

Interview: Helen Joseph

A 1931. I came from India, straight from India.

Q It was a bit of a fluke, I mean, that you didn't have any particular interest in politics?

A No, no. I didn't. I'd had..I was engaged to be married in India to a young man in ? a tobacco company. ~~xxx~~ Today that fills me with horror; the way he earned his monthly salary was going out into the countryside teaching the Indian villagers to smoke. This is so awful, I didn't ~~x~~see it then but I ~~dox~~ see it now.

He went on leave and he was under a contract with his Imperial Tobacco Company; he had to be in the company six years before he could marry. He had only been in for four years so there was a gap with him of 2 years before we could get married and while he was away on leave I was riding and I was thrown from the horse and I damaged my head, skull. I don't know a fracture of the skull ~~x~~or whether I damaged the lining of the skull. I don't know exactly; the Z Rays were not in those days what they are now. But I was picked up unconscious on the road by an Indian friend of mine and you know, I had been, not all that stridly brought up but swearing was not in my line. I had never actually used the word bloody in my life. But Taffy Kelly who is the young man who picked me up swears that when he ^{was} driving me to the hospital, with the driver in front and me in the back with my head on his knee. I opened my eyes and I said to him don't drive so bloody fast. I find it difficult to believe but when you are unconscdous all sort of things do happen.

The result of that was that I was in hospitals for quite a long time, a few weeks, and I went to stay with some friends and I was told by the doctor that I mustn't do any heavy work for at least a couple of years because I think you know, those days they did not really know so much about heads and brains and what not as they do today. I was coming to the end, I was nearly at the end of my own 3 year contract and I had always had it in mind that I would simply ask for a renewal but I was Assistant Principal at that time, of the school. It was a pretty onerous job and the doctors felt that would be too much of a strain. So I had to look for something a little bit easier.

I didn't know what to do and I nosed around and I thought about some vague job in Italy but that did not come off and then I wrote to a

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A Then I wrote to a friend of mine, Dorothy Stubbs, who had been at university in London with me, and we had done our degrees together and she came from Durban, S.A. So I wrote to her to say is there something I could do for about a year, 18 months before I can come back to India to be married. She wrote back and said yes there is; her father was a teacher and had a little preparatory school for boys in Durban. She said, I have just got married and why don't you come and live with my parents and do my little teaching job for about a year; you won't get much salary but you can live with my parents and come here and then go back to India.

So I thought well, that's the answer, so I did that. Then what happened was that, this is going on a bit too long I think, he was delayed in England; he got extended leave coz of the depression, it was 1931, and time he came back he arrived in Bombay at 8 o'clock in the morning and I sailed at one in the afternoon. So we only met for a few hours, literally on the dock and then in somebody's house; and I came to S.A. and was terribly lonely and didn't like it here because I had come with my ideas of new non racial ideas. I had never spelt them out. Hadn't articulated them but I was horrified that in Durban I wouldn't be able to mix freely with Indians; this I knew but the shock wore off after a year or two, it did. But ~~when~~^{he} I first came it was a shock to me.

Q What year was it you came?

A 1931.

Q And was there any feeling that anyone said oh, you're going to S.A. they have a system there where they keep blacks and whites separate?

A They did. The Indian friends that I stayed with in Bombay, just prior to embarking had got cousins here and these were lovely people. He was ? arms agent in Bombay and they had a sort of young palace on Malabar hill and they said to me Helen you will never like S.A. You will never like it. And somebody before that had said it to me, that was the daughter of Sada-? Naidoo, the Indian poetess; I knew her daughter in Hyderabad and Lilarmini said you will never like it, you're mad. And her sister Padmaja had been here on official visit with the mother and had gone to a hair dresser here who wouldn't do her hair for her.

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A I said it is too late now; I have agreed and that is what I said to Nadja Mankama, but you have got cousins there. Give me their names and addresses and they said never, if we give you their addresses you will go to them and you will never live it down in Durban and they refused to give me the name. I still don't know who their cousins were.

So I came here and I was lonely but then I began to meet people and met this very handsome popular dentist, who was 17 years older and very sophisticated, very much a man about town and in the end you know he won. I stayed and married him and I didn't go back to India. I was broken hearted not at giving up Ule, coz I had already fallen in love with Billy, but not to go back to India. But I am really really grieved over that for so many years that I had let that opportunity go of going back to India.

Q And just real briefly, you had gone to India because of this fiance or because you wanted to teach or why did you go there initially?

A I went there to teach originally. I wanted to go back to India, itself, I loved India. I loved it. Of course it was ~~not~~ an artificial life that I lead but I loved it. I was totally unconscious, totally apditical. Unconscious of everything that was going on around me except my immediate surroundings which were very gay and very colourful and very exciting. I lived in an Indian estate, we were both young white teachers, very spoilt but I didn't see the poverty. I didn't see it.

Q And when you came to S.A. initially, your friends had warned you, you got there, you were horrified but what do you mean it wore off?

A The shock of apartheid wore off; I married Billy Joseph; I moved into Durban society. We lived a very, very pleasant social life. The only contact I had with blacks was the few one or two, no I didn't have any Indian friends to begin with. That took about five years. My only contact with black people were the people, the Zulus, who worked for me. I didn't meet any others. Nobody in Durban did. They didn't. There wasn't any mixing.

And I began, I gradually accepted that that was the way of life. This was the S.A. way of life and never thought about it. I grew

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A into it and the shock wore off. And I stopped thinking about it.

Q And then why didn't you remain in that cocoon? How did you...

A Oh, well that is another long long story. The war came and my husband joined up in the Dental Corps and I took some time longer; I was very distressed about the war because I thought it..I knew it meant people were going to get killed and I remember crying when ^{war} was declared. I cried.

Billy was in for about a year; my father was in, he was already 65 and he reduced his age ten years to get into the British Air Force as a clerk; my brother was in, the army service corps as a colonel and he was evacuated from France and then sent to Kenya. He ~~remained~~^{remained} up in Kenya and Somaliland for the rest of the war. So there...my mother was dead by that time. My family was all in. My husband, brother and my father and I was the only one that wasn't.

Then I saw an advertisement for a new corps of Welfare and Information officers for the Air Force and for the Army and you could go on this initial training course for a fortnight or 3 weeks or whatever, and at the end if you ^{were} selected you would stay in the Army and be commissioned. If you were not selected you could either stay in the army as another rank, start from the bottom ^{or} or you could be given an honourable discharge. And I thought well, look I have got a degree and have been interested in some kind of social work, and I may as well give it a bang.

So I went up to Pretoria on this course. Remember I had a car and drove up on black market petrol and went on this course and I was surprised I was one of those who was selected, so that I was in. I stayed in for 5 1/2 years and my husband came out and that was really the end of our marriage; Because when he came out he went back to his girlfriend in Durban which I knew about by that time but thought that maybe the war might cure it, but it didn't cure it. Billy got off the army and went back and had a free hand.

I stayed in the army, in the Air Force rather. It was an extraordinary course because we were information officers more than welfare. And our job was to give weekly lectures to the women in the Air Force to ...on current affairs. And our mandate, unbelievable, but it came

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A from Smuts himself, was to inculcate a liberal, tolerant attitude of mind. Sounds unbelievable doesn't it?

Q What was the context of that? Why did they want that?

A Well, they thought/felt that...many people in the army wanted to know what they were in the army for or why they were always being fought. You see a...don't forget, an awful lot of them had joined up because it was better money that you can get in ~~civil~~ civil life at that particular level; economic level of the white. I am talking about whites, it was the white who joined up, and...but I remember on our training corps, Colonel Marquet said to us, he addressed us one day and he said don't ~~xxxxxx~~ think that I am in here to preserve the British empire. I am not. I am in the army to fight Nazism and to get rid of Hitler; that is why I am here and I hope that is why all of you are here. I mean that was really sort of spelling it out.

Some influential people in the army had managed to...I thought SMuts was a great thinker. I know he did an awful lot of terrible things but he was a man who thought a lot. And they...had to really sort of...persuaded him that it was important that some of the troops should understand what it was all about. And they had already tried it as an experiment, the men, the mens' information corps started first and now they thought they must do something about the women. So they brought us in.

And we were a lot of high...I wasn't high powered, the rest were very high powered ladies. I was overcome with shy~~xxxx~~embarrassment, but there we were, we were in for 4 years. We lived in camp and went from place to place and gave our lectures on teaching people about S.A. its structure, government, municipal and provincial, parliament, on all the isms you can think of. And all I had to do, which was a big effort, had to keep ~~wone~~ one step ahead with the people I was talking to, because was supplied with wonderful information notes which I learnt like a parrot. And managed to give back in a very personal way and.. but you see ^{then} when I came to talk about, to learn and to read, I began to understand ~~and~~ and I began to see the ~~xx~~differences: So little was spent on black education, so much on white education. I saw the difference between the gross national income of whites compared with blacks. I saw, began to learn about the differences in their way of living in the...where they had to live, in their areas of...I learnt

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A about apartheid. I couldn't...well it wasn't called apartheid then.

But I began to see what was happening; so the whites were living on top of the blacks, which I hadn't realised before. But you know Oulie, I'm not alone in that. I read in a book about Nerhu wrote, that Jabal Nheru was 25 before he understood about Indian poverty, because he also grew up in a very...well he grew up in an aristocratic surrounding full of luxury and he was 25 before India's poverty and injustice hit him. So I don't feel so bad. I was about 29 by then, I was well into my 30s.

And that was the end of my marr...I didn't go back to my husband; the end of the marriage and after the war I took up a job in Social Welfare; I was a community organiser. Ideas were seeping in...it took another few years. Then I went to work in C.T., organised community centres in C.T. and I worked on the Cape Flats with lovely lovely coloured people there. We started community centres and that's where at last I grasped the idea that social work is fine. It has to be done by somebody because you must alleviate misery and suffering when you find it, but all you are doing is giving an aspirin, for a toothache.

And so I began to realise that unless you do something about the political economic toothache it gives rise to the poverty and the suffering which I saw around me. Then you are not going to do... you are sort of negating a good deal of what you think and so I looked around and finally I came back to Joberg...I had been here before. I had worked in Joberg as a social worker first and then I came back to Joberg in 1951, to the Garment Workers Union as their director of their Medical Aid society. That really flung me into contact with the people and into contact with Solly Sachs. He finally pushed me over the brink.

Q Why do you think that all the other people who gave those lectures didn't realise that? I mean did....

A They did, oh they did, ja.

Q But didn't move the way you did?

A No, no, they haven't. I don't know why. I suppose, I don't know,

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A perhaps it might have been to do with a broken marriage. They went back to their ordinary lives and they also had established careers, don't forget. They couldn't take up a new career like I did. They went back to their careers and their homes; they are lovely...I still know some of them but they haven't gone into the political field. That...a lot's in opportunity, you see if it is just opportunity that gave me the chance to come up to Joberg under the aegis of the Garment Workers Union which at that stage was the most militant union, under the direction of Solly Sacks, who was treating the Afrikaner workers, they had nothing to fear from the blacks, as long as they had equal pay for equal work. (Nos...) And he influenced me tremendously.

Q You, how did you get from Social Work to the Unions? With that realisation of the aspirin approach...

A Just chance. Somebody phoned me and I think I...from up here I knew a lecturer at the university and phoned me and said look there is a job going at the Garment W. Union, they are looking for somebody who has got initiative. For everything else, why don't you come up for an interview and see what you think of it. And they will fly you up, so they flew me up for an interview; I was interviewed by Solly Sacks, who didn't talk to me at all about what I'd ~~done~~ ~~was~~ doing or about anything else; all he wanted to know was about the coloured people and how they were suffering and what was the feeling amongst them and after about 10 minutes of this he said to me well, do you want the job.

And me, I was so over awed, I said yes. Then I went back to C.T., had to tell them what I had done, I felt awful.

Q So what was he like, what was it like meeting him for the first time?

A Overpowering, I found it. Very ugly coz he had a very bad complexion. Face structure was alright but you know his magnetism was so strong that after a few meetings you never remembered after that, that Solly was ugly. I mean...I was very close to him, I lived with him for a time. (and um...) When he went to England I followed him for a bit but I...took some leave but I decided it would never work out; Solly and I were too far apart, we could never make a life together, so I came back to S.A.

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Q Too far apart in what way?

A Culturally to a great extent; and politically because I wasn't..I mean he used to laugh at me for my middle class spit and polish and he called me a wishy washy liberal and I mean I think he's damn right. Culturally he..was an extraordinary..because his mind was so broad and so enormous and his grasp of political things, but he had not totally moved away from his old family village way of living and way of eating. And there was an enormous gulf between me and Solly Sacks' family.

Q Village where ?

A In Lithuania or wherever it was. He came here as a child.

Q Aha, that is interesting that he called you a wishy washy liberal because if you talk to young students, white students today, lot of them have stories about how they were criticised and they felt so inadequate as a liberal. But still for you that was quite a way to move; I mean when you first came from India to be a liberal would have already been a huge step. (That's right) How did you feel about that? I mean do you think he was right and why? Did it make you feel inadequate?

A I used to get cross, because I had to realise at that stage that was all I was, a wishy washy liberal; and I used to...one day I was shouting about the S.A. Labour Party, which was white and I said I felt...by this time I had absorbed a few ideas about injustices to blacks in a very big way, and me I was a great reformer. I was going to shout out about all these things and I started moaning about the liberal Party and Solly just shut me up; he said for heavens sake stop moaning about it, get into it and do something about it. You see that was...he was so direct.

So I did, I got into the Labour Party...but I moved through it like this. Because I used to say to him but there are only interested in white workers, and not interested in black workers. He said well, that is your job. You know me, the wishy washy liberal.

Finally I was invited by Ruth Furst, whom I had met through Solly at parties and things; I met quite a few people; Violet Wynberg woked

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A in the same union as I did...we didn't work in the union, we actually worked in the Industrial Council. But in it you are very close and Solly had decided, because he lost his case, and he was very angry when he...he was arrested for breaking his bans, defying the ban on City Hall steps, at a meeting; And he wanted either to go to jail or to get an acquittal. He fought his case right up to the Bloemfontein level and there they upheld the Magistrate's conviction, but they suspended the sentence and that was not what Solly wanted. And he said he must go.

Had long fights about it but he had made his own decision and he went.

Q Did he leave the country?

A Yes he left the country. Then I was on a Muizenberg visit/with Solly one Christmas and after he had made this decision, and I...was walking on the sand with Violet Wynberg and we were talking about things and I said you know, Val, I am going to be very sort of...my life is going to be empty when Solly goes, because Solly always had everybody working all round him; he was great at organising people. I will have to look for something else that is worth while to occupy me ~~and~~ and Violet just looked at me and grinned and she said I mustn't do that. She said well, I dare say we can do something about that and she..obviously organised Ruth Furst to come and invite me to...would I like to sit on the founding committee of a new organisation which was the Congress of Democrats. Then I was in.

Q Can we stop before you go on to that? What..do you think Solly taught you anything or do you think, in that period, you learned anything about the role of whites in the struggle?

A Oh, yes I think I did, I think I did. He...yes I did. Although ...Solly felt rightly or wrongly, I think rightly, that not enough attention was being paid by the democratic forces to the role of whites. He was very strong on this that you must get to the whites because he had done that in his own life, you see, in the Garment W. Union. He had changed to a large extent these Afrikaner women who had come in from the backveld in the 1930s. He had taught them to work alongside blacks and he felt it was tremendously important to mould as far as you could, the views of the..especially the

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A Afrikaners. He felt not enough attention was being paid to the Afrikaners. You see he felt that only the United Party...the door was closed against them blacks but it wasn't locked but under..as soon as the Nationalists came in the door was ~~locked~~ and bolted. And he felt that we didn't...had to pay enough attention to the Nationalists and certainly not enough to the whites, as a whole.

So that is why I think that...I don't know if it was really due to entirely to his influence but largely, the Garment Workers Union official stood for..in a ~~xxxx~~ ^{municipal} elections to get in on a Labour Party ticket; to get into the municipality; they all lost but they did stand. I canvassed for Solly; never was there a worse ~~xxxx~~ canvasser than me, because they made it so selective; Solly said well, you can't go into any house with an Afrikaner ~~some~~ because of your English accent. You can't go into the house of any foreign name because they won't understand you so we will ~~just~~ give you the English names; so I went knocking on the doors with English names and swallowed a cup or two of tea, not many; I don't think I made any impact at all. I don't think I got a single vote for Solly but I did try.

So I was in, I was learning you see. I was actually meeting whites and realising how rigid their attitudes were. So at least I was getting experience of it and...Solly felt so strongly that you must do something about the whites. I don't know whether, I suppose he believed that the whites could be changed. But then so did we. Later I realised in the Congress Movement we did believe that; we believed that pressure, non violent pressure on the whites could bring about a change of heart. We also believed it.

So, I think perhaps through Solly I was brought a little closer, just thinking about the role. I didn't know enough blacks to think about the role of blacks at that time. I was moving...I was meeting the Garment workers who were black; I wasn't meeting them socially. I was meeting the progressive minded whites who were Solly's circle. So I was ~~xxx~~ moving into the white political world.

Q Can...ok, you..the wishy washy liberal and suddenly they wanted you to help found....a change there?

 It was only Solly who called me that....

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Q But there still must have been some movement?

A No, I will tell you what it was, what I think it was. You see they wanted to form the Congress of Democrats. They were obviously aiming at radical whites ~~xxx~~ but they wanted it to be a broad organisation and they ^wanted a broad provisional committee and I was the broad element, I am quite convinced of that. That I just got in as somebody who was moving towards the right way of thinking, but I represented the broad element.

Q And did you think that ~~was~~ a good idea? Did ~~that~~..when you got involved did that..was that a help to have all of them being so radical? Perhaps it was useful to have you. What ways do you think your broadness might have been useful? Did you have any contacts?

A Oh, public opin...public figure, that's all. No, I didn't influence them, no, ~~I~~ ^{they} didn't want to be influenced...

Q No, getting...did you think that that helped bring white s in who might have been alienated by the rest?

A I think so because they did try to...they got...you see Father Huddleston was on that provisional committee. He didn't acutally come into the COD itself but ~~he~~ was on the provisional committee; so ~~he~~ was a Roman Catholic priest, Padre deMenoire, he was also on it and mys~~xxx~~ ^{self}, I think we were the broad element.

No I was very ignorant at the time. The people that I worked with Communist Party was banned; for me it was banned. I never stopped to think...I never.. really did, to work out who was ~~xxx~~ a communist and who wasn't a communist, but now I realise of course that people on that committee, with me, some of them were communists. I didn't think about it at the time.

Q But coming from the movement that you came from, ^{even} before the liberal stage, did you have any negative feelings about communists, or were you worried about...

A No, not ~~when~~ ^{he} I was lecturing in the Air Force. I felt, you know, I was more interested in the aims of ~~Communist~~ ^{Communism} which I saw as a very advanced form of socialism. I don't think I got much further ^{than} that

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A And that would be the way...don't forget that during the war the Soviet Union were our gallant allies. So at the time I was lecturing to the troopes they were our allies. Part of our job was to try and make people understand what they were fighting for, and it was presented to me, I think in our information notes and I accepted it as a very advanced form of socialism.

Q And did you ever have any of the reservations that whites have so often about communism? Was there anything that made you feel it's not for me?

A I don't know. It wasn't..it couldn't present itself as anything for anybody at that time because it was illegal. The Party was banned. I didn't know it was still functioning underground, no, very few people, only the people that belonged that were doing it would; other people didn't know that. In the 1950s they were not putting ~~out~~ pamphlets under the name of the Communist Party, so that for me the communist party had gone. Not communism, but the CP.had gone.

Solly used to talk to me alot about I must xread the Masters but I never really got around to it. I did buy, once I bought some books from one of the men who was in COD, who used to import books. And we used to buy them from him; from Moscow and all sorts of places and he came one night...and you know what I bought, I bought Selected Works of Lenin, I think, something, Marx' Capital, something ~~ex~~^{is}ke, I bought three good solid books and I thought now I really ought to know something about communism. So I bought the books; that was on Monday night and I think he went away at 10o'clock and I think I paid him £5 for the 3 books. 6o'clock next morning, there was a knock on my door and I lost the books to the police. So I never even opened the pages.

Q How did...di they know that^{that} ~~A~~ ^{guy} come to....

A No, no, ~~it~~ was just a coincidence.

Q What did they come for?

A To raid. They raided me and away went my books. I hadn't even a couple of pages. And then the books turned up again in the treason trial, as being listed against me to show that I ~~read~~^{read}

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A communist books. So I explained it to the judges that I had never had time to read these books. They were taken from me and only 12 hours after I had bought them.

Q And so were there...was it just a question that you needed the experience and as you put it, the opportunity to move; there hadn't been anything that kept you back if you had thought this is a good idea.. but this communism idea, this is too much; this isn't me....

A No, no, I don't think people did think that in the 1950s. I don't think so. We had the peace council, I was also on the Peace Council which I thought was a good idea; work for peace, that is fine.

Then came the S.A. Federation of Women, and I was part of the..I helped Hilda Watson and Ray Alexander, because I had met them through Sojly and the COD. I helped them to organise, do some of the administrative work, to organise for that conference but that was their baby, not mine. It was wonderful, the first multi racial conference of women in 1954 and they elected...they voted to start the Federation OF S.A. Women and they elected a National Executive and to my amazement I found I was on the Executive.

By this time I was also on the National Executive of COD. I have never really quite known why coz...people had met me and maybe thought I had something to give, I don't know. I always seem to be elected onto something. So life became so full; you have no idea how full it became.

Then through the Federation of S.A. Women, when we started organising it in the Transvaal region, then I was in deeper and deeper and deeper. Then until apart from my work at the Medical Aid society, this was my whole life. There wasn't any other life and I loved it.

Q And what about again, keep focusing back on your role, your situation with whites. The role of whites, do you find yourself losing white friends, people who were not political? X X

A I had lost my white friends except one or two; I have got one or two left from my old days, very few. But, I see, what can actually happen to me was because of my enormous involvement in Fed. OF S.A. Women, and also on the boycotting of schools in the Bantu Education

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A Campaign, I got caught up in that; I actually moved away from whites. Perhaps moved away is not the right word but my whole life was absorbed with working very little with whites. Whereas... and I did very little work in the COD. Once the Fed. Of S.A. Women had started that absorbed me completely. So I think my association with whites to a great ^{extent} diminished, on the second half; certainly by time I was on the treason trial.

So that, whereas the other people had belonged to the COD, they went on working amongst whites, because that was our job.

Q Sorry.

End of side.

Q Who worked in COD, they didn't lose that though because they had a focus?

A That was their focus. That was the role of the COD, was to work amongst the whites and they ANC had made that very clear that our role as a partners in the Congress Alliance was to work amongst the whites, because they don't need the whites to work amongst the blacks. But they needed the whites to work and that was our task. And a very...hard one, it was too.

Q You skipped one stage in..and I want to hear about that hard part but um, how, we haven't even mentioned the ANC. Again I am looking at it as the point of view from ~~the~~ white. Didn't ^{was} that, just ~~as~~ a kind of natural progression or, I mean certainly for a lot of whites it would have been; why would you even think of feeling support for a black organisation, how did that work with you? Do you remember hearing about it for the first time? Do you remember why it attracted you?

A I gradually began to know about the ANC. I had met one or two of the leaders. I remembered the other day that I had actually met Walter Sisulu at Solly's flat and I said so in a letter to Nelson and I said you can tell Walter I met him all those years ago but I don't think he remembers. But I do remember meeting the young Walter Sisulu, he was quite young then. And he was then Secretary

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A General of the ANC. I knew about the ANC. It was a bit remote until I was in the Federation, then I was very closely associated with the ANC Womens League.

You see my feed into the African political people, I think it is true to say, came largely through the women, through the Federation & then when I got onto the treason trial, of course that developed and developed and developed. I'm just sort of spilling it out the way I am thinking about it; I haven't analysed it before. But I think so.

I was aware of the ANC, I certainly, you know by the time I was into the Federation of S.A. Women and in the time of the COD, although I felt my way in, you know, first, you want stories...the first executive meeting of the COD that I ever went to, the National Executive, they talked about the black spots, Julie, I didn't know what a black spot was. And I sat there not opening my mouth, at an Executive meeting, a black spot, what do they mean. And they were talking about Sophiatown and I was...why Sophiatown a black spot and you know I had to go away and find out what, and you know it just shows how ignorant I was. I had to go away and find out what...and when I told, when I speak to students and people they think it is hilarious. I had to go and find out what a black spot was. Me, sitting on the National Executive of the COD.

I learnt as I went, Julie. I picked it up here and there and every where and what I did know was that when the COD was literally called into being by the ANC and the SAIC it was on the understanding that we work with whites.

Q And how did you feel about that task? of working among whites?

A I tried; it was very hard. I told you I am the world's worst canvasser; I can't sell anything to anybody and one of our sort of day to day.. when we had weekly meetings, I was the Secretary of our^{Hillbrow} Branch and they met in my flat and we had discussions and this and that. And one of our tasks was to get our literature out. The COD literature: COD pamphlets and fighting talk and liberation and go flat...in Hillbrow, flat by flat to sell. I was hopeless; I went with Violet Weinberg; we used to go out in twos and we would go to a long corridor in a block of flats, and Violet would go down to the far end and I

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A would knock on the first door and you know why she would be half way up while I am still knocking on the second door. And she would have been in and out, in and out; I never got in at all. And Violet would say to me stick your foot in, they can't close the door on you. And me, I was brought up nicely as a young girl, I would teeter on the edge of the door and stop and wait to be asked in. Maybe given a cup of tea, but I never got it.

Violet would come back at the end of the evening and she would have sold about three pounds worth; I was lucky if I had sold 5 bobys worth. So eventually I was degraded, downgraded and the job I was given, on account of my long legs, I could shove pamphlets under doors but they soon took me off selling. I mean I did try, I really did try, to try and meet people; I tried occasionally through having a branch meeting that was going to be, to invite other people. I would rack my brains and think now who are the people that I used to know that I might get to come and I would bring somebody but I could see that person was an outsider: It didn't work.

The move I'd made from my surroundings to this was far too deep. It still is; the people who are loyal to me today and they are lovely people; its personal, they think I am mad, I'm a nutcase. They sometimes say well, you have the courage of your convictions but they say stop it now, you have done enough; this is the thing that comes. But they are very sweet; friends sent me fifty rands the other day; a woman who was in the Air Force with me to help to pay my fine but she said Helen, leave it alone now, you have done enough.

Q So you really never, that wasn't your forte or your great area being with whites?

A No, it wasn't. That is why...I respected the COD tremendously for what it was trying to do and I mean I was part of it to realise the great honour that we had in being part of the Congress Alliance but that didn't mean anything to the whites, this is the thing. It didn't mean anything to the whites. I don't know what impact we made on the white people in Joburg as the COD. I would think probably only at a fairly high intellectual standard. We certainly did not get around to the ordinary people in the street.

Q So did you see that as a failure.

Interview: Helen Joseph

Q Do you see that as a failure? If you look back to the 50s and people talk about the lessons of the 50s, You always hear that, is that one of the lessons to you, how difficult it was, that you need new strategies now, and then, if you want to reach whites?

A I suppose it is, I don't think I've spelt it out but I suppose... yes, I'll never see the COD as a failure. I tell you where I think we did make an ~~xxxxx~~ impact, not in the personal contact, not in wooing people in, bringing people into the COD but we certainly were an important ginger group.

Q What does that mean?

A I think it is a 1950 expression.

Q It sounded like wait and I was gonna ask you what you meant.

A A ginger group is a group that pushes, gingers people up, that's all. It has an impact on people by pushing them. It gingers them, smartens them up. We made people think through our literature, letters, to the paper; we never got very far with public meetings; we couldn't get an ~~xx~~audience, we could get a venue but not an audience.

But we certainly..I have a long, long list somewhere, I am trying to... there wasn't a topic that we didn't bring out a pamphlet or document on. Anything, apartheid at the zoo, anything you can think of, that came up, that was a topical issue, COD was out with a pamphlet or an ~~an~~ article or booklet.

Q That was your list, you had a list of topics.

A Mmm, I have an enormous list somewhere. They all came up in the treason trial. I mean we really did both inside and outside S.A., on municipal elections, Bantu Education, Group Areas, every aspect of that, Sophiatown removals, everything you could think of, we were out with an expression of opinion and I think that was our great value. I have always said that; that COD had an..did make an impact, not,,we didn't draw people in, no we didn't, not on a membership basis. But our public opinion basis, we were constantly there as a ginger group, as I say. And we certainly had, I think, a great effect upon the liberal party because we were always one or

Interview: Helen Joseph

A two or three steps ahead of the Liberal Party. Now the Liberal Party wanted to be very close to the ANC and the Congress Alliance but they didn't want to give up on some of their principals; but there were we, always ahead of them. We were the people who were recognised, who were part of the Congress Alliance, equal partners in ~~the~~ ^{The} Liberal Party were still trying to buffet its way in but handicapped by its concern for its membership. And you know the Liberal Party started on ^a qualified vote and it took ^{them} four years to get rid of that one. Whereas we were in immediately; we stood on the, before we had the Freedom Charter, the COD stood on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

I think I am talking too much.

Q No I think its great. What would you say if someone would say well the Liberal Party had a concern for their membership, they drew people in, they didn't move too fast, you guys that was your mistake, in the COD?

A That was a mistake; they didn't move far enough.

Q That was their mistake.

A That was their mistake.

Q What I am saying in...so you wouldn't accept that if someone said that that was the trouble, you are saying COD did...

A No, no, no,; you see when the ANC said to us our job was to work with... among the whites, I don't..I mean they were too big for any sort of narrowness, their leaders. I don't think they ever meant we are going to measure you by the number of whites you get in as your branch members. They meant you have got to work amongst the whites as a whole. And we did actually do that. We did do that. And the only way, you know, the only concrete eg. I can give you, is the amount of propaganda we put out and I mean the most...we were the most indefatigable writers of letters to the papers. Everything that came up; was nothing that wasn't touched by us. And then when it came ...they...when it came to the Freedom...the Congress of the people then we had a very big task. But we weren't very successful in getting demands from whites.

Interview: Helen Joseph

A I remeber trying to influence whites about demands for the Freedom Charter and it was very difficult. But then we were drawn into a more active partnership in the Congress Alliance in organising for the Congress of the People. You know when it came to C.T. the people built the stands, and the people who built the platform were the COD. People like...why don't you get on with John Matthews?

Q I have.

A That's right, now what did John say about the COD?

Q He was so...he wasn't even allowed to be at that level. He wasn't even allowed to go to parties; just had to work and (That's right - the role underground, yes) all that you had. Yeah. Even his best friend, the ~~Barsel~~ ^{Barsel} Harmie, was all he could see, not much. I think just the opposite of you.

A Yes. Certainly that the COD, like the...together with the Indian Youth Congress we did the donkey work; our chaps certainly did the donkey work. We helped a lot with transport, because we were better off, we always had ~~scars~~ ^{scars}, organising for joint meetings, being on committees; there were some, I use this word again, there were some broad committees that were set up at the time of the removal of Sophiatown, with the most venerable people on them, such as the Bishop of Joberg or Huddleston or the Chairman of the Liberal Party, COD would be there as well. And when it came to the actual work, who did it, COD.

Q What donkey work did you do?

A I was very much involved in the African Education movement, and the boycotts of the cultural clubs that were going. I worked a lot for their clubs leaders conferences and organised them; prepared for them; got people to prepare material; I was a very busy little bee.

Q Did you write any propaganda?

A I wasn't much of a writer then. I would occassionally get something into New Age; when I had been to some special conference or something and I was asked to write it up for New Age. No, no, I didn't. I can't remem...yes, I did. When it came to passes for African Womenz

Interview: Helen Joseph

A I think I did because that was one of my overt acts, you know, of treason, was an article I wrote on Passes for women. (For...?) For an Africa South.

Q And you spoke about Solly as a person who really influenced you.

A I think so, I think there is no doubt about...our association was very close. But I was always down there, Solly was up here. We know about my role...

Q Someone at the door. We talked a lot about the role of whites per se, and how that the Congress was effective or not effective; before we go on to comparing it with say the role of whites now, what did you learn in those days about the role of whites ~~in~~ working with blacks? Did you find out that whites had to conduct themselves in a special way? There is a way you have to deal if you are going to reach out to whites; what about in dealing with blacks? I mean, you might have had feelings that were non racial but were there methods you had to use; were there ways you had to be careful or conscious?

A I think to a great extent I had learnt it by experience of working those two years in C.T. with the coloureds, where the final change in me started to happen. I think there I had learned to work with them as one of them, as part of them, not as a white. Because when I first went there I was horrified because they were calling me sister because that was the only role in which they knew a white, as a nurse. That really horrified me but on the other hand I must admit that ~~when~~ ^{he} I was there I was the white who was the top, working and all the others were more or less in subordinate positions; that is ~~the~~ ^{the} but I did love them and I think that we worked very much as equals.

But when I came up here, when I got into the Fed. of S.A. Women, there I had, I suppose I had to learn ^{humility?} I think. It wasn't conscious but I am sure I acquired that sense of knowing. And my sense of guilt was deepening all the time; don't forget that my sense of guilt was begin...has remained ~~so~~ so strong. Is that um, although I did hold an administrative position but never - in the Federation - more than Secretary. I was never a President or anything like that. But I was a dogs body; I was a secretary that did the work. (Of the?) Federation, both, initially at the Transvaal ^{level} and then later at the national level as well.

Interview: Helen Joseph

A I am trying to remember don't forget I was, from the very beginning I was - in the Federation - with the woman whose personality was very strong and that was Lillian Ngoyi. And I suppose that, to a certain extent, put me into my proper place, to work with Lillian because she was by far...and Ida Mtwana was also very prominent, forceful character; so I worked with these tremendously powerful African women and I think that unconsciously I learnt my proper place. I learnt humility.

Q That guilt, there are a lot of whites who have it, but it goes nowhere; in fact it is probably why...a lot of people criticise it, agh its just liberal guilt. Is that useful that guilt?

A I think it is important. I think the people must never forget it. I say it constantly to the students, that we are guilty, we ourselves are guilty. We mustn't blame it on our parents, grand parents or my generation or your generation. We are guilty, we bear that guilt and we can't expeate it because what we have to admit is that we (baton) on the system. We benefit on the system; look where I live, the way I live, compared to the way millions of blacks live. Look at the hospital services I get - Baragwanath is a very fine hospital, but totally over crowded. But I get the finest medical service in ~~xxxxxxxixxxxmxxx~~ the world. I travel on white buses; I mean I can't escape from it. It is there and I must always remember it; its stamped on me the whole way I live, and it should be stamped on everybody and that is what we have got to do. And the only way we can expeate, in any way, our guilt which has accumulated over the generations, until it has all come to rest on our shoulders, and on these young shoulders, is by working to try and change the system, that's all.

Q I think it is important, guilt. We mustn't think that because I think ^{what} we have to avoid is we are the benevolent whites doing good to the blacks. We are not. We are the guilty whites, trying to put right some of the wrongs of the past and the present.

Q But is that your motivation, guilt?

A Guilt and love.

Q And what about, are you saying that you're not doing it for any reason that you'll have something to gain? I mean do you...are you in the

Interview: Helen Joseph

Q struggle purely out of guilt and out of a motivation to help? Don't you think...do you think there's anything you, yourself are going to get from liberation?

A I..of course I do. I am getting it all the time. I am getting this sense of ^{en}ness, this sense of being part of the struggle. I mean that is ~~from~~^{from} the extent, that it is alleviating my ~~own~~^{own} feelings of guilt about justice. I suppose it is, but to be part of it and of course I am getting a lot out of it. Look at the life lines, the lines of affection and love; you've read it, you have seen it in my Christmas cards, that is what I am getting out of it. Tremendous, unbreakable lines of affection and trust and confidence. I am more rich than ^{an}ybody I can think of.

Q When you think of people who affected you, I think we were just saying this when Sheela came in, you spoke of Solly having affected you; (Dog put out)

A Solly was only up to 1953, then he went away and then as I say I worked ~~xxx~~with Lillian. I don't...it is difficult to describe it in terms of affect; but that whole companionship, relationship with Lillian and with Bertha Mashaba, whom I worked with tremendously in the way of organising; all these women, and amongst the Indian women- there was Ama Naidoo, Amina Cachalia, I met such lovely people. Mary Moodley, amongst the coloured people; these were the leading women ~~of~~ the different groups and I was with them, I was part of it and that was a tremendous thing.

Then came the treason trial, then I was exposed to new and...sort of permanent, never ending influences in my life. Because in the treason trial I came into contact, close contact with Mand~~ax~~ and Sisulu and the others.

Q Just take it back a bit. I remember you said when you first came from C.T. you hadn't had social contact with blacks, you saw them in the ~~unions~~ and this and that, can you talk a bit about your first social contact.

A I am trying to think. It was really...perhaps it was mainly at meetings - don't forget there are always the transport difficulties and the ~~ght~~ difficulties; I used to meet blacks at parties, not..me I lived in

Interview: Helen Hoseph

A a small flat. But parties that other people in the ~~party~~ ^{movement} organised. Then I began meeting people in a broader ... social context. You know I would go to meetings, there would be Albertina Sisulu, as well as Lillian and Duma Nok... wife, and Amina Kachalia, so I would meet them in a social context, really at parties. There wasn't much ^h going and froing of individuals social contact, like you and I have now, because we were all so busy organising, there wasn't ~~time~~ ^{time} for it.

Q And were there any white women who had an affect on you or was that neither here nor there but feeling....

A Look, I admired Ruth Furst very much but I never got to even to first base...she was way up there. No I don't think so. Ray Alexander I ~~admired~~ ^{admired} very ~~xxx~~ much but she was in C.T. Hilda Watts I liked and admired very much but I can't really say that they, she influenced me. But when I got into the treason trial, I am not talking so much about the first year, I mean we were 155, because then it was a huge gathering of people.

The other person who influenced me very much, of course at the time coz I worked so closely with him was Robert ~~Geshner~~. (Who) Resha. He was the organiser for the Transvaal and he worked with me on the African education movement, on the cultural clubs. Robbie was always there and when we went, I went organising at night Robbie would often go with us so that he would drive back with me out of the townships. I didn't come back alone. I was very friendly with Robert and he had a big influence on me and then when we got into the treason trial, then I drew closer and closer to Robert and to Nelson and the other people in the movement who had always been way up there.

By the time we got after the first two years of the trial, we were down to 30. And it was close, because we travelled every day...most of the, about 26 of the accused went in the big PUTCO bus, the government had had to lay on to bring these people in from the township. But Nelson and Robert and F. ? Adams and I and Stanley Lolan, who worked in..both F. ? and Stanly worked in my office too. We went in by car because were the only people who were holding onto our jobs; or our ^{earn} ~~earn~~ ing capacity in any way.

Interview: Helen Jospheh

A was doing my Medical Aid work with (Fereed) and Stanley early in the morning before we went to Pretoria; taking work with us to do at lunch time; coming straight back to the office by 5 o'clock and working till nine at night. And Robert was working as a reporter on New Age, so that he was also doing... moonlighting and doing treasury ^{is} ~~tr~~ plus working New Age.

I bought a car, a new car, I had a car but I bought a small one, but it was too small and I changed it for a Sim car, which is a French car. Very fast, which could take five people and we literally fled to Pretoria and back every day and so that we could have more time for our work. Now in that car would be me driving, Nelson sitting beside me because of his size, and in the back seat would be Robbie and F. ² and Stanley. Sometimes Nelson, um, Walter would come along as well; sometimes Kathy would come. There was always Nelson and me.

Q Sometimes there was Kathy?

A Kathy, Kathrada, who is now in Polsmoor. So that it took us about three quarters of an hour to get to Pretoria and the same to get back. And during those times we talked and talked and we drew so close. I can't tell you. Nelson still speaks about it in the letters.

Q So the fact that ~~she~~ wrote, he writes and you have got this close relationship, if you had to put... I mean I could ask you about your feelings of him but since he can't speak, if you think of what he's thinking about, of his friendship with you, do you think of those ~~drives~~ drives in the car, was ~~that~~ that then or was there any other...

A Yes, he is remembering it.

Q Was that the time that you bonded?

A Really, yes it was. And then when we all went into ~~the~~ detention, but we accused were still meeting every day. We had to go to court despite the five months detention and we drew closer, we were like a family. You know that sometimes in the afternoon we... the court sat in the morning until about three or ~~four~~ four o'clock in the afternoon and then we would stay till about four/five o'clock and then the prison van would come for us. Do you know that we actually, I have heard people

Interview: Helen Joseph

A talk about oh it is time to go home now. Home! to jail. We were such a family, I can't describe it to you. Nobody has...no other white women has had such an experience, nobody. To be part of that.

Then I went into the witness box as a defendant witness, ~~xxxx~~ during the emergency and I was briefed for my evidence by my colleagues by my co accused and we were...I was taken down every night to the men's jail in a security car to get together with the men so we could prepare our evidence for the next day. And there would be a barrier between us; we were in the visiting room; there would be a sort of wire between us, we didn't have that glass stuff, no perspex then, we had wire and posts and things. And on the other side would be Nelson, Walter, mostly and F-? Adams was the typewriter who was typing down what I was saying and on my side would be me and Leon Levy who was the only other white on the last batch of the accused. There we would sit for a couple of hours, talk, talk, talk. And they wanted me to spell out the Congress history in my evidence and I had to prepare it; the one day totally unaided, go down to them that night and then they would listen to it and would sometimes correct it and amend it but never change it. Now who could learn congress history like that. Who could have that enormous closeness and Nelson talks about it in his last letter, about the days when I...they used to prepare our evidence in jail. He has never forgotten.

Q Oh, I don't want to forget that, you remember you said you would read his letter...

A I will, I'll find his letter and just read you a little bit out of it.

Q Do you think we should do it now since it has come up?

A Yes I think so. Can you un....

Q There was that two months after the raids....

A Two months, yes after...he had (rejected) Walter. And the spirit is totally unchanged. (I'm going to ? you up again) I must be very careful about this because he was very cross with me when he wrote this. I had forgotten to do something, I ? a blackout on him,

Interview: Helen Joseph

A he was a bit cross with me.

And he says...so don't...it starts, 'there have been moments when I even wish I could forget.' It reduced me to tears. And then he goes on to say, 'all the sweet memories which have given me so much joy and pleasure whenever I think of her', that's me, the English lady. 'The Christmas trees and biscuits, the drive to and from the synagogue, attending meetings and tea parties together, preparing her evidence in prison, visiting here at the central prison ~~in~~ during the 1960 state of emergency and so on, you know the score only too well.' after that. It's awful coz I had a black out on something he asked me to do. And he goes... I mean this is very sort of laudatory, but I can't help it. (No you must read it)

One thing I simply cannot, you must not, don't repeat the stuff about him being angry with me (NO) that's all. 'I cannot overcome that it shut my eyes or turned the page, whenever press reports mention her name and activities; add to this our love and admiration of one we love, one we consider super in more senses than one, ^{and} who is the standard bearer of so many ideals that we deeply cherish.'

Q Why does he say her? Why doesn't he say...

A Coz he starts off saying it is about an English lady who has let him down. That is me. He does it in such a beautiful way, he just writes her.

Q 'I once thought that the more one ages the less active and glamorous she becomes in the process, drawing the contempt of the younger folk. I still remember an incident that happened to me,' this is, it seems the way he writes about himself, 'that happened to me way back in 1959 when I visited a friend in Soweto, not far from the ^{it} house I met their 12year old daughter playing with other children, I greeted her and asked whether her parents were home. She courteously replied in the affirmative but as I drove away I heard her ask the rhetorical question, who is this funny man. This to the accompaniment of hushed giggling.' The things he remembers. Sweet.

'The position was seen to be altogether different, with the' this is

Interview: Helen Joseph

A me, 'the English lady, and I believe that at 80 she still has the world at her feet.' Nonsense. 'As a matter of fact sometime last year or so...

Q Stop, sorry...

End of tape.

A 'last year or so I saw her photograph taken as she left an assembly hall at the UCT, where she had just delivered a lecture. She was on crutches and surrounded by a crowd of staff members and students. And their sense of admiration and respect was written across their faces.' What else can I find for you. A lot of this is teasing, you know.

It would like to be angry with her but I have had to give up the attempt; it would not be wise for me to cross swords with one who seems to have in her the 'constant, what is it, 'the constitutions of Harold McMillan, General deGaulle and All... put together. I consider this to be the case, where it is proper to invoke the maxim that discretion is the better part of valour.' Then he goes on to tell me what I didn't do. I read that whole page and I still couldn't remember what I hadn't done. Then he reminded me and I felt terrible. I have done it now.

Then just at the end, he sent me another lovely message; Oh yes, 'Our heartiest congratulations and best wishes for an 80th birthday. And I sincerely hope that the good wishes sent by my colleagues here will cut down that 80 years by half again. We say happy birthday.'

I....right now....also explained that the English lady renounced her British citizenship 12 years ago, so she is not an English lady any more. Anyway, be very careful with that, I don't want to betray a confidence.

Q No, no, no. Ok. We got onto that ya, about your relationships with them. Let me...you said how many white...there is no other white woman who has had that kind of close relationship...(Oh, I don't think so, I don't know of her if there is...) But I mean what's the bigger part of that? I mean you saying that, why is that? Is that because you're exceptional, or because...

Interview: Helen Joseph

A No, no, it was force of circumstances that drew us together for those four years of the treason trial and especially the last two years, we were going to Pretoria and back.. No, I..not because I was exceptional; I have never known why I was...^{I was} pushed into the frontline at the ~~end~~. My contribution hadn't been that marked. But that was something that hasn't happened to anybody else and out of it has come these lovely enduring friendships. All the time I was under house arrest, I was never really alone because I had telephone calls, and they were coming from people; people would come to my gate and the moment my house arrest was over, after the nine years I had a Christmas party again and everybody flocked in. Absolutely flocked in.

Q Now you have said it so many times about why, you don't know why it would have been you, and you said you haven't read as much as other people but why have you been such a thorn to the government? Why did they see you as such a threat, I mean if you've said...

A Stubborn old bag that is why.

Q No, but even through those years, you are saying you don't know why you were

A I came to be a sort of a symbol of...in some way of ~~X~~opposition to the government.

Q By whites?

A About whites, I think. I think so, I have not really thought it out as to...coz I haven't played all that sort of enormous leadership role that I could be seen as being so dangerous. Possibly they hate me because nothing has been able to destroy the friendship and the confidence and the love that I share with the black leaders. That may be what is getting at them all the time. That may be why they won't..not allow me to see Nelson. I have applied 5 times. Every time I go to CT. I apply and every time I get refused.

Q Have you been able to see anyone else in prison?

A The whites, yes, I have seen, I see ~~Karl Niehaus~~, I have seen him

Interview' Helen Hoseph

A a couple of times; I saw him just before Easter. And I see Jansie Lourens, but they will not allow me to see...but I must admit, not many have seen Nelson, whites that is, but other whites have seen him. Benjamin Pogr^{And} has seen him and Harvey Van der Merwe and I am not allowed to see him. Amina is also not allowed to see him. We get refused, refused. And yet I am family. They count me as family.

When I was applying once I spoke to Zinzi; say look I am going to apply, you had better speak to your mother, she can't talk to me, and find out, do I have to sort of getting a rating from her or she fix a viskit and I got the reply back tell him, and she is talking nonsense. She's family, she can go where she likes. ^{And} has that happened to so many people, to be family? Only I can't get in.

Q And how did that come? That close bond; would the rest of the family besides Nelson; you drove in the car ^{but} with Winnie and Zinzi, how did that develop?


A Well, Winnie has been ~~very~~ very close to me since the 1960s; even through our bans when illegally we found ways and means of communicating, when she was in Joberg. I can't do it now. ^{And} her kids stayed with me during the 1976 emergency. Zinzi came to live with me. With one of her frⁱends, it was a crush in a little house like this. To them it didn't seem to be a little house, don't forget. I just thought it was a little house. They stayed with me for about six or eight weeks. Nelson was in jail, Winnie was in jail. She was detained. Then they went back to Waterford and came back again at Christmas and stayed with me again. They were then 15 and 16.

Q Which two was it?

A Sinzi and Zeni, her two daughters. Then Zeni got married to the Prince of Swaziland and Zinzi has had ~~her~~ her own life but I...there is still a loving relationship and when she gets a chance she will come and see me.

Q Which ~~are~~ the twins that he has? Doesn't he have twins?

A No, the two girls, there is a year between them.

 Oh, so there is just the 2 children.

Interview: Helen Joseph

A Well, three children by his first marriage; the one had two sons and a daughter. The one son was killed in a motor accident several years ago, the other son's still here, in Orlando and the daughter was living in the Transkei, then she went to Fort Hare and now she is at Natal University working with Fatima Meer. She lives with her.

Q And what surname does she have, also


A She is Marki, she calls herself Mandla. Her marriage broke up and she calls herself Mandela now. She is back to Mandela. I don't know her married name.

But the girls they are my girls. I am aunt Helen. See how lucky I have been.

Q Ok, there are so many things I want to ask. Ok, I think to get back to the whites, what I would like to ask is the comparison now. We have talked about the COD and historically, do you see parallels with the organisations that are being set up now, (JODAC) and the ones elsewhere?

A Yes, I do. I think they are succeeding more than we did. They certainly are; they are very young, I don't know that they are able yet to draw in more people who are not thinking already kind of thing. They are not doing a great deal of converting, put it that way but they are making their impact felt and they're...they are tremendous. They work very hard and totally devoted and they are bigger in numbers than we were, I think. It..in C.T. they have done very well with their area committees. Durban I think not quite so well. Durban seems to stop and start, stop and start a bit. But JODAC has been very firm and consistent and as you heard from Sheila they have had their problems. They are reaching out, they are trying to bridge the gaps a bit and they are not sort of rushing to do the work in the townships, that kind of thing because it is so easy and so exciting and lovely to do. They are really doing it the hard way which is trying to get to the whites. To make the whites understand.

Q Why are they having more success? What are they doing differently?

 I don't know.

Interview: Helen Joseph

Q Do you think it is the times? that are different?

A Oh, I think the times are different. I think they are younger, I think that is a very big thing. You see in the COD we had very much at the top the older people who had been members of the C.P. in the 1930s and 40s and I think that our top leadership age structure was quite a lot older. I also think of course that there is a far more, I don't like to use the word liberal, radical, element that is on the universities that was never there on the campuses in the 1950s.

We battled to get a youth branch of the COD. We never got more than about 30/40 people into it, if that. But look at the campuses today. And look at the role of NUSAS today, which is tremendous. That wasn't so in the 1950s. NUSAS was functioning on the campus but they were attending to domestic problems, domestic benefits and things for the students and they really only moved in when it came into the Separate Amenities Act, when the blacks were kicked off the campuses. That is when NUSAS really became political/politicised.

And then after all COD was banned in 1962 and it took another 20 years before anything like JODAC began to appear. But they have this tremendous backing from the university and from the people who have left, the ex campus people. I think that is one of the very important things that JODAC is doing and in C.T. - they are providing a political home for the people that have left campus. They didn't have before. They didn't want to go to the PFP, they didn't find it accorded with their radical views; I am talking about followers of NUSAS and the SRCs and they didn't have anywhere to go, but now they do have somewhere to go.

I think that this is tremendously important. Perhaps we will always find our responses amongst, I think it is natural, probably our response is amongst the better educated people. I think that...we are not getting to the artisans. But then what you have on the other hand, you have to realise, is the growth of the trade unions. And the works that the young whites are doing in work, actual work, in the trade unions.

There wasn't anything, all that in the 1950s. I mean there were very few...one thing, there weren't black unions like there are today. So it is a different theatre we are working in.

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Q And what do you point to as achievements? What have you experienced in JODAC that you said this was..made me feel like it was something good?

A The kinds of things we have been talking about. The meetings and that fact that at the big meeting in Jabulani when Nelson Mandela's statement was read out, the numbers of JODAC people that were there. Amongst that 15 000, the part that was played by JODAC in the launch of the UDF.

Q Wasn't JODAC after UDF?

A No. Before, before. It has been on the go longer than UDF. (Oh, I see.) It has now affiliated but it was there first.

Q I think what is interesting about the JODAC area committees, UDF white involvement is the view of liberals. Now you had a lot of things to say about liberals since we have talked; about the way you were the wishy washy liberal and how disgusted you were with some of the liberal party people and this kind of thing.

A When I say wishy washy liberal, was a small L not a big L.

Q Yeah, exactly but tell me about your views of liberals in the past, small L or big L, and your views now. Tell me in the past. Because I would like to know a few things coz I remember this march with the Sash, the early sash...the s...constitution ladies and....

A That is right. Violet and I got really bullied into that by the Johanna Cornélius. (Who is that?) She was the great trade union leader, a protege of Solly Sacks, one of his...Johanne Cornelius ~~Anna~~ Scheepers, were the ~~three~~ main ones. Now the Black Sash was then called the Defend the Constitution League and it was all to do with the rape of the coloured vote, which was moving people tremendously because at that time, it was the early 1950s, you had still got the residual of the growth of liberal opinion that occurred during the war years. That got broken down again, firstly amongst the troops.

When the Nats came in it got squashed again but during those war years there was an upsurge of liberal opinion, there was. We were

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A fighting for democracy. And there just was. Then in the early 1950s the government came in with, depriving the coloured people of their vote on the common role - you know all that, that's history. If you don't know it you will find out. And the white women formed themselves into the league of women, not the league of Women Voters, that was already there long ago, fighting for their vote for women.

To defend the Constitution League. But they limited their membership to voters, to women voters which meant that they automatically excluded all black women to begin with. But they were organising protests, this was in 195...the Fed. was on the go, 1954/53 and they were having their parades, their demonstrations outside parliament in C.T. and wherever and they organised a two or three day protest at the Union Buildings. They were the first women to go there, we weren't the first, they were.

It was the middle of June, beginning of July and I remember we were reading about it in the papers, they had been there one night and Johanna walked into my office one day and said Helen, you and Violet must go on that...and I, we are all going. You are coming with us. And when Johanna said you are coming with us, you went. And so off we go to Pretoria, with Johanna and Violet and a few others. I found that there were about a hundred whitewomen there and they were camped at the bottom of the Union Buildings, where the General Botha statue is, right at the bottom of those gardens.

When I say camped, they did not have any tents, there they were, they had blankets and they had slept there one night already on their mattresses and their blankets. And so I shared a mattress with Johanna Cornelius and I nearly died of suffocation, not cold, because every time I pulled the blanket down to get some air, Johanna pulled it up again, over my head and I nearly stifled the whole night. But it was lovely, because she is a warm person both bodily and...she is dead now, and in herself.

We got a lot of support oddly enough, in Pretoria. People supporters came round with bottles of port, brandy and whisky and sandwiches, thermos; we didn't starve. And we stayed there for two nights, two more since it was a three day/night demonstration. Then we came back to Joburg and this is how we started the protest at Pretoria, because when SAFA reported to a meeting, a conference of the Federation about it, that

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A is when Margaret Gos[?] stood up from the floor and said the white women went to Pretoria to protest against their grievances but they did not invite us. Now we will go to Pretoria to protest against our greivances but we shall invite them, and they did. But only the white women didn't come. Just a few; they came as observ...they made a token presence as observers.

We were never able in the Federation to get any other white womens organisations to affiliate to us, but the Sash and the Liberal Party would send observers.

Q And what was it like being with those women? What were they like politically? What was it like to be with them and had you ever had any alliance with them before and had you rejected them before?


A No, we were...I know I felt a little bit like a cuckoo in the nest, but they were quite nice to us. They appreciated the fact that we were there; we were extra bodies and they wanted extra bodies. And we had come under the wing of Johanna Cornelius.

Q But what were your feelings, true feelings about them?

A I don't know that I thought about it very much. Julie at that stage I was so involved in what I was doing; disappointed that the white womens organisations wouldn't take a stand with us. Formally we invited them to everything and they would send a couple of observers, or one to a conference and I, my feeling was a bit, well, if that is the way they are, we have got plenty..there is a lot of work to be done. And if we can't get the whites in and we can't get the whites, we can't get the whites. (And what was your feeling....) Do they really matter, I think that is the stage I was getting to, did they really matter.

Q And then when they founded the Liberal Party, how did you feel about that?

A I wasn't very much in at the time. That was at the end of the Defiance Campaign and I hadn't take part in that because I wasn't in any organisation, I had only watched it from the side lines.

 Well, you see, there was a split on the people that attended the

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A sort of meeting called by the ANC and the SAIC, to discuss the formation of a white organisation. Because of the amount of sympathy there had been evinced during the Defiance Campaign. And there was quite clearly a split between us which was really on the vote. Because the people that later went into the, made the COD, stood on universal franchise and the liberals stood on a qualified franchise. So there was this split. And I suppose I acquired a form of contempt for them because of that. I was so enthusiastic about this new world of mine that I tended to be very critical of people who wouldn't accept universal franchise. That was what we fought for: me, that was what I had been in the army for.

For democracy, and democracy means universal vote and (that's) what the United Nations says, its declaration of human rights, then why can't these people accept it. I...was intolerant, I really was intolerant of them. I knew some lovely individuals, persons, like Ruth Hayman, Jack Underholter and one or two others, but as a group the COD did, we had contempt for them: yes we did. Yes.

Q And how did that feeling towards liberals grow or change over the years so then the Liberal Party just (Can't really say) Didn't? So you have always had ~~xx~~contempt?

A We have always been ahead of them, you see. When it came to the Congress of the People we were part of the National Action Council that formed..that handled it. The Liberals wouldn't come in. They wouldn't come in on a procedural objection; they said they were not prepared to be sponsors of something they had not been in on the planning of from the very beginning. And I was there at the meeting when they said that. Today they want to deny it but it is true. It is true, that is what they did say. It

It was a thing of pride.

Q And how does that compare now with the view of the younger or the new generation of JODAC people towards liberals?

A Towards...well now you mean the PFP? Don't you, because there is no Liberal Party. (Ja) So you mean the PFP now. Well, as Sheila says we are reaching out but as she also said, for the meeting we had a year ago, there was a division in JODAC as to whether they should

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A go ahead with it. Whether they shouldn't leave the PFP to wallow in their own mistakes.

But you see, they have moved, they have come a year later, they have had a very successful meeting so I think that is happening. I have contempt..I must say I have great contempt for them, the PFP. Not for the individuals, I really admire Helen Suzman, always... wonderfully, I really do, for what she does as an individual; what she has stood up to for all these years but I have the greatest contempt for the Party.

Because I maintain they are absolute sell outs; they have no right to be in parliament; Sheena is there... A year ago, well 18months ago, now, what were they doing, campaigning for a no vote in the referendum and what are they doing now, sitting in parliament. Therefore they are no better than the Rajbansis and the Hendrikes. I mean I do have very intolerant views of them, I do. Very much so but not to the individual, there are some individuals that I like very much.

But I think as a party, and I have said it. I was invited to go to C.T. Sweetie you are so tired.

Q No I am not, I am listening. (Exhausted) I am listening so much.

A I went to C.T. last year, I was invited by the PFP Youth to go and speak to a meeting in C.T. on the 31st May, or near to it, which is Republic Day. Sort of protest meeting against the Republic. I said you won't want me really because you won't like what I am going to say and they said we give you a free hand, you can say what you like.

So I went to C.T., to their PFP Youth, they had about 200 people there. I sat on the platform with the PFPs; Di Bishop, I like very much as a person, I think she is lovely and I told them exactly what I thought. I said what are you doing in parliament; I know that you are the opposition, you are talking about things that are happening in S.A. loud and clear but the extra parliamentary opposition outside are saying those things much more loudly and much more clearly and they are being listened to all over the world, whereas you're not. You are only talking to parliament. I said honestly you have no right to be there, you are no better than the Rajbansis and the Hendricks; you are regarded as sell outs and you campaign for a no vote

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A you had no right them, no moral right to go back into parliament. So I have said it to them.

Q And what did they say?

A They were ~~seet~~. They came up afterwards and ~~nsaid~~ do ~~we~~ resign from the PFP? And I...said to a few of them, no I don't think you must resign but you must work at it. And make them understand what they are doing~~x~~. Must make...you see there is a thinking going on but it is in the youth, in the PFP Youth which isn't happy about the role of the PFP. ~~I~~ just is not. They were really sweet, sweet.

Q But so would you say that for you, you haven't changed? It is the same kind of contempt you always had?

A I suppose so.

Q But at the same time would you have seen yourself five or ten years ago, if someone had said, let us go to a meeting to hear Peter So~~al~~ or whoever (I would have gone) You would have? (Mmm) Even then?

A I would have gone to the meeting, I went to this meeting, I'll always go to the meetings.

Q Now. What I am saying, that you~~u~~ went to this Peter So~~al~~ meeting now, ten years ago would you have gone to hear a Peter So~~al~~, some PFP person?

A I wouldn't...I might have gone to a PFP meeting; don't forget I have been banned from meeetings off and on for so long. I suppose I would have gone, Yes I would have gone, though I didn't really bother to go to the Report back~~k~~ meetings because I had these, I read hansard anyway. And I would go to heckle. I would go to argue. I didn't at this~~x~~ meeting but partly because now I am old; I don't want to be taking up their questions. I want the young to ask the questions and they did; they asked the questions that I would have asked; so I felt so satisfied. The only thing I did do was when somebody asked Peter So~~al~~ do you see the coloured party and the Indian party now in view of their previous stand, and the fact they don't represent their people, do you see the~~m~~ as illegal. And he said yes I see those parties as illegally in parliament. I did say then, what about you.

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Q And what did he say?

A Well, there was a burst of laughter you see. And then Tom ^{Wasp} took it over and said that is the ~~x~~king of question I like, two words only. But it went home but I didn't have to expand on it because later on somebody else asked the questions.

And that I think is terribly important, why when I go to these meetings I do not ask the ^uquestions. I want people and not me and they do; I find if I wait long enough they ask the questions I would have asked.

Q I guess, ^{I'm wondering} if you feel that there is a different attitude on the part of white progressives to the liberals, PFP, or whatever party than used to be among COD? Ja, that is the way I should ask it. Does JODAC feel different towards the PFPF than COD felt towards the Liberal Party?

A No I don't. I think individually we had our own feelings of anger and ~~co~~ntempt against the liberal party in the 1950s. As an organisation not really, no. Look we went and canvassed for Ruth Hayman as a candidate for the Liberal Party when she canvassed for parliament. I have ~~can~~vassed for the Liberals. WE did, we would always work, we would have been very happy if we had got closer to the liberals. But the liberals were very suspicious...don't forget ⁱn the 1950s there was tremendous anti communist suspicion and the liberals were very suspicious of the COD which they saw..and some of them still see as a communist front. Some of the old die hards in the Liberal Party have, certainly have not changed their ideas ~~at~~her.

Q So anyway I will quite trying to push, I think there is a difference. I came to S.A. in 79 and ~~co~~ntempt is the word; if someone had said lets go and hear the report back of Helen Suzman, it would have been like you said, why bother, whereas now it seems there is the whole reaching out

A Well there is a reaching out, yes there is, I think you are right. It has certainly changed itself in one year, in JODAC. I was glad that Sheila was here..I didn't know ^{this}, I didn't know that they had this trouble at the ~~f~~irst meeting. That there was a solid block

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A against it. I didn't know that. So there is obviously is a move ...I think that it is important because in S.A. that is to come, the whites are still going to be here so we had better learn to live together, hadn't we and learn to live together with the blacks.

Q And do you feel there is more potential? Do you feel that there is more hope, that its less hopeless than it was in years past?

A In what, which way?

Q For the, vis a vis the whites? Do you think there's more scope? Do you think, like when I said to you, what about COD and you said oh, it was difficult, bitter and hard, difficult battle, not much was achieved; Do you think there is more hope?

A Oh yes, (Now?) It is very little but...JODAC is certainly ahead of where we were in the 1950s despite all the..the battle against much more repressive legislation than we had to, much more. I do think so yes.

But it's got a long way to go and whether...I think they will eventually overtake.

Q Really, is that how you put it..I was going to say, you know if indeed the whites are so difficult, then what do you think about the role of (I don't know, I don't know, we must battle on....

A You must build bridges, you have got to build bridges. But whether they, how effective those bridges are going to be, whether there are going to be enough of them, I don't know. But you have got to build them. The only ? there is only bridges between JODAC and the PFP, I suppose you do, I don't know, I suppose you do have to build bridges.

I think it is important that we should educate the PFP about the image of JODAC, I think that is important.

Q What do you see your role now at this stage with regard to whites?

A Do whatever I am called upon to do. Yes, when JODAC wants me to help them, go to meetings, speak or anything like that, I will always

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A be there. They very often ask me to go to a meeting because they say they want me present there. And I will go.

Q So it is kind of an inspirational, symbolic...

A They feel it has got some kind of symbolic value and I am quite happy

End of tape.

Side B

Q Yes, but when you got back in touch what was the road that lead you to the point that you were friends with Karl and Jansie? Did you start having friends with the young people, whites, or was that just a coincidence or do you think that you feel that it's important to give moral support?

A Oh, I do think so. I am trying to remember how Karl came into it. I think it was before the formation of JODAC, just before. Yes it was. There was a great friend of mine, Anne Hughes who is the director of the Dependents Conference in the SACC. It really started from the church, amongst Christians; a feeling amongst us that we ought to get a few Christians together just to have a few discussions; not to form an organisation but just to come so we could get together with other Christians and talk. And that's..and Anne knew Karl and that is how Karl came to me.

And out of that grew a very close friendship and Karl used to come, and Jansie, come stay in the house if I had to go to hospital for a few days or if I had to go away to speak at a meeting and Karl and Jansie used to be at the house. So we got..very close relations.

Q Had you had close relationships with Afrikaners, many? Before?

A Not really. You see, no I hadn't because, you're right I hadn't really thought about that. No I hadn't. Yes, I had. I had a friend who I met in my first day in S.A., when I came to the school she was a teacher at the school. Her name was Sybil Forth but she was born Sybil Krige. Today she is an old lady of 94 and we are still friends and she has never stopped being a Nat. When I go to C.T. I always see her; last ~~some~~ time I went to see her she came to fetch me in her car, she is driving at 94. And that personal friendship is there.

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A Now the other ones I have a great friendship with is, a very old, he is 93; these people were older than I was when I was young here, and of course they are very old today, because I am old already. And that is a man who was a General in the Army, but Kenneth and I love each other very much as persons. We cannot be in the same room together without quarreling. I am like a red bag to a bull to him. I can just sit here...he loves me and always comes to see me when he comes to Joberg but we always get onto politics and him telling me how wrong I am; but he is concerned as an individual.

I have had these relationships: when I was under house arrest he wrote to me and said he was sure, he has got so much influence, a retired General and he said he would write to people in higher positions and he was sure that I would give a guarantee to mend my ways, he would be able to get my house arrest lifted. I was so angry I tore up the letter and threw it away. Never replied to it.

So I have had these friendships which have been...lasted through. Then was...they are individuals; an individual nurse who I was very sorry for; she was on a dreadful trial about attempted killing of her husband, who had a brain tumour and what not and I had her to live with me while she was on bail and that kind of thing. So I have had persons yes. I have known quite a few Afrikaner persons who I have been very close to, but not really politically.

With Anna, Scheepers, Johanna Cornelius I wasn't close to them - I didn't have an intimate friendship with them, no I didn't.

Q What happened to Ana Scheepers that she went so different? Did she...

A Agh. I think the seeds were always there.

Q Really. So you...solly Sachs attempted to...

A Mmm. Well, she was a very powerful women, very powerful and Solly used to say she was the finest negotiator, that she was a born negotiator. She was on negotiations with the employers, she knew exactly how far she could push and when to stop. She never made a mistake. She had great qualities but she didn't have any real warmth, she didn't have warmth in her. Whereas Johanna did.

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Q But was she politically any different or what was she like?

A Well they were all in the Labour Party and they never got...beyond the Party. I think all of them had visits to Moscow in the 1920s/30s or something like that but they never got beyond the Labour Party. The old white Labour Party. They were...outstanding figures in the old Labour Party.

Q Have your views about communism and the Soviet Union changed or do you think you never had any direct support of dealings?

A No, I didn't. Look, as far...it is difficult to explain: Communism and Marxism, as a philosophy I greatly admire; I don't understand it all that well, not in depth but I do really admire it and I think it has the answers, very many of the answers; but the outrages that have been committed by the Soviet Union I cannot swallow, I can't.

Sometimes I'm tempted to discuss it with people who I know have got very very radical views and they are...and then when anybody says to me well, they have to preserve the achievements of socialism I have had it.

Q So how would you describe yourself politically?

A I hope I have graduated from the wishy washy liberal. I think...I don't want to use the word progressive, cause that then mixes me up with the PFP. I think in today's terms I am a radical democratic. I want to see S.A. ...I want to see a system of socialism here but I can't spell it out. But what I am is a Freedom Charter Socialist, there you are, that is my definition. I am a Freedom...I stand totally by the Freedom Charter. I am a Freedom Charter Socialist and I would love other people to think of me that way.

Q That is a beautiful ending so the rest of it is just clearing up loose ends. I keep saying it, I am terrible, I have more questions.

A That's all right.

Q So there weren't any afrikaners, white Afrikaners who were changed by Solly Sack who I could talk to...who, because I am only interviewing progressives. It is just there are so few Afrikaners...(So long ago,

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A I mean that's 40 years ago.

Q I know, I just have interviewed a lot of older people but I just...

A The other Afrikaner that I knew of course, in the 1950s, but that is who I don't want to talk about: Peter Beyers ^{veld} who was the President of the COD. And of course the other one is Bram Fisher, how could I forget Bram Fisher; you see I don't think of him as really an Afrikaner.

Q I know I was going to say, I certainly don't think of Elsa and Ruth...

A No, you see, I/one doesn't, but then he is...course he is, he is a supreme example. I would never..I loved Bram very much but at the time you know, I went to visit him in jail and it was lovely visiting him but I ~~was~~ never had ~~a~~ very close relationship with Bram, I did not. I admired him, I thought he was absolutely wonderful but of course there's Bram.

Now Peter Beyers ^{veld} was the Pres. Of COD; I admired Peter very much in fact we all did and the fact that Peter broke under jail pressure, but while he was our President he was trusted by everybody; he had the confidence of the Africans, he was on the consultative committee with them and I..he never betrayed that, never. But he couldn't stand up to the pre...look, we..none of us know where our breaking point lies and Pete's lay very close to him. He broke at the thought of long years in jail and he betrayed Bram and became a professional witness, which is terrible. Dreadful.

Q Is he alive today?

A Yes, still in Joberg. I met him once, in the street, we passed each other and our eyes met as we passed; I can't tell you ^{ha} what his expression was, it was like, the look in the eyes of my dog if I have beaten my dog when it is naughty. But the difference is that I feel sorry ^{for} my dog. I didn't feel sorry for Peter. It was a dreadful experience, it really was; I thought about it for days afterwards and I knew I had not felt sorry for him. I had seen that look of a whipped dog and I wasn't sorry.

Q And you felt you could not speak to him?

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A I couldn't.

Q Does he have contact with anyone?

A No. Not that I know of. I don't think so.

Q What does he do?

A Well, his wife Stella had a big typing agency; that was known as the Stella Bele... Agency and he sort of was part of that. I imagine it is all part of that, I don't know what they live on. I don't know. They had a brilliant son who went to Cambridge, Dereck Bel . I don't know what he thought of his parents.

I didn't feel sore about Dereck, because he wasn't part of it. I thought sorry for Stella but she made her choice which was to support her husband.

Q And were there any people from the ~~Congress~~ ^{Congress} who supported Benveld -

A Not from the whole Congress movement, no. He was damned as a traitor for all time.

Q And why do you think..I mean why was he different? I mean you had so much admiration for him when he was in that position, why was he different?

A I don't know. There was some flaw in his make up of which nobody was aware of. I am sure it..he wasn't aware of it himself. I am sure he wasn't. It is a flaw, dreadful, tragic,...(SO...) But he knew what he was doing, that is the thing. He wasn't tortured, was never tortured, but he couldn't face the thought of long years in jail - he said so.

Q And his position, I want to make sure...He's not on the books, is he. Just want to make sure, so many people are. He was President of COD from 53 to 62, the whole time?

A From all the..no, let me just think about and get it straight. The Transvaal COD was formed first and Bram was the National..was President of the Transvaal, but then he was banned and then Peter Bele...

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A became the Transvaal President, and I think when we got to the National Conference, as far as I can remember, Peter was elected National President..I don't remember any other National President. And he was right up to the very last days of the COD. The last day of COD was a meeting of the remainings of the National Executive, all of us banned, I think, as I remember. There were, six of us, met in a car after the COD was banned. WE went to drive inn, not a drive inn, to the Doll House, w~~x~~here you buy pandos and eat them in the car and we sat there munching hamburgers in the car. So as not to look like a meeting. And we took our decision which was that the COD could not go underground.

The ANC was already underground and there was no room for another organisation in the liberation movement underground. And so..we had been fomed to work above ground, to work amongst the whites; there was no...we could serve no purpose by going underground and so we took that final, that was the final meeting of the National Executive of the COD. We took the decision, to fold up.

Q So you have never actually never been involved in underground work?

A No.

Q You have always been above ground.

A Always been above ground.

Q Did you know Torch Commando or Springbok Legion people?

A I didn't know the Springbok Legion people. I didn't come across them. I think the reason for this is that I worked as Welfare and Information Officer in S.A. whereas the Springbok Legion was working really up North. I knew about it but didn't come into contact with it.

Now the Torch Commando, I was very impressed with it, because it took a very strong stand, on the coloured vote and said that that wasn't what they had fought in the army for; for the coloureds to be deprived of their vote and they organised these huge torch light processions across Joberg and I marched in those torch light processions, as an ex servicewoman, carrying a torch. I did do that, I got as far as

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A that.

Q Why didn't you get further because you didn't agree with them politically?

A No, see they weren't a membership organisation. They were a group who would call masses of people into meetings, and to march in processions, but they weren't a membership organisation.

Q Is there anyone around now who I could talk to or are they more outside?

A I can't think of anybody off hand, Julie but there must be people.

Q Carnesie? Fred Carneson, someone mentioned another name.

A ? here.

Q Pardon?

A He is overseas.

Q Ja, I am saying...

A Oh well, no Fred would more likely to be..tell you about the ? Mclee? but he could also tell you about the Torch Commando.

Q There is no one here who could tell ~~xxxx~~me/ think of ?

A there must be lots of people but they aren't people that I know and their names doesn't sort of come to me immediately. I can't now remember who were...you see the leading lights were the very high ups, like who was the man who lost a leg, Barder. The flying ace and people like that; people at the top of the army and the air force. They were really the organisers and the guiding spirits in the Torch. But you see there wasn't a membership thing. I suppose a lot of people who were in the army would march in the Torch C marches but I don't know who they were.

Q Mmm (I have moved away from my war time associations, I have moved very far away from them, politically and socially)

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Q And those, the magazine of COD, or the publication was Fighting Talk?

A Fighting Talk was a very fine... but our..well Fighting Talk was one of our publications. We worked on that on the editorial committee but our journal was Counter Attack.

Q And those are all in Archives? Those I can find? There's....

A They are all banned duckie, you can't get...just that you can't find them.

Q No but one would find them probably in...Britain or something.

A If you can get into them, they are on the universities, they are all in the banned section. But overseas there must be, must be, oh there must be.

Q Ja, and I wanted to ask how many whites were in the treason trial initially and then at the ^{en} ~~nd~~? Really asking some memories?

A Stop this and I'll get you the figures.


Q Ok, then we'll do that at the end. A couple more questions: Why did Solly Sacks leave?

A Because he said that there was no role for him to play, he felt that if he'd been convicted that could have been a rallying point for the whole of the Garment Workers Union. He felt that he had been acquitted; he could go on, still organising the Union, opposing the government and everything else. But when he got a suspended sentence he felt that that actually hamstrung him and that he couldn't be effective. He felt it was an insult-

Q So when did he leave?

A 1953, May 53. End of 53.

Q And do you think he did anything worthwhile after he ~~left~~?

 Yes he did. He wrote a few books; He got a fellowship to Manchester

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A University. But of course he didn't play the role that he expected he would play. I think he was very disappointed. He didn't understand that his influence was SA. I think that he made a dreadful mistake.

Q Did you ever think of leaving?

A Never. Never, never. Look Julie there is nothing overseas that I could do. That the people there can't do just as well or better. There is nothing that I could do; there is plenty that I can do here.

Q When you described yourself politically would you say you are a feminist?

A Not really, not really. It is something about..that I haven't got involved in. I certainly am aware of and deplore the injustices to woman, when I think of how they are treated and the disabilities that are heaped upon the black women, who suffer as being black, being a woman as being everything else. And I get very angry about this but I wish that they were a sort of middle of the road feminist movement that I could be drawn into but I find them so extremist. The feminist groups here, I find them very extremist and I do see them as a danger in this, that there/they have the potential and it does happen in practice too, they draw women away from the liberation struggle. It is an out for many women; it is a safe out.

And I find it is competitive. It draws people away from the real struggle. Our views, you can call it a view, in the 1950s was that we are fighting for the liberation of all people, we are fighting for social justice for all people; men and women, for men and women together. When we have got our freedom then we will attend to any workings of women if we still need to. Look we felt that there would not be any need, that these things would get solved when we got our freedom.

I think I still...feel that today. I feel that ...the..the..you see the feminist movements, they do vary, they operate as you must be aware, at different levels,; On the campuses they do tend to be rather exclusively and esoterically academic and these are the ones I am not really in sympathy with. Moving downwards, now getting the women's groups formed that are more part of the movement and I think

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A this is a great thing. Because then they can go along at the same time, it means you can draw them in by drawing attention to their wrongs and at the same time draw attention to the wrongs of all people .

Q And there is a lot of debate going on; we are talking about them within the white community, do you ever listen to or care about or think about this workerist anti charterist...(I am really disturbed about it

A I don't know how strong it is and I don't know how long it will last. I hope that it will work itself out; I am very disturbed about it.

Q Do you know..how do you feel is its origins and its motivation? What are those workerists about?

A I don't know. I wouldn't like to voice suspicions, I don't really know. But I find that it impedes the struggle. You see I go to meetings and obviously I am so pro Charter that I am...would naturally be angry about anti charterists expressions and what not, and movements against the Charter, of course ^{there} would be. The thing is the Workerists are so full of cliches..the ¹⁸ ~~role~~ of the working class and the proletariat must lead the ^{struggle} ~~struggle~~ etc. etc. All these things are true but they put them out in such cliched hackneyed terms.

Like the working class..I don't know whether I go along 100% with the division into classes. I still feel very ^{strongly} ~~strongly~~ that racism is a very very strong dimension in our struggle, in the whole system here. Whereas the workerists ~~tkend~~ tend to disagree with me. They ~~put~~ put all the ~~emph~~ emphasis on class exploitation, whereas I ~~put~~ put a lot of emphasis on racist hatred. Yes I do. And I feel that the workerists..I wish there wasn't this division; I think it is such a pity, it isn't time for division, this ^{is} ~~is~~ the time for unity.

And who..I mean, I feel there is a tendency to limit the idea of the working class to people in factories. The working class goes far beyond the factory floor. I consider that people, academics are workers. I don't see why they ~~should~~ be excluded. Anyway this is all very naive.

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Q It's 30 years almost exactly till when the Congress of the People happened and you had all this time when you were banned and had to just look at what seemed a hopeless situation; Did you ever think 10 years ago, 5 years ago even that there would be this 'legalisation' of the Charter; you would be able to have things up on your wall?

A No, not one of us did. We knew we were building something that was important. We knew that it was tremendously important at the time - for us it was our blueprint in a way, it was a blueprint for the future. It was the wishes of the people. Nothing laid down from above, it was the wishes of the people expressed in the Freedom Charter and to us that was an enormous achievement. We never realised that 30 years later it would be one of the most important things in the whole liberation movement. The cement that draws people together. An aim, a goal. To me that is one of the most exciting things about being alive today, its just seeing that.

Q If someone were to say is this valid? Do you think this is a valid ..this idea of looking at whites, do you think it is important to look at whites? I mean surely we know that the struggle is black lead, would you say that it is a valid thing to do? It is an important useful thing to do, historical or whatever?

A It is human it must be useful. You can't exclude a group. If you exclude the whites from our liberation struggle we are no better than the bloody Nats, are we.

Q But and what about the exercise of trying to interview all these people yourself and all the people I have mentioned, do you think that is useful?

A Yes I think so. I hope so. I hope the drop of water falls on the stone. I do hope so.

Q In what way?

A You see I can't... we can't exclude the whites, any more than the blacks didn't want to exclude the whites either. I think... (Tutu) put it beautifully once in a speech, in a speech he said they say we want to drive the whites into the sea, but what we forget is that there is apartheid on the beaches and we can't get to the beaches. It

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A doesn't apply today but was beautiful at the time.

Q Who said that?

A TUTU. It is beautiful that they..today you can't say it because you know, apartheid is being taken away on most of the beaches but when he said it then, he said we can't go on the beaches to drive the whites into the sea.

Q Can you just make a statement to me about what you see as the role of whites?

A Look, I would like to eliminate the word role from my vocabulary and everyone else's vocabulary. I get really tied up in knots about this idea of the word role. I think that the part that we have to play now in the struggle of liberation must be a supportive role if you like. Supportive role. I think this is very important. That we must merge ourselves into the whole struggle and be accepted as a supportive role because that is all that we want more than we deserve.

I have no time for this talk of in the PFP and what have you, of protecting minorities; that drives me round the wall. What right have whites minorities got to talk about being protected? We have deprived the majority of their rights for 100s of years. No no, we must stand side by side, side by side is one of my mottos. Side by side we must stand and we must take whatever part we can play; whatever supportive part we can play. I don't think we can have a.. expect anything more than that. That is pretty hard for the whites to accept.

Q Just to ask two things, for a comment because I think it is important for overseas: The one is the disinvestment campaign. I think it would just be interesting for someone to just ask you to comment on that. Is that something that you think is...I mean how did you feel when you first started hearing about it?

A For years I have met American visitors here who have said to me what do you think we should do? I have always given the same answer: take your money out of SA. And that is where I stand today. They must

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A take their money out of SA - we don't want it. It is not doing any good. It is bolstering up this bloody government. Oh I must not use that word. Bolstering up this government. At least I haven't said buggars. And its not..it maybe benefitting a few employees in each particular factory but what do they add up all together, ~~absolutely~~^{absolute}ly nothing. Very few people.

It is helping this government and anything that is helping this government is bad. It is prolonging the life of the government, because it is..helping with its...well the prosperity that is gradually now coming back, it is coming back. I am tremendously in favour of it.

Q Tape is going to end; I just want to follow up because...437