

Interview: Ester Barsel

A moved to SA when I was six months old and my mother and I joined him in 1927.

My father built a farm store in the Middleberg Bethel area and we lived there for eight years. Most of the farmers in the area were Nats and violently anti Semitic. We were ostracised and isolated by the community. I was particularly lonely as I am an only child and the children at the farm school were very unfriendly and always made snide remarks about the Jews.

When I went to boarding school in Middelberg life was no easier as I was accused of killing Christ. I contracted rheumatic fever at the school and spent about six months at home without medical attention.

In 1935 my father sold his business and we came to Joberg. I joined various Zionist organisations, mainly for social contact. I seem to fit in best in the Huche Meir a party which is left of the Zionist socialists.

When I was in high school a friend invited me to the Left Club and loose association of left wingers. There I realised that Zionsim was not the B all and end all of life and that there was a struggle going on in this country. For the first time in my life I met people of colour on an equal level. It took me some time to grasp the significance of what I was experiencing and I needed to know more.

I started attending political classes and was soon recruited into the Young Communist League. I found study classes difficult and I learnt very slowly but I became more and more convinced that I had to become involved in the liberation struggle here, but I wanted to work for freedom for all our people white and black.

Apart from YCR meetings about twice a week I sold Ikululeko and The Guardian to blacks. I noticed that most members were actively involved in trade unions. I wanted to work for the movement full time.

I started working for the Friends of the Soviet Union where I met Hymie whom I later married. Here my work was predominantly amongst whites; I learnt a great deal about the Soviet Union, what lead to the revolution, the revolution itself and the struggles of the young Soviet state trying to build socialism. I was also filled with admiration for their

A courageous struggle against fascism.

On a personal level some members of my father's family were killed in the Ukraine and my mother's family in Lithuania were entirely wiped out in the holocaust.

By this time I had joined the Communist Party and became involved in its activities. I particularly like working in election campaigns as it gave me an opportunity of speaking to the whites. The greatest campaign that I recall was when Hilda Watts was elected to the Joberg City Council in Hillbrow.

Our eldest daughter was born in 1948 and our second daughter in 1951. For a few years I was inactive politically. In 1948 the Nats came to power and sent shock waves through the movement. The CP SA dissolved itself and was officially banned in 1950. I was not listed at that time.

The Springbok Legion was a very active servicemens organisation which continued for several years after the war. By 1952 it no longer had popular support. It was decided to call a meeting of democrats; there was no unanimity at this meeting and two new organisations were formed. The Liberal Party and Congress of Democrats. I joined the COD.

The ANC welcomed the formation of COD and gave us their full support. We were to work amongst whites to popularise the liberation struggle. This was not easy. Although our membership was small I feel we certainly made an impact and gained many friends for the Congress movement. We knocked on doors, sold literature, held house meetings and public meetings and raised funds by donations and social functions.

The Peace Council was formed about the same time and drew its strength mainly from the Congress movement. Each of the congresses had representatives on the Peace Council. They distributed their literature, attended their public meetings and participated in all their campaigns. We helped to man tables during the various signature campaigns.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament inextricably linked to our struggle for liberation. Invariably at our meetings we invited a speaker from the Peace Council. We sought a peaceful solution to our problems but violence was constantly used by the police against our people.

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A formed and coordinated their activities through a consultative committee. It consisted of the ANC, Natal Indian Congress, or rather the SAIC, COD and SA Coloured peoples Organisation and was later joined by the SACTU.

We started ~~campaigning~~ ^{planning} for our first major campaign, Congress of the People. The idea of a Freedom Charter, our own declaration of human rights caught the imagination of the people. For the first time the man in the street was asked what kind of society he or she wanted. Volunteers went out in urban and rural areas to explain the campaign and to collect demands. The response was overwhelming and drew many new recruits to Congress, particularly in remote rural areas where people had never heard of the Congress before.

In COD it gave us an added reason for working amongst whites. Consultative committee had drawn up a series of lecture notes about the world we live in and many house meetings were organised to discuss these notes. SACTU had recently been formed and many of us spoke to groups of workers at SACTU offices. They in turn spoke to other groups of workers and to people in the townships. Everyone was speaking about Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter.

We in COD served on various sub committees; we helped volunteers with transport to rural areas, we helped to produce and disseminate literature material and we helped to raise funds for the campaign.

The Congress of the People at Kliptown on the 25th and 26th of June, 1955 was the culmination of many months of hard work. Delegation after delegation arrived, holding banners aloft, wearing colourful dresses and shirts and singing freedom songs. For me a note of sadness was that so many comrades were banned and restricted and could not attend this gathering. I knew they had worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make it the tremendous success it was.

After the opening address speakers dealt with each clause of the Charter which was debated and adopted. For the next year the Charter was discussed by the movement and a year later another meeting was held at Kliptown when the Charter was ratified.

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A and I am trully delighted that it has surfaced again. It has been widely debated this year with many people saying it does not go far enough. On the whole I think it has been accepted by the liberation movement as a guideline for the future SA. I do not think it is either a socialist or a communist document, it is a document of elementary human rights and a minimum program for national liberation.

In December 1956 Hymie and 155 others were charged with high treason. Our children wer e then ~~xx~~ eight, five and eight months. Until his acquittal towards the end of 1958 life was pretty tough for our family. and no doubt the beginning of fear and insecurity fo~~ur~~r our children.

In December 1959 I attended a meeting of consultative committee in Grou~~ntville~~ the house of Chief Lutuli who was restriced to that area. It was decided that on the 26th June, 1960 Congress would embark on a campaign of civil disobedience. That leading members of the ANC would burn their passes and present themselves to police stations for arrest.

The Pan African Congress heard about the Campaign, took it over and put the date forward by three months. The result was Sharpville, and a declaration of a state of emergency.

The emergency threw the movement into disarray. Many comrades fled to Swaziland, many were in hiding and many were more were detained. When Dr. Verwoerd was shot our children went to live with my inlaws and Hymie and I went into hiding. I stopped working and devoted all my time to the movement, mainly the SACP. I cannot recall ever working as hard as I did during those five months. We hardly saw our children.

It took time to regroup and make contact with people who were in hiding. Gradually the machinery started functioning again, although our forces were severly depleted. I had to keep contact with small groups of people or see people individually. Leaflets and pamphlets had to be produced secretly and taken to various groups for distribution.

We managed to hold a national conference of the CP and its most imprtant decision was to emerge openly. We announced our existance in an illegal leaflet. We were pleased that the media published this news.

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A never banned the government banned its officials which virtually rendered these organisations impotent.

The Rivonia Trial in 1963 further weakened the movement. Looking back on 1960, as far as the struggle is concerned I don't think the emergency really ended. Oppressive laws became harsher and very little illegal and very little legal activity took place.

I think it was only in the 80s when the liberation organisations started functioning again legally. The formation of the United Democratic Front played a most important role in its revival. JODAC too filled a vital gap and has made an impact among white.

On the 3rd of July 1964 Hymie and I were detained under the 90day law and our children were again cared for by my inlaws. For them the next four years were very traumatic and the full extent of this psychological harm only surfaced many years later. All three of them were scarred and our youngest daughter is still having treatment today.

Many of their friends rejected them and they told us when they walked into a room people would whisper among themselves. Solitary confinement for me was compounded by the fact that Hymie was in as well and interrogators tried to play one off against the other. The interrogation sessions were not difficult to cope with. I made up my mind not to answer questions and since I was not subjected to physical torture it was relatively easy to keep silent.

After six days the women who were in single cells but could communicate started a hunger strike. We demanded to be charged or released. We were immediately moved to various police stations and jails. And then I was truly in solitary. I was on hunger strike for 35 days and then became scared of the long term effects as I already had a heart complaint as a result of rheumatic fever. The doctor who examined me added to my fear. Somehow solitary and interrogations were easier to bear during my hunger strike. When I stopped I became very depressed.

In the Fisher trial Hymie was acquitted and I was sentenced to three years hard labour. I was moved to Barberton, a maximum security jail. I suppose for white women our conditions were pretty grim. We were classified as D prisoners, one visit and one letter every six months.

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A At first we were virtually in solitary. No communication day or night and watched by wardresses at all times. They thought it was a lowest touch to give us African mens washing to do; hard canvas jackets, shorts full of blood and pus and smelly shirts. After a few days our hands were sore and bleeding.

We were given a starvation diet until we decided to strike and demanded to see the commanding officer. We all marched into his office with our plates of food; he was apparently not aware of this treatment and ordered that our rations be increased. We fought many battles with the prison authorities. We won some and lost others. We were very isolated in Barbeton.

Helen Suzman visited the men in Pretoria Central and their conditions improved. But she never came to us unfortunatly. We battled on alone and gradually our conditions did improve. Being able to study made an enormous difference to our lives. The authorities relaxed when they realised we were just ordinary people and not the dangerous criminals they were lead to believe.

We discussed our lectures with each other, helped each other with assignments, held art classes, made gifts for birthdays and about the last year, except for the fact that we were locked up, lead fairly normal lives.

While in jail I was served with two listings, one as a member of the SACP and one as a member of the COD. I also received a letter advising me that I had been taken off the voters role. I came out of jail in 1968 and was put under 12 hours house arrest for five years.

The lisitngs prohibit me from joining any organisation which criticises the government and from ^{being} quoted.

End of tape.

S1 during the emergency...

Q He was...was (Verwoerd)

S2 He was shot twice. He was shot twice. The first time he was shot he wasn't killed.



Q And that is when you went underground?

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S2 Yes.

Q Was that because of the state of emergency and then when he..why did you say when get shot?

S2 My family panicked. Hymie's family panicked when he was shot and they actually thought that one of our people had done it. And they decided that it was time to move the children away and it actually suited us for them to do so coz we then went underground coz we had heard that thay might be looking for us.

S1 ...wasn't during the emergency..

S2 Whether that was..

Q Who shot him, the whole thing..It wasn't St^{af}hendous, that was the one who killed him, right it was..

S1 Was at the Rand Agricultural Show (Yes I can't remember who shot him)

Q I'll find out. (S2Yes you will) But it was just...what was it...(S1 Survived) So did that kind of indicate the level of the family, that they knew nothing about what you were involved in and..?

S2 Well they knew that we were involved and as I say they thought that one of our people, W~~o~~lfy Kod~~e~~sh had shot him. Have you heard of W~~o~~lfy Kodish?

S1 Somebody thought I shot him.

S2 Yes, and they panicked and they said they wanted to take the children away.

Q And you didn't even try to explain anything; it suited you?

S2 Well, it did, yes.

Q And why did it suit you?

S2 Because we then went underground.

Q And whatdid that mean to go underground?

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S2 That meant moving away from the house and living somewhere else where we were not known. It would be easy enough for the police to knock on the door and pick us up, whereas if we weren't here it would be much more difficult, to find us.

S1 It would be easier in your case coz you were...

S2 Yes, because I stopped working.

S1 I was working so they didn't pick me up here, they picked me up at work.

Q And so you just kept going to work?

S1 Ja.

Q And did anyone, did you act any different or how did you...

S1 Well, I thought the whole thing was somewhat stupid because if they didn't pick me up here I was like a sitting duck at work. But nevertheless I, well I went and like others did I didn't sleep at home.

Now on one occasion I believe they did come and look for us but they never came back.

Q And was it difficult to find another place to stay? You don't have to implicate anyone specifically but was it in a white suburb?

S1 It was in a white suburb in both cases.

Q Which both cases?

S1 I slept at two places, one of them not far from here and one in a different suburb altogether. Ester was also slept at two different places.

Q You didn't stay together?

S1 Only at the one place, yes we did stay together. The first place; at the second place we didn't.

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And were you nervous - I mean the whole idea of going underground, did

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Q that meant that you looked over your shoulder all the time or?

S1 I don't think so. We'd accepted it, if we had to go in we had to go in, there was nothing more to it. But we had hoped that seeing we weren't taken in the first lot, that we wouldn't be taken at all.

At the emergency I think they went for all listed communists, neither of us were listed so we thought...

Q And did people make comments at work? Did they...I mean you said somebody thought that you shot Verwoerd?

S1 No comment at work.

Q Did people at work not know anything about you politically?

S1 Oh yes, they knew very much about it. Look I was involved in the Treason Trial so they certainly knew about it.

Q Let me continue asking Ester; just in that, so you stopped working. You'd decided that it would be more useful for you to, I mean what was that decision to stop working and devote yourself to politics? Did you caucus that with other people or?

S2 Well, look there was so many people either in hiding or out of the country or in detention that our forces were so depleted and they had to make use of whatever was left and I was one of them left.

Q Did you feel like you were kind of straining?

S2 Oh yes, yes, I did. I mean, I was never in leadership level at any time and here I was really thrust into it through circumstances and I just had to make the best of it. There were a tremendous amount of work to do and those who were left just had to do it.

Q And how old were your kids at that time?

S2 In 1960, 12, 9 and 4.

Q And what did you say to them? How did you explain that you were going

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Q to quit your job and live out of the house and they were going somewhere else?

S1 May I interrupt you, Ester was working on a commission job, it wasn't a fixed job where she got a monthly salary so she could just drop it.

S2 Yes, in fact I was working for my brother in law so it was even easier.

Q But ~~what~~ did you tell the kids?

S2 We told them that things were difficult at the moment and that they were going to live with Hymie's family and that as soon as things calmed down a bit we would all be together again. It was difficult, very difficult to explain things to them. They really weren't old enough to understand properly what was going on.

Q Did you not see them then?

S2 Ja, we saw them during the day, I would go up and see them but as I said I didn't see very much of them and...

Q And ~~what~~ did it mean, this is what I was trying to get at going underground- it meant that you lived somewhere else.

S2 It meant not living at home really but basically that was what it meant.

Q You didn't disguise yourself or anything?

S2 I didn't but others did, quite a few other people ~~did~~ and in fact my in laws even supplied ~~us~~ us with a place to live which was very nice of them. It didn't mean disguising but as I say many many people did use disguises.

Q And then in terms of what, what did you hope to accomplish? I mean again just saying what you want to say about, but I think it is quite useful, it was a very difficult choice to make, but what were you trying to do?

S2 Well, the thing is that not living at home gave me an opportunity of keeping stuff where I was living, not being afraid that the police would raid and find stuff. It meant it was easier to keep in touch

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S2 with other people coz I wasn't living, I wasn't leaving from home which means that I couldn't be followed.

Q And stuff meant what?

S2 Material, lists of things, propoganda material, all that sort of thing. We had to have, we had to keep it somewhere safe.

Q At that time was there, this was before the MK was formed?

S2 Yes.

Q So again I have asked all kind of details of what it meant to go under ground but what did it mean in terms of organising? You went and you contacted, I just don't have a sense of what you were doing there just in general terms?

S2 Oh in general terms, first of all we had to get together the people who were still around. We had to make contact with them and it meant that there were far fewer people around and when leaflets were produced the people who were left had to do all that sort of work, they had to produce leaflets, they had to run them off and they had to distribute them. And so somebody had to do that work, somebody had to keep in touch with the various groups that were still around which meant attending meetings - those who were not in groups, those who were around singly, had to be contacted singly.

Q What do you mean not in groups?

S2 Well, groups were people of about four people. Alright.

Q Who lived together or?

S2 No, no, who were in a group, right who were perhaps functioning in groups before the emergency. So perhaps one of them had been arrested so the group was only three people or if three of them were arrested only one person remained. So that person had to be contacted individually so that they could carry on the work of the organisation.

Q And were you the one who did the work of going around and contacting people?

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S2 I did a lot of that sort of thing. I certainly wasn't the only one but I was one of the people who had to do it in the white areas.

Q So were you only dealing with whites?

S2 No, I was only dealing with whites as far as contact was concerned. But on our committees it was multi racial, we all got together wherever it was practical; it wasn't always practical for blacks and whites to meet. I mean at the national conference for instance, it was all racial groups and that was quite something to organise during a state of emergency.

Q When was it held?

S2 In 1960 during the emergency.

Q And where was it held?

S2 In Joberg.

Q Was it in a private house? Or was it in, were there numbers, just talk about was it numbers of people or...

S2 It was numbers of people, yes.

Q But it wasn't in a public hall or..

S2 No, no, public meetings were banned. It had to be organised very, very quietly with the utmost security.

S1 In any event the party was illegal. (S2 Yes) It couldn't have a meeting even if it wanted to.

Q The SACP was banned.

S2 1950, ten years before.

Q Ja, right.

S2 So that even before the emergency we met illegally but it became more difficult during the emergency with our ranks so depleted.

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Q Now what do you...so was the national conference held in a white area in Joberg?

S2 Does it matter?

Q Well, I guess I am just interested in the multi racial aspect but was it if there is anything you could say about being a white whether it was what the difficulties were of getting something like that going. I mean I will leave it to you what you could say but if there is anything useful you could say about that aspect of the blacks and whites working together despite all constraints?

S2 Well, we met together only when necessary. We basically worked in our own areas but whenever it was necessary all the groups came together.

Q Did you feel a certain satisfaction pulling off the national conference. I mean did you worry that it might be invaded, the police might come along?

S2 Yes, it was a worrying time because people came from the whole of SA. And security had to be very tight. It was quite a major achievement I think under those circumstances.

S1 Fantastic under those circumstances.

S2 It was difficult to work out of an emergency but during an emergency it certainly was very, very difficult.

Q And I wrote down here illegal leaflet, did you; it was something you said on the tape.

S2 Yes. Well, we produced leaflets and propaganda material during that period; I didn't write any of them but I had to help in duplicating and disseminating. That meant that leaflets had to be taken from a central point where it was duplicated to the various groups and individuals who were going to distribute it.

Q And what kind of things were you saying? What was the point of making that with all the effort it took to get that propaganda out what were you trying to get across?

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S2 Well, we explained to people A, what the emergency was all about, and the propaganda was basically Congress propaganda, really but we felt that it, at a time like that, it was necessary to get to people and to explain to them what it was all about. The media, the legal media, couldn't or wouldn't publish that sort of information and we found it necessary to do so ourselves. You know the ANC brought out leaflets too. COD was reasonably active during those times.

Obviously it was also disrupted by arrests and people who had to leave the country and people who went into hiding but it did function during that period. They did meet.

Q You didn't work with COD...

S2 I did work with COD but not as much as I would have like to ~~xxx~~ and not as much as I did before or after the emergency.

Q And how long was the emergency then?

S2 That was five months.

Q So when it was lifted was there much change for you?

S2 Well, in fact before the emergency was lifted we felt fairly secure that they weren't really looking for us so we moved back home and our children came back to the house. So by the time the emergency ended family life had sort of returned to reasonable normal...

Q So that was still 1960 then can you just tell me about the period from 1960 to 64, what happened, kind of things were you doing?

S2 Well, after the emergency I became less involved in the CP and more involved in COD.

Q Why was that?

S2 Because a lot of people, the people had been released from the emergency; people who'd gone to Swaziland came back; people who were underground surfaced again and so virtually we had our full compliment back again and it wasn't so necessary for me to be so involved.

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Q But Couldn't you have been involved, I don't understand why it..some people would say that might have been a time for you to get involved, if it was more easy to operate?

S2 My work before the emergency was predominantly in COD and so I just went back to that work.

Q But why the emphasis during the emergency on the CP, Party work?

S1 Ester already mentioned the ranks were thoroughly depleted and whoever was around was then utilised.

Q Right but why in party instead of COD work?

S2 Because I think that as far as the party was concerned their ranks were far more depleted than in COD. They went basically for listed communists in the white communities certainly and a lot, I mean they just picked up all listed people or nearly everybody who was listed and they could pick up, they picked up. And the listed people at that time were listed communists so that in fact it was the CP ranks that were depleted most of all.

Q And what did you do until 64, what kind of work did you do with COD?

S2 Back to what we did before, the same sort of work. We carried on with our leaflets, and working in white areas and holding meetings and so on, discussion groups and wherever possible we consulted with the other congresses. We worked with them wherever we could. Whatever campaigns were run by the other congresses we popularised them in the white areas. But it was very hard work from 1960 onwards, it was very difficult because as I said it was basically still a state of emergency; it was very difficult to work.

Q Even after the emergency was lifted?

S2 Oh yes.

Q All you talked about trying to reach the general white community did you at any point feel like this is just hopeless?

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S2 work amongst whites and this is why I was so delighted when JODAC was formed. I think JODAC has made an impact. They get a lot of people to their meetings and although their numbers are not big, they are certainly bigger than COD were and they have what I consider to be friends of JODAC or friends of the movement. When they have a public meeting they have a pretty crowded hall, which I think is very good. It is terribly important when you're striving for a non racial society for other groups to know what is happening.

Q And what were the attitudes of the whites? I mean you'd had the state of emergency, I can imagine the government must have put across its point of view quite strongly, did you feel that, can you tell me anything about white attitudes you encountered when you got back to circulation?

S2 Yes, it was more difficult to work amongst whites then than it was before. It certainly was. But we still had quite a few people we could go to and we tried to broaden our base. We would go to one person who was sympathetic and we would ask that person to call a group of friends together and in that way we widened the circle. We didn't widen our membership or broaden our membership but we broadened our influence.

Some people who might have perhaps started off by being anti the movement, to some extent we neutralised them in their opinions.

Q Just one last thing about the underground period. Did you get any sense of how it was for a white as compared to a black, I mean did you ever compare notes with blacks about what being underground meant for them?

S2 It was far easier for blacks to be underground, quite obviously because they could be absorbed in the community far easier than we could. We stood out like sore thumbs and it was quite difficult.

Because generally speaking of course our ideas were not accepted by whites.

Q I was just wondering if there were any experiences you had that could illustrate that; did you have any encounters with whites or did you get any of their opinions about during that post 60 period? (S2 How do you mean?) I mean in terms of any thing you could tell me that happened to you vis a vis other whites or to the kids or anything like

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Q When you say there were anti I don't know concretely what they were saying- I mean did they actually say anything to you?

S2 Well, in a lot of places we were certainly kicked out but..when we went door to door knocking, we were physically kicked out. A lot of other people were prepared to listen to us but I must tell you that I think there was a tremendous fear amongst whites of being associated at all with the left and a fear of being on lists; a fear of being openly associated and this is why I call them friends of the movement, not actual members.

On the other hand a lot of young people became interested in the movement. It took a long time for them to actually form something concretely. I mean we in COD also had quite a lot of young people and when COD was banned there were/was no political home for them and so for many years no work was done at all amongst whites.

Q You know what I should ask either of you to answer is I mean quite obvious but you haven't said it in your own words, I mean you went from that period of the Soviet Union friends, and the war time allies, and you didn't talk about the shift in the 50s. I mean what was the fear of communism like, what was the propaganda like in the 50s and 60s? I mean how did it go from the war time ally to you know what was the peoples' fear?

S2 Well, first of all it started with the Cold War where the allies started turning against the Soviet Union and of course it filtered through to SA quite naturally and the propaganda was very, very strong against the Soviet Union from being our glorious ally they suddenly became our bitterest enemy.

S1 Then of course you remember what happened in 1948, the Nats came to power and the Nats were openly a fascist kick, there was no doubt about that. They didn't mince matters at all in 1948, in fact if you go back a few years earlier a very large number of them were still in German camps for pro Nazi activities and that was the situation you found, with them in power and we the underdogs. In fact you had the situation reversed in a matter of three or four years and from then onwards it could only get worse and worse and worse.

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S1 to get stronger all the time, without doing something about in the early years, so they lost whatever they had and repression became worse and worse and worse all the time.

I know it only too well because I've felt it in a perfectly legal organisation that the blessing only a few years earlier of general Smuts ..

Q Can I just ask you...Then I guess even though I could go and get more and more details would you go on, the 64 detention. Was that a shock, surprise or did you just think one day it would happen or how did that happen? Coz you said you didn't do that much, you went to COD, COD was never banned?

S2 Cod was banned in '64 or 65. No, no, 64 in fact the year of our trial. Yes it was banned in 64.

Q Oh so it wasn't banned from 60 to 64?

S2 No.

Q So how did it happen that you got detained? Can you tell me about that?

S2 I was detained because of my communist party membership.

Q But I mean because you had continued to work?

S2 Well, somebody had infiltrated the CP and it lead to a whole series of arrests.

Q Was that anybody who was a well known person or that a...

S2 Gerald Ludin.

S1 But he didn't affect you.

S2 No but it was because of him that I was detained as well. Directly because he knew of an area meeting of the CP, every body who was at that meeting was detained with several others.

S1 Piet Beylerveld it was who were..

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S2 Now, well Piet was detained, I mean he gave evidence against me but

Q So how do you spell Loodie?

S2 Gerald Ludi.

Q And what kind of person was he?

S2 He was a police informer.

Q But I mean was he..

S2 He infiltrated the CP.

S1 He infiltrated the CP; he infiltrated in quite a lot of places.

Q Was he, I mean Beleveld just couldn't stand the detention and cracked in two minutes, but I mean Ludi was an actual spy?

S2 Yes, he was an actual spy.

Q Can we talk a bit about that coz I have asked a lot of people about Williamson but this was 20 years before. What sort of person was he a professional person or what did he do for a living?

S2 He was a student.

Q He was a young guy?

S2 Yes, he was a young guy.

Q And can you just tell me briefly, do you remember meeting him initially and ever thinking he was..

S2 I had very little to do with him actually. He was in the youth section of CIO and he became very friendly with the Bernstein's daughter, in fact he went to the Soviet Union on that basis and people suspected him of being a spy but somehow or another he remained in till the end.

Q Did you ever suspect him or did you not see him or..

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S2 I didn't see him much. I had very little to do with him. To me hhe was a name only.

S1 I never knew him.

Q So he came in and then was that a surprise? Just tell me were you detained in the middle of the night or how it happened?

S2 In the early hours of the morning, yes.

Q When you were sleeping at home with your kids?

S2 Yes.

Q So it wasn't a question that you'd been doing anything in particular that you had been worried about the police coming it was just that you knew what you were doing was illegal but you might have thought that you had it under control and then this happened suddenly?

S2 Well, I think had I not been involved during the emergency I may not have been arrested. I think that somehow or another starting during the emergency and getting as involved as I did/was I couldn't very easily pull out. I just went on with my activities.

Yes, I think that we both realised that one day we would be detained I mean we'd hoped that we...

S1 But not both of us.

S2 Ja, that's..Hymie's detention was a shock because he wasn't involved as I was and in fact as it later turned out Hymie was detained because of mistaken identity.

Q Did they think he was someone specific?

S2 Yes they thought he was someone else. And because they didn't know they detained him.

S1 (They) tried to prove it at the trial but of course we weren't able to but I am pretty sure of it.

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 Yes we did prove it at the trial that they mistook you for someone else.

A1 That wasn't proved. Vernon...(S2 tried to introduce that, ja) tried hard but...

Q Before we get to the trial, I asked you, I mean these are kind of, very basic questions but I think it is quite important because of all the mystique about the Party and everything. I remember I asked you what it represented when you first joined, at that stage with three kids with a country where there was evidence before your eyes every minute of what the costs were, did anyone ever try to say to you, look Ester why don't you just concentrate on the CDD and skip the Party? Did you ever think to yourself this is what could cause problems? I mean why did you continue, why did you feel it was important to work for the Party?

S2 I have asked myself that question lots and lots of times but I was committed to the Party many years earlier. And my commitment didn't change; the emphasis perhaps could have changed. I could perhaps not have been as involved as I was, that is a different matter, but my commitment remained throughout.

Q What did you feel it offered? Again, I am just, in terms of your belief in it, and the ideal. What was the ideal for you then?

S2 The ideal for me was to achieve national liberation for SA. And whether you call it CP or you call it ANC or you call it UDF, my commitment is the same. Liberation for the people of SA. This has been what I have striven for all my adult life.

S1 Actually I have been in the movement now for nearly fifty years. Let me tell you one thing, and let me assure you of it, in the forefront of every struggle, ever since I joined the movement, with the communist body, always be it from the anti fascist days, right through, may have been unpopular at times, very unpopular, may have been underground; illegal but always in the forefront is the CP. They didn't get chewed ? for anything; we didn't get it for...any ? for anything but work we did, because we knew that there was something that had to be done. And if..

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Q Pardon.

S1 You could pick them out individually, you can see the role that they played in SA's development. Oh yes.

Q Ok.

S2 You are still not happy about that?

Q No, no. I was only saying we could go on but I think that because of that I didn't want a long long answer, I am sure there is a very much longer answer but (S2Yes) Unless you want to say something more.

S2 No, I just feel that I, my earlier training and my understanding of the political situation automatically drew me towards their philosophy and that's why I supported them and it's why I worked with them and for them.

Q And did you ever have anyone try to persuade you and say to you look this is reckless or this is going to cost you trouble.

S2 Oh yes, sure, sure, my family were never happy about our involvment. And they always tried to tell us that we were going to get into trouble and is it worth it and after all we have children and we should consider them. And of course it is much harder for whites than for blacks because it is acceptable amongst blacks. They are the ones who need liberation.

But when you look at things logically whether you are white or black you have got to see the inequality and you have got to understand that the fact that the whites are ok and the blacks are not, doesn't mean that you mustn't make a commitment.

Q But that sounds a bit like a liberal idea that you are doing it for someone else? I mean do you think you were trying to achieve your own liberation, are you?

S2 Umm.

Q I mean do you feel oppressed?

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A1 No, I don't personally feel oppressed. I live in a white area. You know I am ok. But I see the inequality and I am unhappy about it; I don't like to see blacks being oppressed and I feel that blacks must be liberated.

Q Does anyone say look, you know you, you might have to give up this house and would you ever want distribution of income so that you...

S2 Doesn't worry me, not in the slightest.

Q You think that is on the cards?

S2 Fine, if it is to be that, that is fine. I do believe in an equal distribution for all people. I believe that there should be equal opportunity for everybody. I mean the fact that I am was born with a white skin, doesn't give me the right to have everything and a person born with a black skin to have nothing. All I want is equal opportunity for everybody because I feel it is everybody's birthright to have it.

Q Ok. The work before 64, that COD work, because it wasn't illegal was it open or was it still...

S2 Open, very open. All our activities were open. It doesn't mean that we weren't harassed, we were, but it was a legal organisation.

Q The Party work which was illegal, do you think that your kids in any way had suspected anything or did, not even specifically but did they see you working really hard in the evenings or anything like that? Did you have to hide things or was it pretty easy enough?

S2 Well, they knew that we were going to meetings. I certainly don't think they knew specifically that it was CP meetings.

Q No, no, but they did know you went to meetings. (S2 Yes, yes) Did you have to say anything to them to try to ^{not} speak to kids at school?

S1 We had meetings at our house.

S2 We tried at one stage to, in COD, to start something called Young Democrats, in fact this was a resolution passed at one of our national conferences and my kids started attending these meetings where they

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S2 just taught basically or shown basically that blacks and white should be friends and I think that it perhaps helped in some way to give them some sort of understanding of our views.

Q Were those meetings with black kids as well?

S2 Yes, they were. They were.

Q Did your kids enjoy going to those meetings, what were they like?

S2 They enjoyed going to the meetings but I think that they kept it from thier friends because they realised that we were different. They did enjoy them at the time.

Q The friends would have thought it was just unacceptable if its...

S2 Yes, I think so. I don't think they ever mentioned that but then there were children of friends who also went so I don't know, I think that because of their friends with other children, of people who were also involved perhaps helped them to feel not quite so different. But friends outside of the movement, I think they would probably be reluctant to mention it to.

Q Ja, I wanted to interview Sheila Wynberg but she's away.

S2 Is she still away?

Q I heard she was. You don't know.

S2 She should be back by now but I don't know.

S1 Maybe she has decided to hang on a bit longer because of ? the country, I don't know.

Q No, the people I spoke to seemed to think she ^{would} ~~was~~ still be away.

S2 She might be.

Q We'd arranged that I interview here.

S1 No, perhaps I could explain something to you which, try and understand 139

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S1 we're in now. You take the year 1942 I think it was, you get the ANC becoming a militant organisation, developing militancy; get the same thing in the TIC, you get Dadoo in the TIC, Xuma in the ANC. You get them forming this pact but in addition to that both of those organisations had joint functions with the CP; joint meetings and everything. Things that they never before had. That was the period in which I brought into the movement. And I knew right from the outset the Party supported the liberation struggle ~~that~~ all the way, no half measures, no this, no that.

S2 Because they had a common programme. They were all working for national liberation. After national liberation there could be a divergence but up to that point everybody was working for the same thing.

Q Let me ask you about that. If I put the Microphone in the middle it will be, just want to make sure I am getting what both of you are saying. What about, you know there is this..there are all these splits these days, now the people are criticising the Charter from the left, and you've got the workerists; AZAPO thinks it's the real socialist vanguard, did you have that back in the 50s from 55; did you have people who said agh this document is just mushy and it is not..(S2 No I don't think so) Is it just because to have people who are left or who are in a position to talk about it because there is this whole feeling that it is not left enough.

S1 We had I recollect, I recall, who with criticisms some people that this is a socialist document now, and it wasn't intended to be.

Q You mean it was too left...it was socialist but you are a nationalist movement?

S1 It was more of a ... ja, it leaned heavily towards socialism and really what they had in mind was two clauses only in the Charter, two clauses that they have in mind are the ' people shall share the country's wealth' and the land shall be shared among those who work it'. They claim those were socialist principles and therefore it is a socialist document. I know not so long ago the Black Sash even raised the question of the Freedom Charter and they got quite a lot of support.

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S1 harm private enterprise, that is why he was against it, for the very same reasons. Critics there were, there will always be critics of the Freedom Charter.

Q But did you find they were more from the left or from the right? When you...

S1 At the outset I would say it was from the left.

Q There was criticism from the left.

S1 From the..I would call them the ultra left.

Q And how do you feel, I am just interested because I am not talking to liberals, I am not talking to people who are trying to defend it that way. I mean from your point of view how would you defend it to someone, maybe not let's say it has to be an ultra left person, but say a fellow Party member, how would you feel about it? Do you feel that it is, that it is wishy washy in any way, that it is not strong enough?

S2 I would say that it is not strong enough. But that doesn't mean that I am not prepared to go along with it for a very long time to come. Until the national liberation is achieved. As I said before it is a minimum program for liberation, what comes afterwards is for the people to decide but at this moment in time we don't have another document as clear and concise about where we are going, than the Freedom Charter. And for my purposes it is quite adequate to work towards the achievement of the Freedom Charter.

S1 You know we look to the Freedom Charter, to us it is really a guide for the future. (S2 That's right..) That is all it is really, a guide for the future.

S2 If another document comes along and is better than the Freedom Charter I'll support it but at this moment in time I am quite happy to work for the achievement of the Charter.

Q Ja, but I must say that, I mean what about when AZAPO says we have one of these Azanian manifestos, it is truly socialist, I mean why wouldn't you support something like that?

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S2 Well, my objection to AZAPO and PAC and all these people is that it's black nationalists orientated. It wants liberation for blacks only - I cannot possibly go along with that.

S1 Nor can I. And I know that that, nevermind what they say behind everything that is their policy.

Q But it is interesting what you said there, so you are not saying you, you are saying it is for black liberation only. But again I am just asking again, but you're saying that whites need to be liberated as well? I mean if you said you live in a white area, you don't need to be liberated.

S2, Yes, no but I do believe that nationalism on one side only is a bad thing because it is going to lead from white oppression to, white oppression by blacks to black oppression by whites. I am against oppression of any form. I don't believe that that is the answer to SA's problems. I do believe that the country belongs to white and black; that we should all find a way to live amicably together.

And that liberation, the whites have a great deal to learn and the whites, those who want to stay after liberation must...

Telephone.

S1 Yes, the 70s has probably..when the Azania organisation of people organisation AZAPO, ~~then~~ threw whites out of all their meetings, they wouldn't have whites in their meetings. And no matter what they are saying now that they are trying to perhaps change a little bit, that is basic to everything that they do and everything that they say. And no one has yet been able to prove otherwise to me. In fact they have corroborated with what I have said, people who have tried to work with them. They have corroborated with what I have said.

In the same way as I won't work with white Nationalists, I won't work with black nationalists.

Q Ok, just in terms of the fact that...

S2 Wait a minute, I am not happy about this. I didn't think we have put

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S2 our point across well or has Hymie, about why I don't support the AZAPO document and I do support the Freedom Charter.

Q No I think that that I understand. (S2 Doyou?) But the only thing, that why the nationalist aspect of it and the reactionary aspects of nationalism and how inherently so and that is documented in the..many people express that point of view. I think what needs to be combatted is that in the early days after having really waned through the 70s you had this situation where really, in my opinion, and a lot of peoples' opinion, in order to recoup they have kind of said oh, the Freedom Charter is so wishy washy, we're the true left. So leaving aside the critique of as nationalism is reactionary, they have said we are the only true socialists, these...almost like the way you would have felt about the Lutuli ANC. They are saying we are the real ... leaving aside the contradiction that how could a nationalist BC organisation be socialist on its own, they say we are the ones who can come with left,, we are the ones who are true socialists, we support socialism.

UDF can't say they support socialism, they'll be arrested.

S2 Yes, yes. But the point is that AZAPO and PAC are so narrow. They don't want to include all other racial groups and to me that is totally wrong. We all live in SA and it is a multi racial country and I would like to see liberation come for all its people. Some whites will stay, some whites will leave. Those who stay hopefully will be the right kind who will be prepared to work with everybody. I want a change of thinking amongst whites. I want them to realise that they are no longer in a privileged position and that they can no longer ride on the backs of blacks and that everybody must be given an equal opportunity and that to me is satisfied in the Freedom Charter.

I'm happy about the document. What the CP and socialists and others will do after liberation is another story. I didn't think that this stage is going to be skipped. In other words I don't believe that SA will go from capitalism to socialism. I do believe that there will be an interim something and that interim something I am quite happy to accept, it will be based on the Charter.

Q And if someone would say to you look are you saying the communists are going to come do this, or are you saying you would be prepared to see

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Q what the people accept? Are you, would you want to see if the people are going to move further to socialism or communism?

S2 I would like to see them move further to socialism and communism are.

Q But that will be decided? (Ja) You'll fight for national liberation and democracy, ? democracy.

S2 Yes, I don't...look it would be very nice if that stage was skipped but I can't see it. I can't see it. I can't see them going from capitalism to socialism but I can see the attainment of the Charter as being a limited demand and as being a sort of interim thing. I don't know if I will ever see either of them but I envisage the demands of the Charter coming before the fight for socialism.

Q Ok.

S1 You see we think differently. We don't think that because there are a few socialist slogans that we must naturally cling to it. On the contrary we first see what satisfies the demands of the people at any... given time. And the Freedom Charter, in my opinion, that answers everything in any event, this Charter was based on the demands of the people at the time (S2 That's right) Bear that always in mind, no other charter or document written in this country was.

S2 And as such it was fully supported by the CP. In fact they were a silent ally and a silent partner.

Q Why silent?

S2 Because they were underground at the time.

S1 Only from that point of view.

S2 And communists worked very hard in the liberation movement in all the congresses.

Q Let me just. I think this to me isn't a big problem because I have had so many people are saying it on record very ardently.



What I find, I am just thinking of an audience that I want to

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Q reach, that I think is, I am worried will come across as a liberal kind of thing, that here is this women saying and this man saying we are ready to give it all up and it sounds kind of that it is based on an altruistic liberal notion of helping the blacks. I mean when you say you're prepared..what the future SA would be. I would still like you to answer it, the question of what is in it for you? Are you saying that what you are fighting for is to one day ok, blacks whatever happens (Justice - S2)

S2 Just justice. Just simple justice.

S1 Our theory in life is this also. That the white man can never be free whilst his black brother is living in slavery along those lines. The white man is never free as long as the black man is oppressed as he is today. You're vulnerable, any white man is as long as we are living under a system as we are today and our only hope is a truly multi racial society.

S2 Non racial I think it is.

Q Ja, do you..that is interesting coz the multi racial is supposed to be the liberal one and the non racial...does that matter to you the difference?

S2 No. I have never thought very seriously about this but the very big difference between us and the liberals and the cogs for instance they want qualified franchise; the liberals too want qualified franchise.

S1 This goes back to the early years.

S2 Yes, when COD diverted and liberals went one way and COD went another. That is not fair to me.

Q Ja, but I think we better, I mean presently the cogs claim they don't want qualified franchise.

S2 Oh yes

S1 Oh yes, we now. I am now going to show you as over the years the liberals have changed sure but they are always behind the times. In 1952 when

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S1 there was talks between the four and the formation of a new organisation the liberals said no. we can't believe in one man one vote.

Q What new organisation?

S1 When CCD was formed and the liberal Party was formed, before then individuals, white individuals got together the liberal attitude was an educational qualification...

Q No, no sure, that is history, but what about..

S1 And we wanted one man one vote.

S2 The PFP today is still a capitalist orientated organisation. They cannot afford to have, as we want, a one man one vote policy.

Q Because?

S2 Well, because they..there will no longer be capitalism in this country.

I mean you find a lot of young progs who are fighting this, who are not happy with the situation but the senior members of the Progressive Party are capitalist orientated. They would like to see a multi racial society yes. but with the capitalists in control and whether it is whites or blacks at the bottom. In other words they will still have a qualified franchise. They will still, they are interested in having educated blacks, business people, how many blacks are in that category. It is still the upper echelons only which leaves the mass of the people disenfranchised with no opportunity for advancement.

When we say one man one vote we mean it totally. We mean that everybody would have an equal vote.

Q Do you want to say one person one vote?

S2 Here?

S1 One person one vote.

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S1 We use the word man. You will see the situation here; you have got the national ists, oh they also say they believe in one man one vote; You take the progs, oh yes, we also believe in one man one vote. The Nats believe in one man one vote in their own homeland. Progs will say well, we must form a confederation, bla, bla, bla, we must work around it and the the liberals like wise, whereas 33 years ago our view was one man one vote or one person one vote and it still is the same. And 30 years ago it was this, and now it is the same.

Q This, being the Freedom Charter. Ja, ok. JUst an ...

S2 Is ~~that~~ ok? Julie you have got it clear? Where we stand...

Q Ja, I think it is fine. Ja, a lot of times what I'm saying is my own clarity but I think on the tape I think it is clear. (S2 Yes) I think it is fine.

I think I want to move back to 64 with the detention because I just want to ? something the questions.

S1 You'll get my whole thing in there.

S2 in the tapes...

Q Ja, I know that is why just don't worry - let me just ask a few questions and the rest is on the tape ok.

S1 You might not of course like the actual language used - pros versus... I was trying to get it exactly as I felt at the time.

Q No ok then I won't..

S1 The facts are all there.

Q Ja, since you did the elaborate tape let me ask Ester. They came what in the early morning hour, the night, what was the date?

S2 3rd July 1964, it was the last school day.

S1 I think we talked a bit about this, it was right to when I left before.

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Q Ok, and then you sent the kids to the relatives, fine.

S2 Well, we couldn't send them to the relatives, they came here. I mean we were taken away. They went off to school.

Q No but sure there was somebody staying the night, that night.

S2 Ja, we got somebody in.

Q Then the worst part of it was that they had taken you both at once. you'd always thought that it would happen possibly but you would...

S2 to one of us..

Q Then you talked about the interrogation and you didn't answer questions, did you maintain that policy? You just didn't deal with them?

S2 That's all. They asked me questions and I just kept silent..(You Said.) it was very easy.

Q There was no torture, they didn't make you stay up...

S2 No they didn't, they didn't make me stand, they threatened to make me stand. In fact amongst the women only one woman stood for eight hours, that is all.

Q Who was that?

S2 That was Ann Nicholson.

Q How many women were there?

S1 Eight women.

S2 Well, to start with we were about ten women but they didn't all stand trial. They were all in solitary.

Q And was this 64 raid, was on party people that Ludi had put them on to?

S2 Yes, but it wasn't only. You see I mean they did detain a whole lot of people who were not associated with the CP. And they were in fact

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S2 later released. The Cod had various sub committees, they had a Youth movement and they had various other sub committees and so Ludi didn't really know who were in and who were out of the CP and so everybody was picked up. But ^{that} he knew, still didn't mean that everybody was picked up. Everybody he knew was picked up.

Q Did you figure out right away that it was because of this spy that you had been picked up? Or did that emerge later?

S2 That emerged later, yes.

Q So were you baffled at first?

S2 But the young people I was with for the first six days, they immediately said it was Ludi.

Q The young people being?

S2 The young people from COD..

S1 Nicholson..(S2 Folo Duncan..a few people in the...)Younger ones...

S2 thought that it was Gerald Ludi.

S1 Who knew Ludi, we hardly knew him.

S2 Yes, they worked with him.

S1 They were in the same group.

S2 Some of them were in the same group with him.

S1 Same group, that was Brammer...

Q And other than Beleveld, and Ludi were there other spies in the white left?

S2 You know we had a very good policy at one stage. I wish we'd have carried it through further. When we suspected somebody of being a spy we would follow in one car and invariably they thought that if they shook off the one car that was it but we then followed with, in

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S2 another car and they didn't realise but unfortunately we didn't carry this through to its logical conclusion. By the time we realised that Ludi could in fact be a spy it was too late.

Q And had there been other ones like him or was he the big one?

S2 Well, there were other ones that were dropped because they were suspected of being spies.

S1 They weren't necessarily spies.

S2 They weren't necessarily spies, but I think that you, one is correct in adopting a policy of if you suspect somebody drop him or her. It is safer that way, it is better to err on that side than on the other.

Q1 Ludi was an absolute disaster.

S2 It was a disaster that should never have happened.

S1 I think he was a disaster because he was suspected.

S2 Yes should never have...

S1 Somebody gave certain facts which proved that he is the person that's got contact with the Security Branch but they suspected him for a while then they took him back just like that, I don't know why. (Chuckles)

S2 But if you work in a movement you (Hold on one second just changing these)

S1 But you know Es, if I could just...

End of tape.

Tape 3 as marked.

S1 ..at the Rivonia trial you and Hilda, Hilda over heard the Security cops saying they first want to get these chaps and then they are going to go for the others. Hilda told you that. And therefore one is expecting it.

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Q Expecting something...

S1 Something, one didn't know when but...

Q Did you ever, again this is the black white thing that I keep harping on, but did you ever speak with blacks about spies in their community? Did you ever sense whether there were more or less in the black community than the white community? Did they ever say oh God, we have got that problem with spies? I mean it is a very racial oriented thing - you don't send a black into the white organisation and vice versa, so that it is very much white talking about white spies and blacks talking about black spies. And Williamson is a very different thing than some guy gets burned, his house down and you know..so I'm just interested in that level.

S2 The thing is that we basically worked in our own areas, don't forget. From a convenience point of view...(Sure, no..) So, Ja. what are you..

Q No I just mean did in your own areas did blacks ever tell you their spies being black how it was different? Than you guys having your Ludis and Williamsons? Did you ever compare notes about spies in the black as opposed to the white communities?

S2 I really can't remember that. I am sure we must have discussed it but I can't recall.

Q Do you have any thoughts about whether it is easier to infiltrate into white organisations: that someone can come in and act sincere and..

S2 I think it is easier to infiltrate in black areas. (QReally?) Very much easier.

Q Why is it harder with the whites? (S1 So few)

S2 Because we are fewer for starters. The other thing is that basically when somebody comes into the movement in the white movement, it is usually a friend of somebody so they know them fairly well. And I think it is more difficult. (Q Ja) Or it was in our time. I mean people in JODAC for instance, think that they have got a lot of spies but I don't think they have pinpointed them.

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S2 But in COD I think it was reasonably easy. But we didn't worry too much about, we were after all a legal organisation.

Q So at a certain level of they come to your meetings and talk it is not a problem: it is just getting them into..

S2 No. it was from COD that he went. was recruited into the CP and that was the danger. (S1 Not COD) Inside COD itself he didn't really do any harm.

S1 He couldn't.

S2 Coz all the work was open.

Q Ja. And again, I have got all the details, but some questions about your experience. You were in, and being interrogated, then...during the period you were detained did you see anyone. did you get any visits from your kids or anyone?

S2 My sister in law visited me once during the 90day detention.

Q Is she a very sympathetic person, how did she feel about going to a prison?

S2 She is a very nice person but (She was looking after our children - Hymie) I wouldn't call her sympathetic. But she was sympathetic to us as people.

Q And was it just a practical visit, how were the kids and everything?

S2 That was all it was meant to be. They wouldn't allow anything else.

Q And what did you get charged for then?

S2 With membership of the CP.

Q Purely membership?

S2 Ja, well I happened to be on the area...(Fisher trial..)

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Q No but I am they didn't get any activity or furthering the aims of this...it was just the membership?

S2 Well, basically that's really what they proved. In fact during the trial most of my activities was in COD but I was convicted as being a member of the area committee...

S1 The actual charge was about participation in an unlawful organisation.

S2 Yes, right.

Q But the area committee of the Party?

S2 Of the CP yes.

Q And were you tried by yourself or with others?

S2 With eleven others. We were 13 and Hymie was acquitted so it was 12 were convicted. We were actually (S1 Bram went into hiding) Yes.

Q When you were arrested, he didn't get arrested, he hid?

S2 Who? Bram?

Q Bram.

S2 Bram was arrested as well. He was not in 90days. In fact several people were arrested after we came out of 90days - Elly Wynberg, Bram Fisher, (S1 Ivan) and Ivan Schermbrucker and Loius Baker.

Q What do you mean after you came out?

S2 After we came out of solitary. When we were awaiting trial: they arrested these other people who were then charged with us.

Q So who were, can you name the 13 who were at the trial?

S2 Yes sure. Bram Fisher, Elly Wynberg, Ivan Schermbrucker, Myself, Norman Levy, Jean Middleton, (how many, (S1 6) Coster Gazidies, Anne Nicholson, Flo Duncan, (Ja, 9) Molly Anderson, and they are both from broadcasting.

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S2 his son, (S1 Drew Wheeler) yes. (Baltu Wheeler) yes..

S1 And Slyvia Neem,

S2 That's 12.

Q So was Bram .. accused number one?

S2 Bram was accused number one; he was then allowed permission to go to England to take a case. Right.

S1 He came back.

S2 He came back to SA..(S1 24 hours and then went into hiding) and then he went underground.

S1 See, he kept his honour, he said to the court he promises that he will come back. (S2 which he did) which he did. And then he went into hiding..(S2 He came to the trial for one day and then went into hiding) As a matter of fact there, many people overseas who said Bram don't be a bloody fool, don't go back.

Q But, were you out on bail?

S2 No.

Q So how did he get to go?

S2 No, he was on bail.

S1 I was also on bail.

S2 Bram and Hymie were the only two on bail.

Q Why did they grant bail?

S2 Because Hymie wasn't guilty, he was acquitted.

S1 I don't know there was talk at the time (S2 Giggles) that I got bail and Pixie Benjamin who (S2 never stood trial with us anyway) he never

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S1 stood trial and we got bail and I heard that the reason why we got bail was for the prosecution to use when Bram applied, for them to refuse him bail.

Q So why did Bram get bail?

S2 Bram got bail..

S1 He is a son of the soil...

S2 No, he got bail (S1 that is what the magistrate said) to go to England, to go to London (S1 He was in the midst of a very big trial.)

Q What kind of trial?

S1 Tobacco trial I think it was. (That's right.) And he had to go back and he got permission: he promised the court he would come back. He did come back.

S2 And they didn't withdraw his bail. He was still out on bail, came back to the trial for one day and he then went underground and everybody said to Hymie they are going to withdraw your bail, but they didn't.

Q Did the magistrate really say son of the soil?

S1 Son of the soil. I remember those words very clearly. (S2 Laugh) He is a son of the soil!! This was his answer to the prosecutor who would not allow. he opposed bail. He said he is a son of the soil.

Q And..

S2 So finally 12 of us were convicted.

Q And this was the Fisher trial?

S2 The first Fisher trial.

Q But this was the one that he went underground and skipped?

S1 and 2 Ja. yes

Q And then was that kind of exciting to you folks that he managed to 181

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Q outwit them that way? Or did you think oh dear he's given us trouble?

S2 No. we thought it was a good thing.

S1 Look. for me who was out I wasn't in. I was out. It was a bit of a trying time because as long as he was out there was the prospect always even after the trial was over. there was a prospect always of being redetained and the house searched and all this and all that. As long as he was out there always was that. You were inside. there was nothing could happen to you.

S2 Now in the trial six pleaded guilty and six didn't. So those of us who didn't plead guilty had to go into the box and that was quite awful.

Q What do you mean. to give..

S1 Witness box.

S2 To give evidence. Ja.

S1 I know nothing about that.

S2 In our own defence. I was in the box for three days (OR God) I was hammered by that prosecutor. too terribly.

Q And did you get coached about it?

S2 No. what I had to do is I had to write down all my involvement. what I had done and so on and what motivated me. why I came into the movement. why I did what I did and so on.

S1 I was in the box for two days. (S2 Two days) Over two days.

S2 And Hymie was on safe ground because all he had to do was answer questions FSU. it was ? easy. (Smiling)

S1 The first half of it they tried to pin my involvement in the CP activities. When they failed there. they brought the treason trial indictment and once they brought that I knew I was on safe ground.

S2 Hymie was in the treason trial.

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S1 I knew I was on safe ground-

Q How do you mean they brought the treason trial?

S2 Well, then they started questioning him about...

S1 They had the whole treason trial indictment there and they took out relevant parts that I was involved in...

S2 But Hymie was acquitted on that charge so he felt fairly safe.

Q What about yourself? Did you begin yourself for a sentence? Did you figure you would get a sentence?

S2 Ya, I expected a very much stiffer sentence I must say.

Q Like what, five years or...

S2 I just didn't know but when I got three years I was quite relieved.

Q And did you get visits as a waiting trial prisoner?

S2 Yes.

Q From your kids?

S2 Mmm.

Q So your little ones came?

S2 Well, they couldn't actually..the little one couldn't come and see me. So we (Q Because why?) arranged something quite crafty. I attended the cardiac clinic and my family knew when I was going to the clinic so they brought my daughter, my youngest daughter to see me there and that was very exciting for me.

Q Why didn't they let her go to visit?

S2 She was too young.

Q Is that a limit of age?

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 Mmm. Mmm.

Q So you got to see her then?

S2 I got to see her.

S1 Julie I didn't write anything about that at all but do you want me to still.

S2 No, no, no Lets...

Q I ~~just~~ really have to concentrate on the...there is so much to tell...

S1 In any event if you want it you can find it on other books...

S2 No let her ask questions.

Everyone talks at once here but Ester most keen not to have Hymie write all that up for you.

Q No I can find it ja. No what I really want to ask the questions about in the time we have is non racialism and inmaking this human because the whole thing of, I am interviewing a range of people and there is such a kind of all the stereotypes about communists, party members, and I just think that if I sound a little corny in asking these maybe coz it is also I'm a mother but I just find that that human aspect; that you were undergoing the same feelings as anyone else would are quite..

S2 Actually I find the human aspect ^{of it} very difficult to talk about Julie. I really do.

Q Would you prefer I not ask?

S1 No..S2 Aaah...

Q I only meant for you to continue what you were saying, you were saying I was quite crafty and that was quite exciting...

S2 Yes, no that was exciting and in fact (Q I was just saying to you what I...) when I was convicted I asked the commanding officer if I ~~could~~...they were very sympathetic to prisoners who had children

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 and I asked him whether I could write and receive letters from my children and that request was granted which to me was tremendous, you know. It helped me keep in touch with them and whereas the eldest one used to come and see me finally they allowed the other two to come as well.

I thought they were doing very well while I was inside. You know their letters were bright and breezy and full of what they were doing and who they were seeing and all that sort of thing. It was really

only afterwards when I came out that I realised it wasn't that easy for them. And, naturally I did have guilt feelings but one day...and for years and years afterwards I had guilt feelings about what I had done to my children, particularly the youngest, you know, who really did suffer.

S1 But you know..

Q Can you just finish sorry.

S2 Mm. And then one day I just thought to myself you know really I did this with my eyes open, I knew what I was doing, I knew of my commitment...sure I didn't realise that I would hurt them so much, psychologically...but somewhere along the line guilt has got to end. And I just made up my mind this is time now, it's 20 years after. But it does keep coming back. Sure I know I hurt them and I deeply regret it...but I keep saying to them, you know if you haven't understood yet what we were trying to do maybe one day you will understand, you know and you won't condemn.

You know I have had all sorts of things flung at me, very hurtful things...and I don't know, you know, whether on hindsight I would have gone as far as I'd have gone. My commitment would always have been the same, but my activity may have been slightly different. Not the two older ones, again it is the younger one.

You know I am telling you this, not necessarily for publication, but just how I feel about it.

Q Did it ever help you overcome that when you thought of the many more blacks...you know you ask whites but when you think about it..I remem-

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Q remember when I read this article or something where Albertina Sisulu talked about being detained and she was breast feeding and I think I was breastfeeding at the time. and I knew what it meant to suddenly just not have your child for twelve..just for your own physical comfort you know...

S2 Yes, there is a very big difference Julie between white children and black children. Blacks...blacks in the liberation struggle are accepted by the people. they are the majority, they are heroes, they are lauded, for their commitment. Amongst whites it is a different story altogether. You stand out like a sore thumb. You do. Because you are not accepted by the whites as a whole. You are not accepted by the children's friends. You are not accepted by your family. You are accepted by your friends because the friends you choose are the friends that think the same way as you do. But you are not accepted by the general community.

You know. again as Hymie said, the views that we held at the time of our detentions have become more popular today and they perhaps think almost, almost, not quite, but almost, the way we did. We have advanced even further. But you know what I am trying to say, that..that views amongst whites, who now accept the changes coming, how it's going to come and what is going to happen afterwards they haven't really thought through.

Whereas in the 60s there was no such feeling that there will be liberation. The feeling was that we will go on and on and on with the sort of society that we've got and that blacks will always be oppressed. The thinking has changed now to this extent of knowing the change is coming and accepting that it is going to come. So that in that sense there is acceptance of our view, then. You know not the same commitment obviously. Do you know what I am trying to say?

Q Yes. And do you...spoken to others who then...were you in prison with anyone^{else} who had kids?

S2 Yes, I was in with Lesly Schermbrucker. She and her husband were both in. Her husband was sentenced in our trial and she was sentenced shortly afterwards.

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 In the other Fisher trial—because she wouldn't give evidence against Bram. She and Violet were not in our trial. And they both came in afterwards and joined us.

Q So was that helpful to have other mothers?

S2 In actual fact I said that to Hymie just the other day, that the women in jail who had children coped better than the women who didn't have families outside.

Q Really.

S2 Yes. There was somebody waiting for them, there was somebody outside who came to see them — it wasn't just friends, it was family. So we ourselves coped better but as far as the Schermbrooker children are concerned they took their parents incarceration quite differently. They kicked and ranted and raved and externalised immediately; blamed their father and mother and in fact, people outside had a hell of a time with the Schermbrooker children. But they got it out of their system.

Our children didn't. Our children internalised which made it more long term suffering which meant that their trauma only came out afterwards. And that was the big difference.

As far as Violet is concerned Sheila has been magnificent. Sheila herself was in with us for six months so that we had mother and daughter together at the same time. But then Violet herself had a very traumatic experience in that Mark died during that period with both Violet and Eli inside and that was a terrible shock.

Q What happened to him?

S2 You know the Weinbergs had an accident a few years before the emergency and Mark was quite badly hurt and a nerve was severed and he became deaf and we don't know quite to this day what really happened. He went into the bathroom, locked the door and the next thing they found him drowned. It was a terrible terrible shock. But Sheila has come out absolutely fine, tops, no scarring, continued in the movement, very committed. I suppose it depends very much on the person's personality: on what they've got inside. I don't know. People are different. Not everybody can

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S2 take it the same way.

Q Ja. Coz to me it was such a shock and I mean this is totally not for publication but to interview [redacted] (S2 Yes.) Who's a..

S2 You're not taping this, we're just talking..

Q No we can stop..Ja.

Ja, that's an achievement that they're non..not in operation.

S2 They are not racialists. You know they have never discriminated against black or white. It's ok, they accept people as people which is I suppose the best we can expect. But none of them have come into the movement.

Q Your children either?

S2 No. Merle's started, the youngest one. She..let's put it ^{off} for a while.

Q Mmm.

What did she say?

S2 Yes, I look around at JODAC membership and there are no people of Sheila's age. This..in other words the age group of our children of people who were involved in the 60s, I would say that they come like a decade of two later. And Helen made this point very strongly that you look around at people like Sheila and others, none of them have come into the left movement.

Q Ja, and also...

S1 There was a generation gap you see.

S2 Yes, a generation gap.

Q Mmm, ja. It's interesting coz when I've asked people if..I mean non one has suffered the way you have and been detained and been imprisoned, but I've asked people would they want their kids to be political and would they be disappointed if they weren't.

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S2 Political people?

Q Ja. and sometimes they have said that you know. for eg Molly Blackburn, not that she's comparable but she's said she'd be disappointed if her kids weren't political. And

although (S2 Her children are not) I know and one of the UWO women in fact a friend of Barbara's said to me, oh got a problem. she's got these cooped children, so (Both S1 and SE laugh) I mean that to me would be a tragedy too. I mean this is.. I am not speaking from any position of having anything compared with you but I'd find it terrible to have children who weren't you know, but at the same time, one can see (S2 Why) what I'm saying has no resonance coz I haven't experienced it or anything, and you have to ask me 30 years from now.

S2 But so often of course children have directly opposite views to their parents. I mean I certainly rebelled against my parents, my parents didn't approve of my political views when they realised where I was going.

Q Ok, then when you finally came out of prison you had the great reunion, with the kids. Did you feel that you wanted to throw yourself into the kids, did you think of politics after that?

S2 There was no way in which I could get involved then, no way at all. I was under five hour..five years house arrest, so I could only get out during the day and there was in fact no political activity to get involved in when I came out. It was many, many years before there was anything at all.

But apart from that I am not allowed to participate.

Q You weren't? And still not?

S2 I'm still not allowed to participate because of my listing. I cannot join any organisation that criticises the government policy so the only extent of my involvement is to go to public meetings, that is all I can do, legally at this stage.



because of those constraints?

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S2 Yes..

Q Because of those constraints did that mean that it was a relief for you to be able to be a full time stay home mother, with your, especially the youngest? I mean did you go into that role?

S2 Oh, I wanted very much to be involved. I wanted very much to be involved because at that stage I didn't see any harm to my children. I resented bitterly not being able to do anything. (S2 So..) In fact I tried, I tried to get involved in all sorts of innocuous things because you know there was quite a lot of stimulation in jail. I mean after all I was with five other political women and we did discuss a great deal about our activities and then I was suddenly deprived of all this.

I could only talk to Hymie about politics and so I looked at ways and means of what I could do. I even went to Race Relations to find out if I couldn't be of any assistance there and the moment Ina Perlman heard that I was a listed communist she couldn't find anything for me to do.

Q Did you think of the Black Sash?

S2 The Black Sash in those days were not nearly as political as they are today. No, I certainly didn't. First of all and secondly I don't think that they would have had me at that stage.

Q Can you work that out when..let out when now,

S2 68.

Q Just for the record who were the other five political women?

S2 Now wait a minute there were more than five but in our trial there were only six, right. Do you want to know only from our trial?

Q No. I'd like to know

S2 Or all the women I was with?

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 Right I was with Molly Anderson, Anne Nicholson, Flo Duncan, Sylvia Neen, Molly Anderson, (S1 You said her before) So how many have we got now.

Q ..this time..sorry

S1 Start all over again.
There was Molly Anderson, no. 1.

S2 No I have said all of ours but we were also joined by Violet Weinberg, Lesley Scherbrucker, Sheila Weinberg, and Stephanie ~~Cope~~/Kemp.

Q Oh. Was Stephenie Kemp one of the younger ones?

S2 Stephanie Kemp was in ARM. She got a two year sentence, but she got one year remission. (S1 All the AR, crowd did, they all got remission.) They all got remission.

Q Did you? Except for. Hugh Lewin didn't.

S1 Hugh Lewin didn't.

S2 Yes. they didn't all Hymie. A lot of them did you know. At the time the minister said if any of these people involved could claim that they were misled by elder people we'll consider reducing their sentence. Do they...a lot of them somehow or another. parents pushed you know, they got remission.

Q Just for the record, I am just interested, just a quick digression, did Stephanie Kemp some ^{cause} tension, that she came from a different point of view?

S2 Yes. I am afraid there was. There was..

Q Didn't she subsequently change?

S2 I believe so yes but we were quite suspicious of her in jail.

Q Coz didn't she marry Albie Sachs?

S2 Yes she did. (S1 Quite a...) She told us in jail th

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 that she was going to marry Albie Sachs, long before Albie knew. (Laughs.)

Q But that didn't even change her then? At that time was she not, was there, she didn't, change her views in prison?

S2 Let's say ~~like~~ our views were somewhat different and we did have many political arguments with her and somehow or another she wasn't one of us.

Q And she did only what a year?

S1 She did a year in.

S2 Yes.

Q And that was the only non ANC person?

S2 Yes, well Violet and Lesley were not convicted for being members of the CP; they were convicted for ... (S1 Refusing to give evidence) refusing to give evidence against Bram. But they were our people, you know.

S1 You also had someone there for a few months..

S2 Yes that's right... Schoon's wife.. what was her name?

Q He had a ~~girl~~ wife?

S2 Yes, he did. Diane Schoon.

S1 He was married to her.

S2 Poor Diane Schoon, had a two month sentence..

End of tape, side A

Side marked II

Q So were you able to offer her any comfort or was she too scared of you?

S2 We tried very hard, we all tried very hard.

Q Did she refuse to give evidence when she..

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 No, I think, I think, I am not sure, it was a minor offence, I think she could have painted a slogan or something like that. It wasn't a serious offence or anything like that. Sheila was sentenced for painting a slogan; she got six months and Di only got two months.

Q Ok.

S2 I must tell you that when the Republic was established was when? S1 61 61 - five years later we were in jail, right (S1 66, ja.) and we and they were offering a general amnesty to prisoners. And it came to our ears via some of the wardresses that they were going to offer some of us remission and we talked about it. We talked about it a lot and we decided that it would be a terrible thing if white women accepted remission and it was not offered to blacks. So we made it very clear to the authorities, without us being told officially that we might be offered this, that we didn't want it. We weren't prepared to accept it. And so it was never offered to us.

S1 Now that was the view inside but the view outside was if you can get remission take it. Take whatever you can get. You are far more use outside than inside.

S2 But we were absolutely adamant that as white women we were not prepared to accept it.

Q Was that a kind of statement for non racialism that you didn't want separate treatment; that you wanted to show solidarity?

S2 Ja, solidarity. That..that we wanted, we wanted rights for all political prisoners not just for white women prisoners. (Q Mmm) And it was indicated to us that the amnesty would only be offered to (S1 to white politicals only) to white politicals women only (S1 women only if at all, not blacks.)

Q Hmm.

S2 In fact SyMia Neame we said to her well what happens if they just push you out of jail. You know, you are offered this remission, you got to take it. She said I'll immediately go commit an offence and I'll be in jail again. (S1 and 2 laugh)

Interview: Ester & Hymie Barsel

Q How do you spell her surname?

S1 Neame.

S2 She is in East Germany now.

Q Aha. Working for the ANC?

S1 No, (whispered)

S2 I don't think so. I am sure that she does that sort of work as well but I think she's...but she actually taught herself German in jail and she is lecturing at a university in German.

Q Was she married there or anything?

S1 Ja.

S2 Well, either married or living with someone, I am not sure.

Q Ja.

S2 Just switch for a minute.

Q ...just going off.

S2 Ja. We used to have the dentist coming to see us in the jail and he would come with lousy rusty instruments and we had to accept that. Well we damn well decided that we weren't going to, and so we complained to the commanding officer and in future they took us into town to have our teeth attended to.

We also complained about the treatment that the doctors were giving us, you know they were also pretty ghastly people and they would give you a bare minimum so we complained about that too and that improved as well.

We had to battle for everything that we got. I told you previously that we were given black prisoners washing to do and they were pretty awful.

We complained about that and finally we were given white warders sheets

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

S2 and pillow cases to do and I want to tell you that we opted for the black mens washing any time rather than the muck that we got from them. It was terrible. It was ghastly - I don't know what they did to those sheets and pillow cases...

Q They had you doing labour?

S2 Well, you see. I had on my cards, somewhere I saw, three years with HL so I said to the matron one day what does HL, what does it mean? She says Hard Labour and we are going to make you work. And that.. it was hard labour. You know we worked damn hard, and we weren't used to it. lets face it.

Q As white women.

S2 As white women, we weren't used to hard physical labour/work. You know we had to keep our quarters clean too, that was not nearly as hard as the washing. And in a way hard work helped us because it got the aggression out.

Q Let me continue because there is so much I am getting that I want to make sure, there'll be a lot I'll cut out, so I should focus on what I am definitely going to use. (S2 Yes)

When you came out then finally sorry I just follow this up, but did you have someone working for you in the home before you were ...

S2 A maid? (Q Ja) yes, a very nice person. (I actually have..) A very, very nice person. (S1 She looked after the children too) She was very good to the children.

Q She was staying with you all throughout.

S2 She understood our involvement perfectly.

Q Because she was black?

S2 Ja.

Q Did she ever give you any feeling of what other blacks thought/said

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Q in the townshipS? Did she live in the townships?

S2 No she lived here.

Q But other blacks she saw, what the other blacks, her friends said?

S2 I'll tell you what we used to have here. Also during COD days. We used to have Thursday evening meetings of black domestic workers in the area and that was tremendously successful. On a Thursday night we would have about forty women here at our house, and in other houses as well and we would talk to them about their conditions and so on and they would tell us how hard it is for them and so on.

They were^a part of COD work that I am really proud of.

Q Do you think your relationship with^{OUT} a black maid was different because of your political views? I mean in terms of pay or conditions or anything?

S2 We treated her as a person not as an employee and I mean she herself had seven children which she brought up while she was working for us. I think that we came to be friends.

Q But at the same time a ? would say that. I mean that's like a liberal thing..

S2 At the same time?

Q I mean that lots of liberals say they are like one of the family or that...

S2 Ja, you're right yes, no she was never part of the family in the sense that..I mean we invited her for instance to come and sit with us at the table, just because we thought that she too was as person. She never ever would do that.

S1 Never.

S2 But she was really very kind to our children, ^{she was} and they love her very much. They were very sorry when she left. No, she left to go to the

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S2 homelands because she wanted to build a house.

Q And just in terms of her working conditions and her pay, do you think she felt different about that than others?

S1 I don't think so.

S2 Different in what way?

Q I mean was her situation different from the other people that..in the neighbourhood?

S1 I wouldn't say so you know.

S2 Mmm.

Q And did she tell you how the other domestic workers felt about you? I mean if ever, most every white felt that you were traitors, did you get a sense of how blacks felt, the average ones?

S2 Well, we had people here and they were mostly her friends in the area so we were able to discuss very openly about what was happening. She too came to the meetings. In fact she brought people to the meetings.

Q Ok.

S1 I suppose there wasn't this master servant relationship as there is now. But I suppose the only difference, I don't think she was better paid than others, do you? I don't (S2 Probably not) think so. But there was the fact that there was no master servant relationship.

Q Ok, ja, let me move coz I have got so many more questions (S2 Have you) maybe we can stick to the shorter answers. (S2 Ok) coz what I said about that.

When you came out of prison you were limited by all these things you were saying, were you also limited by the fact that there was so little for whites to do in 68? Would you say that was kind of the nadir of white involvement in terms if it was the .. COD, there wasn't even.. there was nothing approaching a JODAC, there wasn't even...

S2 Well

there was certainly nothing that I as a listed person could do. 23

Q And then just whites generally how did you feel that white were reacting and when you came out did you get any sense of the white community having moved in any direction? Did you feel just as ostracised? Did anyone seem to think that you'd been doing anything remotely useful?

S2 Actually I did feel quite isolated. The only support I really got was from Hymie's family who were very nice to us, you know even though they were not with us in the struggle, they were nice.

As far as other whites are concerned by and large the places I went to people didn't know about my involvement. I would go to the grocer shop or the butcher or whatever and I was an ordinary white SAfrican.

I started looking for a job and that was difficult because I had to tell people what I had been doing for the last four years and I really had nothing to say. I mean I couldn't tell them that I was in jail.

S1 Looking after your family. Isn't that what you told them?

S2 Yes, but I then had no qualifications, so somebody told me to get in touch with Les Dichy who is a prog city councillor and I went to see him and he gave me a job at a firm called SewKnit and most of the employees were black and I was very happy there. I really found that at least I was doing something during the day where I could have some sort of communication with people.

Q Because they were blacks did they know your background?

S2 Yes, they all knew.

Q Did they support that?

S2 Ja, sure.

Q So you'd told them after you went...

S2 Well, first of all I told Les Dichy who wasn't at all frightened by what happened and he gave me the job and the others knew about my

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S2 involvement, either I told them or he told them.

Q And can you give me any sense of how they responded and if there was any..

S2 They were very, very nice to me. They really were.

Q Did you get any sense they thought that it was pretty neat that a white person had done this?

S2 No. I think I was just accepted as one of them, not specifically as white. (Q Not at all) Les Dichey himself was considered to be fairly progressive.

Q Right but was there a difference in their minds to a white person who was ok or a person who was ok, was a drog and a person who actually had gone to jail and I mean did you ever get any sense of them having knowing that you had done that?

S2 Ja. I felt that I was more acceptable than the average.

Q Did they ever ask you about it and?

S2 Yes. sure. And I was delighted to tell them about it.

Q Ja. ok.

S2 Some of them weren't political at all. And some were.

Q Then after the five years the house arrest ran out and then were you allowed to get more involved politically? Or you still were listed?

S2 I was still listed..(Q Still couldn't) I still am. Yes.

Q Ok. but then what about in the late 60s and early 70s...

S2 You know at least after my banning order expired I could see my friends. I couldn't even see my friends who themselves were listed people. So that I was virtually completely cut off.

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S2 In fact after my house arrest expired we had a big party here of all the people I hadn't seen for some nine years, I think and it was a marvellous get together; it was lovely to see people again. And to talk to them politically.

Q And what about when you came out and you were able to think and at least know about politics that was happening in SA, how did you feel about the BC coming up? I mean you'd worked so hard, you'd served in prison, you came out in 68, 69 Biko lead the walk out from NUSAS, there was..you know, there wasn't any talk about ANC; people said it died, and then there was all this BC, whites have no role?

S2 Well, you see I mean, at that stage I was already able to attend political gatherings and I remember very clearly having quite a lot of discussions with people who were BC orientated and we actually had very acrimonious discussions on this. You know where are you leading your people to. And the people we spoke to were I suppose not the ordinary rank and file, they were of the Biko type and they explained to us that it was very important for them to make black people conscious of the fact that they are people. And that they mustn't walk with their heads bent down, they must hold their heads high and must be proud of the fact that they are black.

Our argument was that if you continue along this road you are going to build up a people who are going to be violently anti black (Q anti white) (S1 White) I mean, sorry, will be violently anti white - that there will be no place for whites in the society in which..that you are trying to build.

And their answer was rather a strange one. They said their first priority was what I've said, to make them feel proud of being black and to assert their . . . the fact that they are people. The fact that they are not slaves, to make them feel proud of that fact. When that is achieved they will then say to them ok, you are now there, now you can associate with other groups.

And our argument was that we cannot turn the clock back. Once you get people along this path you can't change their view, their mode of thinking. Biko himself had that feeling. He associated with whites.

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S2 Barbara Hogan knew him very well. Others knew him very well. He wasn't anti white and quite a few people of his period were not anti white. But the way they were going they were definitely and we see it today, have built up a force of people who are anti white, who want to see the whites out of this country: who don't want whites to be, to have any part in the struggle for freedom. And when freedom comes they have no place in it.

But they are loosing the battle.

Q So just..

S2 It is the people who are saying SA belong to all who are winning.

Q Right. I think I can skip that because I have done so many interviews with blacks, like Terror Lekota, who changed. So because I want (S2 That's right, that's right) and Rabie and just tons of and (S2 Right, I see managed to see them) Ja. And all the Eastern Cape.

S2 He is fantastic this Terror Lekota. (S1 Ja) (Q Super guy) Ja. outstanding.

Q And the Eastern Cape is full of this...

S2 And there is no bitterness about him. you know...

S1 ...black consciousness element...

S2 He knows where he is going.

Q Mmm. To Pretoria Central.

S2 Ja. well he was in hiding for a while. He came out when he had to come out, he had to come out for this conference, he felt.

Q So was it just a dead lock? Did you just from 68 to the early 70s did at a certain point did you figure ok. BC is on the rise. I'll just with draw till ^{this} thing takes its...

S2 It wasn't a question of withdrawing. I mean when we had social contact

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S2 we spoke about it. But that was the only way in which I could put my point across. (S1 But there was..carry on) There was no other contact that I had with blacks.

Q Except for social..

S2 Except for social contact.

Q So did you have social contact with blacks?

S2 Yes. oh yes.

Q Was it the old friends or what was it?

S2 Through old friends, yes, who had invited blacks over, you know it was social gatherings of that kind which invariably lead to political discussions.

Q And so did at a certain point did you feel you accepted this was a period you were in? I mean did you get really depressed and didn't settle?

S2 I certainly did because I saw no activity on the other side, yes. It took a very, very long time before people started other movements, like the UDF only started in the 80s.

S1 First bit of activity that I can really recollect in these 70s was student uprising in 1976.

Q How did you feel about Soweto 76?

S+ Well...

S2 You know again it was a period of complete political inactivity for me. I had just hoped that the 76 period at least people would be guided by the right...in the right direction. I was very afraid that it would turn to BC rather than to the other side. But I our people were working amongst them. We only realised that afterwards.

Q And what about the little things you got, like did you notice Jeremy

Interview: Ester and Hymie Barsel

Q Cronin and Sutner's trials in 74/75?

S1 Yes

S2 Very much so. Very much so. In fact we were in London at the time that they were detained.

Q You got a passport?

S2 Huh, we got a passport - you won't believe that we got a passport. In 1975, we had heard that passport applications were going up from 3 Rand to 5 Rand and so we decided to, why should we loose R5, we would rather lose R3, we didn't realise that we would get our R3 back. So we applied for a passport, both of us.

S1 So we went for a holiday..(S2 and we got it..) to Plettenberg Bay, spend all our money, came back and got the...(S2 and came back to find we had a passport) passport.

S2 And we took it, we grabbed it and we went overseas, we had a marvellous time; we saw all our comrades we hadn't seen for so many years and we just threw caution to the winds. We decided that this was probably going to be a once anyway and so we saw everybody and we stayed with Wolf Kosh, we went with him to the continent and we really had ...

S1 It was a wonderful time...

S2 a wonderful time. We really did. We arrived in Italy and I got ill, and of course Wolfe took us to the Party hospital there, what was it...

S1 First of all to the Party offices,

S2 To the Party offices, who sent me to a clinic and they examined me, that was nothing but through that we'd made contact with people on the left and we had the most marvellous time. We really enjoyed it.

S1 Big brass there.

S2 Yes. And at that time there was this tremendous controversy about

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Sq Euro Communism and we were very green about that, really, we had very little literature here at the time, but of course in London people knew all about it and Wilfy argued vehemently with them.

But it was for us quite an experience and then we came back and realised that you know we would never ever get a passport again. We did apply again in 82 but this time to go to America only to America. My daughter and her family had left and they were unable to come here because they were not given green cards and we knew that they were struggling and we wanted very much to go. So we applied to go to the US only and we got permission to go to the USA with everything crossed out except that.

But then started my hassle. I had to get a visa. And the Americans wouldn't give me a visa.

S1 We got a passport and no visa. (S2 But a passport...) Now I think they were acting hand in glove...(S2 without any trouble and when I went for a visa, I was put through the third degree. And it was only because we had a friend here previously who had gone back to America that we finally got past it.) Stand the consulate...

S2 No Hymie got it because he didn't have to make any declarations. I did. I had to mention my conviction.

S1 We had a friend in the American consulate, what was his name. Arnold...

S2 Well, he finally got it for us but do you know that our application went to Rome. And I tell you that I vowed I wouldn't do it again it was just too traumatic and until we actually got onto the plane we didn't know whether we would or wouldn't be able to go.

And another thing that happened during that period was that time when Barbara Hogan and Prema Naidoo and several other of our friends had been detained and they had made statements about us, that we had had a meeting here at this house and they wanted at that stage to have a very big trial involving all the congresses, involving the communist party and so on and so on and so on. So we got visitors and they wanted to know about the meeting that was held at our house.

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S2 Barbara Hogan told them about it and Prem Naidoo told them about it and what was discussed etc. etc. So that at the same time as we were applying for passports and visas this thing came up between as well. So that really how we got onto that plane is an absolute miracle.

Q But it ended up not being in the press?

S2 It ended up by the, we subsequently heard that when all the evidence was presented to the Attorney General he said if this is all you have got to base your case on I cannot prosecute and so the whole thing was thrown out. So there you have it, you know in spite of..in..the fact that we weren't active politically there were things going on: did have the occasional meeting across the colour line with our friends in the white areas.

S1 Did speak to so and so and we did see so and so...

S2 Right, so it wasn't a complete vacuum but it was nothing like what happened before.

Q So you just basically, ok.

S2 I mean we just still consider ourselves political animals, we can't help it.

Q And did you find that young people sought you out? How did you actually meet Barbara?

S2 Well, we met Barbara through our daughter, Merle. She became very friendly with Barbara and brought her to the house and we became very friendly.

Q Was that back in the late 70s?

S2 Ja, I would say it was in the late 70s.

Q Because I remember John Matthews mention there was Barbara Hogan...coz I said to him what did he feel with the young people active and ...

S2 We had quite a few young people coming to the house because of

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S2 of our daughter and Barbara who brought people over and it was for us tremendous because we had been cut off such a lot from activity - it was really lovely and then just before JODAC was started a lot of young people started coming because this one was doing a thesis on the 50s and somebody else was doing it on the 60s and they wanted to know about CGD and Congress of the People and so on and so forth and so it was nice, for us.

Q Did people like Barbara just ply you with questions?

S2 Yes, all the time, all the time.

Q And you didn't mind talking.

S2 Oh no not at all, in fact we welcomed it and in fact we asked our friends to come and meet her and others.

Q What do you think you had to offer to them? What, why was it...

S2 I thought we had nothing to offer to them but they obviously thought we did have something.

S1 We only had one thing to offer, an experience and that is what they wanted. They wanted to know, they wanted to hear about it.

S2 But I find young people today far more politically aware than we were then-I really do and I have the greatest admiration for them. (Q What when it..?) They are very articulate, they know where they are going, they are good speakers, they have a lot of contact with people in the movement, all sections, they are very involved in trade unions, ...

Q Did these blacks that you saw, I mean these people you saw, the young people were there any blacks among them?

S2 No- You mean the people who came with Barbara and co. ? (Q Mmm) No. There weren't any blacks amongst them but we saw quite a lot of Indian friends. Young Indians.

Q And why do you think there weren't more blacks?

S2 .Mainly because of the problem of getting together, you know you can really only see blacks during the day. It is very difficult to see lots of blacks at night.

S1 I have often thought about this; the young ones, those who have just come into the movement we didn't know. The older ones well, I suppose are out of the country, many of them are in prison..

S2 But we did have some of the older blacks coming to see us. We did have contact with some of those, like Elliot...

S1 Elliot came, Chibonga...

S2 But the others, we have had Albertina Sisulu here when she has not been banned. In fact the time when Dave Kitson came out of jail Albertina was here.

Q To see him?

S1 Mmm. S2 Ja we invited her over and we invited Rita Nzanga over. I think those were the only two blacks who came that afternoon.

Q Where is Rita Nzanga these days?

S2 Een last I heard she was still in jail, I don't know if she is now.

End of tape.

Tape 4 Side I

Q I could keep you forever but I think one of the really valid things you are going to ^{have to} be able to tell me is the comparisons of JORAC. First of all you talked about the inactivity, then you saw the organisation being founded finally UDF, (S2 yes) and Jodac. How did you feel about JODAC being founded?

A2 Tremendously excited about it. I mean we were so happy but there was now another organisation. It was going to work amongst whites and also have contact with blacks?

Q And did it remind you of..was it reminiscent of the COD days? Or are there differences?

S2 Well the difference is, I think the main difference is that JODAC is really composed of young people, by and large. There are a few oldies there too but by and large it is young people. And we would like to see them work more amongst whites than they do. Spread the word if you like amongst whites. I think there are a lot of whites who will accept JODAC ideas today that wouldn't accept COJ ideas when we were working.

I think their organisation is far larger than ours ever was. ^{But} they are not broadening their base enough.

Q Ok. Again I want to ask...

S1 I must say I was equally thrilled if not more thrilled at the ECC.

S2 Mmm, Yes.

Q Ja.

S1 Peace movement I was terribly excited, I thought it was fantastic.

Q So did that remind you of the days of the Peace Council and

S2 Yes, but it is slightly different (S1 Yes but far better you know.. far better organised and a far better organisation.)

S2 What we do find lacking today and we ^{have} mentioned this to quite a lot of young people is the international aspect. We are very isolated here and somehow or another they haven't established enough links with people outside SA. They do have links but not enough.

You know we had a lot of links with overseas. People coming here and going there. Literature from SA Peace Movement, international affairs that sort of thing. You know people are very, very involved with what is happening here, fine, that's perfect. But they need to have an international view as well.

Q Ja, but that is also the times. I mean they wouldn't even let that Bishop whatever come to the ECC conference.

S2 That's right.

S1 But we can already see in Ecc they are already linking up the ECC with the Anti Nuclear Campaigns. Slowly they were, which they didn't at the beginning, now they are bringing in campaign for Nuclear Disarmament...

S2 They are very interested in the Peace Movement of the 50s. They come to ask ^{vs} and others what sort of work we did and so on and to some extent they are also campaigning for peace. Which for a long time the movement didn't incorporate and today they are.

Q Ok, can you make any comparisons between the state of emergency that has just been declared with the 60s?

S2 I knew you were going to ask that question. It is a difficult one. First of all there were far more people detained in 1960 emergency, there were something like 10 000.

S1 Well, I don't think we will ever know, some say it was 11 000.

S2 Yes, but it was far more than now. (Oh yes, far more, far far more) I think this one will last not nearly as long. Obviously it hit the economy at that time. I think there is far more of ^{out} ~~of~~ cry internationally at this state of emergency, than there was in the last. I think that the SA public don't know nearly as much of what's going on as people overseas do.

My son in law for instance, was so unhappy about his family being here. He wasn't here. He says you have no idea about what is going on ⁱⁿ the country you are in now, come home, and quite obviously my daughter was not affected by the state of emergency. But to him the most terrible things were going on; they were aware of it but we were not. There is very much less known by whites of what's happening.

S1 This state of emergency seems to be more..there seems to be more political activity in this state of emergency than there was in the other.

Q What do you mean, it has continued despite the emergency?

S1 Ja.

S2 gency really crippled organisations for a long time to come and I don't think this one has done the same. You know by and large I think, organisations are ^{not} nearly as badly affected by detentions.

S1 I don't think they are as nearly intimidated as they were the last time.

S2 There were a hell of a lot more whites detained in the 1960 emergency than today.

S1 They went for all named communists right away. (S2 ja) Straight away, if you were listed, if you were named communist, inside.

S2 There were several hundred whites detained.

Q Does that indicate there are less activity amongst whites now or is there more?

S2 No. I think that..the arrests now are for people who have been immediately politically involved, rather than people who had been involved over a long time/period. There they had a list of names and those were the people they took in. (Q Ja) Here they have seen in the Vaal Triangle this group of students who have been very active so in they go. And the same in the other areas.

Q Ok.

S2 The UDF is still functioning.

Q Is it?

S2 Well, it is functioning, it's not been closed down.

S1 And they are far less intimidated.

S2 It can still issue statements. There was very little public activity in the last emergency; true there is very little now too, but there has been a public meeting held, sponsored by several organisations, I think JODAC was one of them.

Q Did you go to it?

S2 It was the day our family left so we weren't able to go. But I believe it was a very good meeting.

Q Ja, I was there...what about, is there anything ~~else~~^{else} you want to say about the state of emergency or..I am just wrapping up questions?

S2 I don't know what else there is to say, I think that after the emergency we will be able to assess better, you know and compare if you like. Only one thing I wanted to say, let me just think, there was something else.

S1 I can't help thinking this state of emergency is not going to last much longer.

S2 Yes, I know what else I wanted to say, I have said in my other thing that after the 1960 emergency, I don't think we were ever out of a state of emergency. So whereas that one came as a sort of shock, cut off point, this one is merely a continuation of what has ^{been} happening from 1960 onwards and it's really not anything more drastic than what has been happening up to now; people have been detained, people have been charged, people have been let out, um..From that point of view...

S1 Three only, I think..(S2 ja, but I really feel...) ..a degree.

S2 But I really feel that in a sense we have been living in a state of emergency all these years.

Q One other point I didn't ask you was, with the founding of Umkhonto were you not to be involved with the military? Was that a separate thing?

S2 It was a separate thing, yes. The only thing we did was to handle out leaflets, illegal then/illegally.

Q So to support it in spirit?

S2 Ja. That's right (Q and How..) And that involved, you can't imagine, you know, if you are handing out leaflets legally it is very easy. When you are handing out leaflets illegally you have got to find out.. however, many leaflets you've got, first of all you have got to be very careful that you go to town when you are not going to be caught; you

S2 want to get it to the best possible people who would be interested in what you have to say, so you have to case the joint to put it that way. Say there are four people in a groups, you'd go round seeing, should we do this block of flats, should we do that block of flats, you decide which time you are going to do it and at that particular time you are there, to see what sort of activity there is around that area, and on the night of the distribution you have to arrange to collect your leaflets, not be caught with them, you have to collect your comrades to go round and do the distribution, and when you have finished the distribution, ^{you've got} to disperse. It 's completely different, in those days it was, to handing out leaflets legally.

Q And who were you handing them to, whites?

S2 Ja, we were doing them in blocks of flats. You can't just take a leaflet and hand it to somebody because then you are identified. You can't be identified.

Q Ja.

S2 You can't be identified.

Q Ja, also the whites might throw them away right.

S2 Yes.

S1 But if I may interrupt MK, with Mk wasn't it posters and not leaflets?

S2 Yes, Leaflets too. (Q Did you put up posters?) S1 I recollect posters coming home from work, going somewhere quickly, getting posters, sticking them up, not knowing what the hell I was putting up and seeing the next morning in the paper what I put up.

S2 Maybe you did posters, I did leaflets., (S2 ...and hearing of MK for the first time.) Yes I did leaflets. (S1 and my hair sttood on edge)

Q Why, as soon as MK came was it like th~~e~~ really, the scarey part, I mean was that a huge risk?

S1 Well, the..it had to come, but it changed from normal activity to the military side.

Q Can I ask you just a bit again - this would just be a brief public purposes statement. Being somebody who worked for the peace movement being a mother and all the things that are said about violence, how did you feel about that step up to armed struggle?

S2 Look, right, all along the Congresses had campaigned peacefully and had got ^{them} nowhere. The..violence came from the other side we were really getting nowhere. I think that it was the right decision.

Q Did you at all think about it as being, in terms of being, the violence did that worry you?

S2 No it didn't because eventually there had to be war between the one side and the other side. There was really no other way that we could see of achieving freedom.

S1 I think I recollect that what Ester's said earlier is contained in the poster; there is one clause that sticks out in my memory. As far as possible we will protect human life but there may be casualties. That is one of the things I recollect. Well, I read it in the newspaper. (S2 Look of course...) The whole poster was reproduced in the paper.

S2 Of course the loss of life worries one, but when you look around you and you see how much loss of life there is today perpetrated by the police, what MK has done is nothing compared, not yet. Beyers Naude says we are in a state of civil war, I believe we are. And you can't turn the other cheek indefinitely.

S1 I suppose it was..came as a bit of a shock sort of, you know going from normal political activity to (S2 a military struggle) Ja. But one got over it right away you know. After all you can't just throw 20 years of peaceful struggle away and think oh, take it in our stride you know.

S2 But Jenny, when you think about it..(S1 there was no other way) no one has won freedom by peaceful means. It eventually turned to violence, military struggle. The SA government will never hand over power peacefully. How else are we going to win freedom? By strikes, that's been tried too and that will be tried in the future as well. There are all forms of struggle. We ourselves ^{have never} actively participated in the military struggle and we and accept there are different forms

S2 and all these together will bring us eventual liberation. It's strikes its work stoppages, it's politicising people, it's knocking on peoples doors as far as the whites are concerned. I still believed that that's necessary. And ⁱts ^{the} military struggle.

S1 ..can see it quite clearly developing into two struggles: on the one hand the political one and on the other the military one. Both of them complementing each other.

S2 But the movement in this country is still calling for a peaceful solution. And always will, (S1 right) Until right at the end; they will still call for peaceful negotiation. They are calling for the release of Mandela for that very purpose. That we would very much like to avoid bloodshed, if we can.

Q Do you think your attitudes are different from the blacks attitudes do you think blacks have any trouble...or do you think...

S2 ..as far as the military side is concerned, I think a lot of blacks probably feel that that is the only way. (S1 I am sure of it) they will achieve freedom, whereas we believe that there are complementary ways of achieving it. That we must never neglect the political side.

Q Would that be because they are just experiencing so much violence?

S2 Probably.

Q Do you feel like you have ever experienced the violence of the state?

S2 Yes. in a small way. when you're in your hands you're jolly well at their mercy. (Q When in the prison?) Ja.

S1 How it's violence when one is made to stand and get tortured, of course it is violence.

Q Were you tortured?

S2 Mmm.

S1 Well. standing for 35 hours. you'll read it all in the tape. you'll

S2 And solitary is torture too. The funny thing is that when I was first detained I was so scared, I really was terrified but I then started thinking about it. And thinking I was stronger than they are. They won't get me down and gradually my fear subsided but I was still in their hands. They could still do whatever they wanted with me. When I was on hunger strike I was actually very sick. And one night I nearly died, and I called..I was taken out, this was just after the hunger strike. I had been taken out of Bodksberg jail and I was sent to a prison in Pretoria. And one evening I was very ill, and I had to call the authorities. Took a very long ti me to raise them and finally got a doctor to me and he gave me medication and after a few days I was alright. But you do have these fears from time to time because you know that they have control over your life and death. If they want to. Perhaps they were a little more careful with us. It was only the beginning. You know people after us had it far worse. They were tortured, we weren't.

Q Do you mean whites?

S2 Whites and blacks.

Q One other thing, the reaching out to whites that you think is so important for JODAC to do. (S2 The what?) The reaching out^{to} the white community, how do you feel about it now? Do you think that the white community in the thirty years that you have been working, more than that, do you think that the white community has moved at all? Do you think that they have gotten worse? And how do you feel when you tell JODAC people, you must try and reach the white community, how would you feel, do you think that they could say to you agh, is there any point?

S2 No, I think they want to.

Q I know they do, but in terms of you and your experience?

S2 Yes, I think the whites have moved, maybe very slightly but they have moved. I think there are far more...democratic thinking people today. As I said to you earlier by and large whites accept the change is coming and I think that they will benefit by knowing how the struggle is progressing. By not knowing the fear is greater of what the future will hold.

S1 I want to make one other point here. Whether the whites ever advanced or they haven't advanced, we still must work amongst whites. Whatever the situation we must always work amongst whites. Our political activity whether it is UDF or what, no matter how difficult, we must work amongst whites.

S2 And it is a hell of a lot more difficult...to work amongst whites...

S1 It is more difficult because the minute we stop that, we are going to tend towards black nationalism.

Q The minute you stop what?

S1 Working amongst whites, trying to influence whites, having a policy for whites, trying to put our propoganda over to whites. Ignoring them in other words.

S2 What Hymie is saying that if we don't have whites sympathetic towards the movement there will be a greater tendency towards BC than there is today.

S1 If you work amongst whites even though many of them are reactionary you work amongst them and you work amongst them, you win over a few and those few will win over a few more and that way continuity will always be there.

Q In a sense, ^{do you think} that maybe you are agreeing with BC philosophy when they say go conscientise your own community, that's one of thar lines?

S1 What is one of thar lines?

Q To say whites must...we 're not saying whites don't have a role in the struggle, your role in the sturggle is to work with the white community; you know they say don't get involved with blacks; black men be on your own. But whites, go and make the white community more progressive.

S2 We are not working amongst whites because they are whites. It is not easier to work amongst whites, it is more difficult. We just believe that whites must be in the stuggle, it is our philospohy, that SA belongs to all its people.

S1 Look, we had this many years ago, people would much rather go and sell Guardians and Inkululeko (?) amongst black workers, (S2 much easier) much easier. Just sell them like that, you go and try and sell one to a whites. You go and try.

S2 We did, laughs, we did

S1 And we kept that aspect alive all the time.

S2 We had some ultra lefts in COD who said that our work, yes it's amongst whites, but we must go and work amongst the working class whites. Oh boy did we get kicked out so quickly in those areas.

S1 A very big issue was the working class and the working class and the working class.

S2 And that is certainly not where we drew our support, not amongst the white working class.

S1 Never came from the working class. The people were far more interested in their struggles of pass laws, victimisation on colour grounds, on racial grounds, far more than class issues.

Q Who was more interested in that?

S1 Black people themselves. If you tried to organise them on .. I am talking of years ago, I am not talking of today. If you were to try to organise a trade union for instance, the issues that they would raise at the first meeting wouldn't be how can I get more pay, how can I work less hours, how can we get rid of these discriminatory race laws that are affecting our lives.

S2 In other words what Hydie is saying is that the ANC was always stronger than the trade union movement. (S1 always.) That blacks flocked to the ANC but it was the ANC members themselves who had to activate trade unionists. In other words their national oppression was to them worse than (S1 far greater) their economic oppression.

S1 Julie, I wouldn't know what it is like today you know. I am talking so many years back.

Q community? How did you feel about the liberals and do you think it was worth dealing with them? I mean to try to get support?

S1 We worked with liberals. We tried to interest liberals and we did interest them. I have always said there is a difference liberalism as an ideology and the liberal party. Liberalism is an ideology. One can work with this. As a matter of fact when we look back everything stems from a liberal outlook, a liberal approach, the liberal ideology. But the minute it forms itself into a liberal party, then they start associating themselves with all sorts of reactions.

Q Did...

S2 As far as I am concerned I work with anybody who is prepared to listen to me. There are all those elements in organisations like Liberal Party and the PFP who are to the left of that party's thinking. You take the Black Sash, they moved a hell of a long way since the time when they first started and today they are in the progressive camp.

Q Ok, and do you see any...was there any greater antipathy then when you looked at COD and the liberals refused to join, and the anti communist slurs and all that, between relations with liberals then and relations with liberals now?

S2 I think people are more susceptible.

Q The liberals were more susceptible to what, a progressive line?

S2 Yes.

Q And what about the progressives, are they more or less disdainful of the liberals? Working with liberals. I mean..five years...

S2 There is no liberal party today, so whatever liberals there are would be in the PFP or with us.

Q But is there less disdain with working with the PFP?

S2 Less disdain amongst the white community?

S2 Ja, I would say.

Q Mmm.

S2 Not amongst the white left, you mean amongst the white population.

Q No, among the white left. It seems to me that five or eight years ago if you had said to whites you must go and work with the PFP, they would have said agh, I can't bear it. Helen Suzman is terrible, I don't want to know, it is just beneath me and even NUSAS rejected liberals. Whereas now JODAC actually unabashedly goes out and tried to get the left wing and PFP youth and..to the ECC (S1 quite rightly so) Ja, but I'm saying that seems to be a changes. (S1 and S2 Mm. yes) and how did ~~xxx~~that compare with the 50s? Or back, before? Do you think you folks had any disdain for liberals? Or did you try to work for/with them or..

S2 We tried to work with them but usually unsuccessfully.

S1 I always draw the distinction between liberalism as an ideology,

S2 You have said that...

S1 Because I think all my life I have worked with liberals. The people with a liberal ideology and those are the people who become more interested.

Q Ok, the last thing I am going to ask you is could you make a statement about SA's future and how it will be racially. Just in terms of do you..what kind of position do you envisage for whites in a future liberated SA?

End of side.

Side II

S1..of all, we must assume if we talk of a liberated SA and what the role of whites is, we must assume that it is again the future SA is going to be based on the principals of the Freedom Charter. If that is so there is certainly room for whites. Whites, black, Indians very-body, one parliament, that is all, that is all there is to it.

Q What's that, is that your radio?

S1 No, it is not ours.

S2 It is outside somewhere, why is it interfering?

Q No, I just wondered if there was somebody coming.

S1 So with the principals...with the F.Charter ideology as the basis for a liberated society there certainly will be room for whites. As a matter of fact an important place for them too.

S2 Well, I envisage a future SA free of exploitation of man by man, where everybody, irrespective of the colour of their skin will have equal opportunity in education, jobs, housing, equal opportunity, period. And that there will be one man one vote. And I Hope I will be here to see it.

S1 When you talk about no more exploitation of man by man, isn't that going a little bit too far or are you (S2 Well, that is what I would like to see) envisaging that...so would I but I think it is far more practical to implemant that.

Q The Freedom Charter...?

S1 Freedom Charter in a liberated society.

S2 Well, I realise that that probably is a minimum demand for the immediate future. yes.

S1 I suppose from our point of view a minimum demand from others we would bring the blimin army out if they want anything like that.

Q What?

S1 We'll bring the army out. the government talking you see. To us..

Q Ja) it is the minimum demand. to them it's good grief - laughs.

Q Ja. And do you ever think of your own selves beingⁱⁿ a future SA. not necessarily the one that's the one you'd like to build. but do you

Q ever think about change coming? Do you ever think about the time frame when you look at the situation right now. do you ever think to yourself well. maybe in ten, twenty years I will be doing this or this? Do you ever fantasise like that?

S2 Yes. I do sometimes think of a future SA. I think of all the people who will come back, who are out of the country. For me personally there will be far, far more freedom than I enjoy today. I don't consider myself at all free. today.

S1 Why?

Q Why not?

S2 Because I still hold the same political views: I am not happy with the government of the day: I want to see changes coming and I feel an oppression personally. ^{of what is} going on in our country. I am very unhappy about all the people who are being killed: of all the fights that are happening ^{black} against black. white against white. I think a lot of the killings of so called black against black is provocation. I would like to see all the trials come to an end. And I am very unhappy. I would like to see all the people out of jail because the people who are sitting in jail. the people who are out of the country, are people who can build a better SA.

And I do fantasise about all these people coming together. In one big meeting and discussing the future SA. Free of exploitation. free of police intimidation. I personally will feel free then. I don't feel free now.

Q Do you think about the future?

S1 Every now and then yes.

Q And what comes to your mind then? Concretely. what place do you see for yourself?

S2 You'll start a new ~~FSU~~...laughs..

S1 For my own self strangely enough I don't. give it much thought. I.. know that in a liberated society I will fit in perfectly. I don't know

S1 what I will do and what I won't do: I will probably do hundreds of things. but whatever I will do it will be perfect.

S2 You know even today, when I phoned my friend I am careful what I say over the telephone. It's all these years of being afraid to talk on the telephone. I see times not phone people. I go and see them, and there is no earthly reason why I shouldn't phone them but it is the sort of life that we have lead for what. 35 years now. It may not always have been as acute as it is now, but it has remained, it's there.

Q Mmm.

S2 I hope I won't be too old to help build this new society.

S1 At the present moment we can look forward to Botha making an offer of some small thing or another, bringing blacks into an extra...parliament or something or other. Giving them some sort of say which the blacks are again going to reject...

S2 But even the Indian and Coloured parliament is not acceptable.

S1 The blacks also won't be..and I all I can see facing us at the present moment is years of hardship, and battle, struggle and bloodshed also. Because unless they are prepared to tackle the problems of SA properly.. (S2 which they won't)which they won't, the idea of it being a I call it multi racial society, with one man one vote, in a unitary society things won't let up in the country. It's gone too far. It really has, it has gone too far: what was acceptable a few years is not acceptable any more.

S1 From the people you have spoken to Julie, do they generally feel that the government now is not in a position of strength?

Q The resistance people I have talked to, it aias all people like yourself, you know. (S1 Yes) Agh it is funny, like the blacks- let me not use the tape up.

S1 After Verwoerd then, now freedom after Botha..laughs.

Q May I ask you something before I forget, Is Ester, with an H.

P80 Interview Baseeds.

A2 Yes. Esther.

Q One last question, coz I just going on forever. I just wanted you to make a comment about this Goniwe funeral with the SACP and Soviet flags went up, do you remember?

S2 Yes, well our immediate reaction was that it was provocation. But I still don't know. Has it in fact happened?

Q I have interviewed tons of people ...

S2 And?

Tape stops briefly.

S2 Significant, that it was put up at all and it shows where their sympathies lie and their support.

S1 Can only mean one thing, that there is an underground party working there and they have decided now is the time to come into the bloody open and show our colours.

S2 But in any case even ^{with} _{in} the ANC underground there is open support for the ANC. Their colours are on everywhere.

Q Ja. In fact the person..tape stops.

S2..about the Soviet Union (QBut if..)and that they..if they read just every bit of literature that they can get on the subject. And so it is possible, that Marxism is being discussed. It is not unusual.

S1 It is more than possible. It is being..once you see a thing like this it's not agents provocateurs, on the job then you can rest quite assured that that's what is happening.

Q Dyou ever have blacks, even now, do you ^{have} contact with blacks? Do they ask you questions about the CP?

S1 No. do you?

S2 have been blacks as well. And recently a comrade came out of jail, what was his name? (S1 Oh yes I know) He was a volunteer during the Congress of the People and we met him at a friends house and oh, we just talked and talked and talked about our campaigns in the past. And he was absolutely determined that he was going to go right back into activity and he spoke at one of the JODAC meetings and obviously we spoke to him quite a lot afterwards, too. That's where we have had contact at Jodac meetings: Indian comrades, like Billy Nair who we hadn't seen for a long time and we were involved with him in the struggle and one or two young people that we meet.

That's really the only contact that we have.

Q Ok...because of the fact that there is this comradeship was it this Christmas party that you get together every year with the Heymans, and ..

S2 No, that is a new years party..(Q I thought it was new years eve.) Christmas we go to Helen. Christmas day we go to Helen and at 12 o'clock she usually makes a speech mainly about the people who have been detained and we drink a toast and the people in jail also know that Helen has a party on Christmas day and at 12 o'clock we remember the people who are in jail, who are banned and so on.

And on New Years Eve we usually go to the Heymans.

Q And do what? Just have a ?

S2 Well, we have a party. (S1 Just a party). we have speeches..

Q And have you done that every year since when?

S2 We've done it every year except one or two years when Ann was here.

S1 Since, the last few years isn't it?

S2 Ja.

S1 In the 50s we had a couple here. Nelson ^{was here} ~~was here~~ Walter was here.

Q And what was this thing about Tom Wasp getting the young people in to
S2 one of the New Years Eve parties?

S2 Well. the Heymans have always tried to get young people to their parties and every year there seem to be more and more people coming and there are quite a lot of Indians and blacks who come too.

Q And was there something about JODAC getting involved in one of the meetings and doing quite poticial games and things? I heard that last years New years eve party. something about more JODAC people being involved?

S2 Yes. more JODAC people came and in fact what they did they adooted the Weinberg family as the family of the year and somebody sooke about the Weinberg's involvment. Eli and Violet and Sheila. That's all. (Q Ok) We also got somebody. Sally Hogan to speak. Barbara's sister, and that was very nice. You know Barbara's involvment has brought Sally and her husband quite a lot closer to us. I see her from time to time; she wants to understand why Barbara was involved and I really think she has got a good understanding and has been very, very suopor-tive of Barbara. She was very pleased to be asked to speak though, and she spoke mainly about Barbara. about her involvment with the support committee and hw much they helped her and her family over that period.

Q So was that a good feeling to see the young people at that party?

S2 Mmm. Very good. it is always good to see young people. at meetings. I don't know if you are interested in this but when we came back from C.T. Hymie decided he wanted to have a few meetings about the 40th Anniversay of the end of fascism and we had three house meetings around that. and we drew in JODAC people. some Indian comrades, etc and they were very successful. Young people were very interested. in that. Made quite good contributions too.

Hymie I am just telling them about the three house meetings that we had about the 40th Anniversary of the end of Fascism.

Q Ok. I could go on and on (S2 Ja, you could go....

End of interview 296