved to London, and his most notable political act after prison occurred on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1987 when he represented the ANC at the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid. He gave a speech and said in closing, “Power to the People!”<sup>143</sup> Goldberg’s decision to accept the offer of release from prison is surprising for one main reason: the respective statuses of his fellow accused. While he walked out of prison and began to rebuild his life, his fellow accused remained interned at Robben Island, encased by iron bars in cells that were filled by up to thirty men. Denis’ own wife

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<sup>141</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 228.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

Esmé made it clear: “She could not be actively involved in getting just me released and not the others as well.”<sup>144</sup> If she could not bear it, how could he?

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<sup>144</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 227.

## Chapter 5

### Activists Remembered: an Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool

Politics for white activists changed immensely in the 1970s and 80s. Those in prison were stripped of their ability to participate, and could only read of the political happenings in South Africa through the few news publications they were permitted to read. Those abroad in exile participated in a varied fashion, yet most remained politically active. Joe Slovo was by far the most active of his comrades: He moved to Mozambique in 1977, where he established an operational center for the ANC, was a part of the central committee of the South African Communist Party, and was chief of staff of Umkhonto until April 1987. In 1985, he became a member of the ANC National Executive Committee. Slovo was also a part of the subversive ‘Operation Vula’ in 1987, an ANC plan for the forcible overthrow of the apartheid regime, and Raymond Suttner argues that Slovo “definitely had contact with individuals inside the country.”<sup>145</sup> Yet one fact remained: he was not in South Africa, where apartheid still reigned. A new generation of activists sprung up and began to replace the old. With new activists replacing them, did the people of South Africa even remember the comrades of the 1950s and 60s?

Ebrahim Rasool, the South African Ambassador to the United States and former Premier of the Western Cape Government of South Africa, can provide us with an answer. Born on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962 during the height of the state of emergency, Rasool grew up in ‘District Six’ of Cape Town: an inner-city residential area made up mostly of Muslims. Beginning in 1968, the apartheid government began forced removals of the area, acting under the same premise as the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Group Areas Act had called for separate racial areas to prevent racial mixing, which would cause what they argued would be ‘the degeneration of the white race.’ Thus, at age six, Rasool was uprooted from his home and thrown into racial politics –

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<sup>145</sup> Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 99.

whether he liked it or not. Rasool became an executive member of the United Democratic Front in 1983. The United Democratic Front was a non-racial anti-apartheid coalition formed to rally against the new Tricameral Parliament, which divided Parliament into three racially exclusive sections. In 1985 the UDF had 3 million members with organizational affiliations ranging from civic to religious and student to worker. The UDF showed its support of earlier white activists and ANC policies by adopting the Freedom Charter, and adopting the eight comrades sentenced at the Rivonia Trial as members. Rasool later joined the ANC, becoming a member of its National Executive Committee in 1998. In 1985, he was detained without trial under the state of emergency. He was not released until 1988.

Ambassador Rasool makes the case that even though white activists were outside of politics within South Africa in the seventies and eighties, their names and legacies were not forgotten by the new generation of activists in the country. In 1973, there was a reassertion of trade unions within the country, and the black trade union movement emerged with a wave of strikes in Durban. Without a word of warning, workers who had been quietly dissatisfied for decades shut down dozens of factories all over the city.<sup>146</sup> According to Rasool, these new trade unionists looked to the white Eastern Europeans such as Joe Slovo who had originally formed trade unions in South Africa, and who “Had seen fascism and who came to South Africa determined not to repeat fascism, and they started organizing the food and canning workers union in places like the rural areas of cape town, and this and that union.”<sup>147</sup> New trade union activists looked to those of old and the immense positive effect they had on the workers of South Africa. Rasool argues that white trade union activists of the past had uplifted the spirits of ordinary workers and gave them a sense of power. The new trade union activists also looked to

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<sup>146</sup> David Lewis, “Black Workers and Trade Unions” as seen in Thomas Karis, Gwendolen M. Carter, Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa*, Volume 5, 189.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

the lessons of activists in the past: “They taught us a lesson... ‘organize or starve’, and that you can have as much passion as you want to, but if you’re not organized, your passion will go nowhere.”<sup>148</sup> This lesson, Rasool argues, was the most important of all to new activists of the seventies and eighties: as passionate as they were about what was going on in the country, they had to organize in order to make headway in their plight.

Ambassador Rasool as an activist in the 1980s knew about the stories of these white activists, even though they were far removed from current events, stating “All of these exiles had been kind of larger than life in our own minds.”<sup>149</sup> The government had banned the circulation of their names and words within the country, yet their messages were still heard through underground outlets. The ANC and the SACP issued banned writings, and the ANC also issued radio broadcasts under the name “Radio Freedom.” The broadcasts were sent from ANC bases in Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, Ethiopia and Madagascar. Each broadcast began with a voice-over that said “This is Radio Freedom, the voice of the African National Congress and its military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe.”<sup>150</sup> Listening to Radio Freedom could result in a prison sentence of up to eight years, but Rasool argues that he and other activists listened to it when they could. Through Radio Freedom and banned publications the younger generation of activists knew names like Joe Slovo and Ruth First, and they also knew these names, Rasool argues, through cultural outlets as well: “Music became a major instrument, and in all of this music the names of Mandela, Tambo, Slovo and so forth really stood out.”<sup>151</sup> And therefore according to Rasool, there was almost equal acclaim for someone like Joe Slovo as for other black ANC leaders in exile. This was particularly evident when the exiles returned to South Africa in 1991, receiving a

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<sup>148</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 286.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

warm welcome from people all over the country at the First National Bank stadium in Johannesburg: “The acclaim for someone like Joe Slovo was enormous. People had clearly known without ever having seen him, what he stood for.”<sup>152</sup> Individuals from all over the country cheered for Slovo along with other activists such as Mandela: clearly even though these individuals were banned, outlets such as music and Radio Freedom broadcasts kept their stories alive.

Ambassador Rasool also argues that the ideology of earlier white activists gave new activists ‘the means to an end’ in the negotiation period. The beliefs of communist white activists in particular helped later activists such as Rasool determine their goals: “We looked a lot to these activists to add the rigor, the intellectual rigor, of what it is that we were striving for.”<sup>153</sup> In pinpointing which old activist beliefs they found most pertinent and useful, Rasool cited Joe Slovo’s “seminal” paper, “Has Socialism Failed?” as being particularly critical. The paper was published in a 1990 edition of the South Africa Communist Party’s publication *The African Communist*. Slovo, like many other communists at the time, felt certain disquiet towards communism with the collapse of communist party governments in Eastern Europe in the last half of 1989. In the paper, Slovo argued that those regimes were unpopular and undemocratic, and that socialism still had a future in South Africa. Citing the Party’s plan for a post-apartheid state which would among other things guarantee all citizens the basic rights of freedom of organization, speech, thought, movement and religion; Slovo argued that these freedoms “clearly imply political pluralism”, unlike the dictatorships and regimes in Eastern Europe.<sup>154</sup> Even though socialism had failed abroad, Slovo argued that it was still the ideal political form in South

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Joe Slovo, “Has Socialism Failed?”, *African Communist* 121 (1990), *Aluka*  
<http://www.aluka.org/action/showContentImage?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.DOCUMENT.0001.9976.000.121.1990>  
(accessed April 10 2011)

Africa, and that once democracy came to the country socialism could come after. According to Rasool, Slovo's paper kept alive the ideal of egalitarianism which was needed in South Africa since the country had "A completely unequal society, the inequalities are color coded, and so you can never replace the passion for equality. But we then understood that that equality needed to be located within a set of freedoms, a set of rights, and within a set of democratic institutions."<sup>155</sup>

Rasool argued that Slovo's paper came about at the most ideal time for South Africa: the time that the country was in negotiations and thinking of their new constitution. Slovo's paper provides a clear example of how new activists looked to and relied on the ideologies of old.

Ambassador Rasool argues that the most important role older white activists played was that their stories reinforced the ideology of non-racialism in the 1970s and 1980s. The uprising in Soweto had spurned a move towards black solidarity in the movement, and the legacies of older white activists kept this ideology from coming to the forefront. On June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976, students in the Soweto township revolted against a mass edict by the national government that students be taught half their classes in Afrikaans, the language of the oppressor. The young black students in this township rose up in protest and their activism was coupled with police brutality, police killing at least four students that day and over 1,000 more individuals later as the protest spread to other parts of the country.<sup>156</sup> Helen Suzman was in the United States that day receiving an honorary degree from Harvard University, and when she was approached by the U.S. media to comment on Soweto, she recalled "I could express only utter dismay but no surprise. After all, had we not warned over and over again that violent confrontation was inevitable unless conditions were improved in the Black Urban areas?"<sup>157</sup> When Suzman returned from South Africa she had several meetings with civic leaders from Soweto, all of whom were adults. She

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

<sup>156</sup> Lyubinskiy, "A brief history of the African National Congress".

<sup>157</sup> Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, 176.

wrote that the young Blacks in the township did not want to meet with her, and “It looked as if things had gone too far for white Liberals to play any role other than continuing to put pressure on the government to do something which might give some hope to Blacks.”<sup>158</sup> The resentment and isolation Suzman felt from young blacks was only the beginning. After Soweto, young blacks rose up in support of the Black Consciousness Movement, which called for the psychological liberation of blacks as the pre-condition for their political and economic emancipation.

According to Ambassador Rasool, white activists of the 1950s and 60s again became important at this time as debate revolved around whether to continue with the non-racialism of the Congress tradition, or turn to the racial exclusivity of Black Consciousness as a means forward in the struggle. It was because of the stories of earlier white activists and what they had sacrificed to the movement that leaders in the seventies and eighties decided to keep the movement non-racial: “By the early 80s, I think the reassertion of non-racialism was complete. The Congress tradition had re-asserted itself; the Freedom Charter again became the lone star, that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.”<sup>159</sup> Leaders began to commit to non-racialism as a way in which to both conduct the struggle and as an end to the struggle, calling for equality of the races in the future South Africa instead of one race assuming superiority over another. The ANC became what Rasool described as a “broad church in which everyone was welcome.”<sup>160</sup> It became multi-racial, multi-class, multi-ethnic, and included members from many ideologies, including liberals and communists. The UDF took a similar approach, and in the 1980s Rasool argues that the management of the struggle became a management of all of the different liberation movements. Rasool and fellow leaders of the UDF

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<sup>158</sup> Suzman , *In No Uncertain Terms*, 178.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

took an ‘omnibus’ approach to the struggle: “We said ‘let’s not worry about who is all on the bus – we want to get to the terminus of freedom, whoever wants to go further can go further, whoever wants to get off before that time can get off.’”<sup>161</sup> The leaders of the UDF knew that liberals wanted a qualified franchise where only educated and property owning blacks could vote, and so metaphorically speaking they would ‘get off the bus’ before communists who believed in one man, one vote. But for the time being, “We would say to them ‘Get on this bus, and drive as far as it is comfortable for you.’”<sup>162</sup> For leaders of the UDF, it was important to coalesce all dissent against the apartheid regime no matter where it was on the political spectrum, because in the new South Africa all races and groups would have to work together under a democratic system of government.

This creativity and collaboration scared the national government, and the police retaliated, launching “a dirty war against the ANC and its allies that made the abuses of the 1960s look mild.”<sup>163</sup> At least 49 rebels were assassinated in a decade long-campaign: the ANC’s London headquarters was bombed, and the Umkhonto headquarters in Mozambique where Joe Slovo worked were raided, police killing 13 people.<sup>164</sup> In August of 1982, Security Police intercepted a letter sent to Ruth First from the United Nations. They inserted a small bomb inside of it and sent it on to her office in Mozambique. A few days later when Ruth opened the letter she was killed instantly. Even though Ruth was out of the country, she was still a target for Security Police. Though the police were systematically assassinating activists, Umkhonto’s war of sabotage did not stop. Members of Umkhonto we Sizwe kept launching attacks on police stations and other targets of the apartheid regime, and fighting would continue until 1990, when

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/11.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 314.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 315.

the apartheid government was forced to negotiate the end of apartheid because, among other reasons, international economic sanctions crippled the economy and domestic unrest made the country ungovernable.

## Section 4: 1990- , Dismantling and Reconciliation to Present Day

### Conclusion

#### Negotiation and Reconciliation

In 1990, it became increasingly clear that the country of South Africa was in a crisis. The government begrudgingly realized the need for negotiations with the South African liberation movements for several reasons: domestic resistance had made the country ungovernable, international sanctions were crippling the economy, and the business community argued that they needed stability in order to remain in the country. In order to begin negotiations, the government had to release, un-ban, and recognize their political adversaries. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1990 Nelson Mandela was released from Robben Island. In that same month, the ban on the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress was lifted. Activists were able to return to the country legally, and now that they were back in the picture, negotiations with the national government could begin.

In 1992 negotiations hit a deadlock: the ANC wanted majority rule while the National Party wanted vetoing power. Joe Slovo proposed a compromise that ended up being the saving grace of the country: he called for a “Sunset Clause” which would be a period of power sharing that would then disappear. Commenting on his contributions to the negotiations, Nelson Mandela argued that Joe’s ideas “played a seminal role in the transition that South Africa has undergone and is still experiencing.”<sup>165</sup> Though an agreement between the negotiating groups had been reached, violence remained in the country. It seemed that a free election would take a miracle.

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994, that very miracle came to South Africa. Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa in an election where more than 19 million people voted. Sixty-two percent of the votes went to the ANC, twenty-seven percent went to the National Party, and ten

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<sup>165</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 3.

percent went to the governing party of the Qua Zulu ethnic homeland, the Inkatha Freedom Party.<sup>166</sup> Hilda and Rusty Bernstein returned to South Africa to vote in the election, and Hilda discussed the moment in her autobiography: “As I stood in a long queue to vote in the White suburb near where we used to live, I saw on that day the transformation of a country: Whites and Blacks standing in line to vote, each with one vote – equal at last under the law.”<sup>167</sup> On the day that Mandela was sworn into office, the Bernsteins sat together on the platform with him.

Few in the crowd recognized Rusty and Hilda: they had been away from South Africa for seventeen years. Though exiled activists were invited to return to South Africa, many did not return, sensing that they were forgotten, and thus would not receive the recognition they deserved. Rusty was one of the white activists who felt this way: “He knew better than anyone that society moves on and personal histories fade quickly. Still, at times he felt the pangs of his own obscurity.”<sup>168</sup> But that on that day, they were not forgotten: Mandela’s speech called South Africa a “rainbow nation”, and he dedicated the day “to all the heroes and heroines in this country and the rest of the world who sacrificed in many ways and surrendered their lives so that we could be free.”<sup>169</sup> On stage watching Mandela, Hilda felt enormously proud of him and of all of her comrades. They had finally won their struggle.

How have white anti-apartheid activists’ visions been fulfilled? Have they been fulfilled at all? As a nation re-born on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994, South Africa has been free and democratic for over sixteen years. Speaking on South Africa today, *Kaffir Boy* author Mark Mathabane argues that the country is far from perfect. Mathabane stated that at present, country is plagued with

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<sup>166</sup> Robert Vinson, “*Miracle of South Africa*”, In-class lecture, 12/1/09.

<sup>167</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 386.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 322.

“economic refugees, AIDS orphans, abuse and complications of emasculation.”<sup>170</sup> Though the country is far from perfect, it has only been democratic for sixteen years and still needs room to grow. In an interview with television news reporter Riz Khan in 2007, Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool commented on the state of the country: “I think it’s impossible to overturn a 300 year situation in 13 years. But I think that we know we are alive in South Africa, and we know we are on the right path because we struggle with the things others tend to deny, sweep under the carpet, or suppress.”<sup>171</sup> According to Rasool, the white activists of the 1950s and 1960s may have been disappointed with the state of the country. They would be “somewhat perturbed” that poverty still persists in the extent that it does in South Africa, yet they would understand, Rasool argues, that it comes from the remains of the pernicious education system of the apartheid regime. Those activists who were communist would also have been disappointed given that they had a vision for a far more socialist society. However, Rasool contests that “I think they would have been fairly happy to see that we have corrected the contradictions of socialism by inducing a far greater sense of democracy, participation, freedoms and rights within our social makeup.”<sup>172</sup> Other liberal activists such as Helen Suzman may have been happier with the political system of the country, given that they did not vouch for socialism.

Throughout the trials and tribulations of the 1950s and 1960s, white anti-apartheid activists rose to the call of duty and took a stand against injustice, taking a stance that others refused to take. They threw themselves into the fire, serving jail sentences, going underground, and suffering great hardship as they separated from their families and friends. When imprisoned and exiled by the national government, they soldiered on, more resilient than ever. These activists provided an invaluable service to their country and to their fellow citizens of Africa, and

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<sup>170</sup> Mark Mathabane, In-class lecture, 11/18/10

<sup>171</sup> Ebrahim Rasool, *Riz Khan Interview with South Africa’s Ebrahim Rasool*, 10/25/2007

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, 4/10/2011.

many of their lives were forsaken for the cause. But above all, they achieved their aim: a free and democratic South Africa equal to all.

## Epilogue

### The Children of a Movement

*“To this book I dedicate my beloved wife Betty and to our children,  
whose understanding and whose sacrifices made it possible for me to do my work.”*  
-Malcom X, *The Autobiography of Malcom X*

A historical account of white anti-apartheid activists in South Africa could not be complete without telling the story of their children, whose lives were forcibly altered without their consent. This phenomenon is universal, felt by any child whose parents have been heavily involved in a social movement. The experience of these children in particular, however, was heightened by the context of their world. At home, they were often neglected – left in the dark by parents who genuinely cared but were engrossed in the struggle. At school, they encountered other white children with unrestrained tongues and parents who made their racist beliefs known. Ultimately, activism affected the children of families differently. Some strove to be a supportive anchor for their parents and followed in their footsteps; others were entirely resentful of their parents and completely shut off, while others still were too young to comprehend. In the end, these children grew into adults who wrote about and appreciated their parents’ involvements, maintaining the legacies of activists long after they were gone.

Joe Slovo and Ruth First had three daughters named Shawn, Gillian and Robyn. Having children, Joe wrote, was “Part of the flow of the ‘normal’ stream of our lives. But in retrospect we came to understand the divide between the rhythm of family life and the tempo of political activism in illegal conditions was certainly more problematic than it seemed at the time.”<sup>173</sup> Slovo made a valiant effort at chronicling his children’s reality in his autobiography, arguing that the children lived in two different worlds. Outside their home, the children experienced the racist

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<sup>173</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 110.

white world that ostracized communists like their parents. At home, the children experienced an altogether different kind of world where the color line was of no concern. This duality must have been difficult for the Slovo children to understand. Ultimately, Slovo realized the inadequacy his children must have felt as their parents constantly went away: “Our arrests and frequent absences must have seemed, in the eyes of our children, acts of voluntary preference; they must have felt that they came a poor second to the cause.”<sup>174</sup> Acknowledging all of this about his children, he asked himself a difficult question: “Were we morally entitled to have a family? And, having become a family, did we have the right to include our children in the sacrifice for a cause which had meaning only in our understanding?”<sup>175</sup> The answer, Slovo argues, is not simple, but one thing is clear: “The world would be a poorer place if it was peopled by children whose parents risked nothing in the cause of social justice, for fear of personal loss.”<sup>176</sup> White activists with children placed themselves in a tough predicament. Should they fight on for the cause, when it meant going to jail, exile, and underground, altogether unable to provide the adequate parenting their children needed? Many argued yes, because fighting on for the cause also meant ensuring a better South Africa for their children’s future.

Shawn and Gillian Slovo, the elder of the Slovo daughters, were old enough to comprehend what was going on in the world around them. On the morning their parents were arrested for the Treason Trial, reporters came to the house and snapped photos of Shawn, Gillian and Robyn “In their pajamas, eating cornflakes and smiling for the camera. ‘Mummy’s gone to prison to look after the black people,’ Shawn, who was six, told the press, she and her sisters clinging to a tranquil world of breakfast cereal and pajamas inside a political maelstrom.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Slovo and Dolny, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography*, 111.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia’s Children*, 66.

Both Shawn and Gillian took to the arts to share their story, perhaps as a way to cope with the complicated feelings of their childhood. Shawn wrote the screenplay for the film *A World Apart* which was filmed in Zimbabwe and released in 1988. The title not only signifies the great gulf in the lifestyles of whites and blacks in South Africa, but also signifies the gulf that existed between mother and daughter as well. Her mother had been emotionally and physically absent during parts of her childhood – keeping important information such as her father’s whereabouts away from her and serving a prolonged sentence in prison. In 1989, Shawn won the award for best screenplay from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

In 1997 Gillian released a memoir of her childhood and the lives of her parents entitled *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*. In an interview for her latest novel, *Wild Orchids*, Gillian candidly shared her perspective on her childhood, stating that she lived a “schizophrenic kind of existence.”<sup>178</sup> Gillian said that she felt a sense of relief in leaving South Africa, since in the country she often felt abandoned by her family: “My father had disappeared, my Mother was in prison, my Grandma was continually going between prison and home and my Grandfather also disappeared. And the first time I knew he had gone was [when] I saw a ‘Wanted’ advert in the papers.”<sup>179</sup> At the end of her memoir, Gillian and her sisters are visited by Nelson Mandela hours after their father’s death and he shares with them how one day when he had gone to hug his daughter she had flinched away from him and burst out, “You are the father to all our people, but you have never had the time to be a father to me.”<sup>180</sup> Mandela told the girls that this had been his greatest regret: that his children, and the children of his comrades, had been the ones to pay

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<sup>178</sup> Gillian Slovo, On-line Bookcast interview. 1/12/09.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Book Review, *Every Secret Thing*. *The New York Times*.

[http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/25/reviews/970525.25geigert.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/25/reviews/970525.25geigert.html?_r=2)

the price of their parents' commitment. Mandela had known just what to say to the Slovo girls, and his comment was in reverence to their experiences.

Denis Goldberg's memoir paints a painful picture of his twenty-two year separation from his children. He writes, "One of the lessons I have drawn is that freedom struggles have their price and it is children who seem to pay it."<sup>181</sup> After his release from prison, Denis had to attempt to get to know his family again. His first-born Hilly, "said that I was her hero and she loved me but she also hated me because if grownups want to get involved in politics as I did, then I should not have got [sic] married and had children."<sup>182</sup> Goldberg's younger child, his son David, was not as forthcoming with his feelings as Hilly. After a few days together, David asked him "Why did you do what you did that took you away from us for so long?"<sup>183</sup> In his response, Denis told him that he had a duty to the millions of fatherless children in South Africa, and that he did not know how to make his children more important than all of the other children of the country. "I looked over at him and saw in my grown up 28-year old son the sad little six year old crying his eyes out."<sup>184</sup> Underlying Denis' interactions with his children in autobiography is a separation which is easy to detect: the separation of a father who had been taken from his children for twenty two years and who as a result barely knew them.

Hilda and Rusty Bernstein had four children: Toni, Patrick, Frances, and Keith, who all took their parents' activism differently. Toni was the oldest child and incredibly responsible while at the same time insurmountably influenced by her parents. She had the attitude of an activist and could not be defeated. This was especially evident one night when Toni was home from college and invited two of her friends over. She had invited them before Rusty was issued

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<sup>181</sup> Goldberg, *The Mission*, 252.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

his house-arrest notice, and his status made for an awkward dinner, where Rusty sat with the other children in the kitchen while Hilda sat in the front room with Toni and her guests. In an attempt to catch Rusty in violation of his orders, the Special Branch arrived at the house. Hilda recalled that the police were aggressive, intimidating and rude, demanding the identity cards of Toni's guests. The Special Branch questioned Toni, lecturing her that they were not allowed to receive house guests, which resulted in a heated argument: "I'm not under house arrest – you haven't served me with any notices prohibiting me from having visitors.' 'Your father is under house arrest. He is not permitted to have visitors.' 'That's right. These are my visitors, not his.' 'They are not allowed here.'"<sup>185</sup> Toni thought their argument was ridiculous and took action, launching a campaign for the right of children of persons under house arrests to receive guests. Toni took to the press, phoning reporters she knew and giving them the story by issuing several statements, including: "It would be hard to make the little ones understand why they couldn't ask friends to come home with them. But however it affects our lives, we are proud of our father and will put up with all the hardships and sacrifices."<sup>186</sup> At the end of the week, Vorster issued a statement that the children of parents who had been placed under house arrest were not banned from receiving guests, and Toni won her battle. During the Rivonia trial, Toni was extremely supportive of her parents and agreed to stay with the children while Hilda traveled to and from court. Even though she was a newlywed, she told Hilda that she and her husband would move in with them as long as Rusty remained in jail. Hilda was hesitant to agree, but ultimately conceded, realizing that she needed the help and company. Toni was a model child for her parents, taking after their activism and remaining steadfastly supportive.

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<sup>185</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 39.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Patrick, however, was quite opposite. Toni's younger brother, Patrick was in his early teenage years during the Rivonia trial and got lost in the family shuffle. Instead of going to school, Patrick would sneak off behind the house where he would smoke cigarettes, climb trees, and generally amuse himself. The trial took up everyone's attention and no one seemed to notice that he was skipping school. Patrick later came up with the idea to go to boarding school in Swaziland four hours from home at the Waterford School, and Hilda felt relieved. Though she cared about him deeply, she did not know exactly how to reach out to him. Rusty was for the most part in the dark about the details of Patrick's unhappiness: "Rusty knew few of the details of Patrick's unhappy life, but he knew the broad outlines and he felt his imprisonment was partly to blame. The trial had added to Patrick's anxiety, and at the same time had removed Rusty from the possibility of being home to help put things right."<sup>187</sup> At boarding school, Patrick had a hard time adjusting and drifted into an even deeper state of depression. When he found out his parents had fled South Africa, he grew incredibly resentful as no one had told him. Feeling angry, resentful and totally isolated Patrick decided to do something drastic: "When he had arrived, the school's headmaster had taken his passport and locked it away in the office. But that did not stop Patrick. As his parents had done in Johannesburg, he carefully planned his escape."<sup>188</sup> Patrick's sense of isolation and resentment remained with him for many years after that day.

The Bernstein's youngest child, Keith, was too young to comprehend what was going on unlike his older siblings. When Rusty returned home to pack his things after his arrest at Rivonia, Keith was home and silently observed. Rusty packed a bag with a change of clothes, pajamas, and toilet articles. When he tried to pack a book the supervising police sergeant intervened, and said books were not allowed. After they left, Hilda remembered Keith's reaction: "He asks for a

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<sup>187</sup> Frankel, *Rivonia's Children*, 233.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

pencil and paper, and prints awkwardly in his left-handed writing a letter which he asks me to send to Rusty. *Dear Dad, If they won't give you any books to read let me know and I will send you some, love Keith.*"<sup>189</sup> Hilda took the letter and kept it, unable to tell her son that Rusty was could not receive letters. Keith's actions were those of a child who was too young to comprehend the severity of the situation.

The stories of their children change the histories of white activists. They are no longer politicians and revolutionaries – they are mothers and fathers with cares and compassions – humanized political beings. They made difficult decisions in regard to movement and their children every day. They often had to keep their children uninformed of their whereabouts, and sometimes had to altogether leave their children for jail or exile. However, whatever choices they made, they constantly had their children in mind. They were fighting for a better country for them to live in. Their children have since grown and shared the stories of their parents, maintaining their legacy. More than anything, these white activists should be proud – not only because they helped form a free and democratic South Africa – but also because they raised children who became socially conscious adults with real and honest values.

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<sup>189</sup> Bernstein, *The World That Was Ours*, 74.

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