

Interview : Amy Thornton

JF You were saying that even if that happened that would be at least movement.

A Ja, I think that would be a great step forward along the road to the ultimate aim. I know that quite a lot of people...they won't accept that there can be these steps along the way and I question myself in my being willing to accept this, you know the kind of revolutionaries getting old and...but I think ...as I do get older I have greater feelings about humanism and I do think that some people almost welcome suffering because it might...it doesn't work that way. You know what I mean, its like this kind of thing that they would rather have apartheid, never mind how many millions of people are suffering under the yoke of apartheid because the change isn't the change that they see as the ultimate change.

I really go along with that slogan Aluta Continua - I don't think that because one gains a victory like say the abolition of the Pass Laws that one has betrayed the struggle.

JF I just want to get a couple of figures like the Hasha- how do you spell that?

A Hashaner Hatzair. There are ? words it means the young watchman, the young guard.

JF There's one question I asked Gaby on this, I mean she is a virtual kind of organdy? to ask this question to really and is also quite-are you very religious?

A No.

JF She's a bit religious;it's just that in a sense, I mean there are obvious marvellous stories where um, what would I call it...

A I say that's also one of the changes from the '50s. In the '50s the majority of the whites who were in the struggle were Jewish. (mm) But this is not the case today.

JF And what is the story with that? I mean the whole links with Israel the Zionism?

Interview : Amy Thornton

A Well, in the '50s there were people who had links in the '40s and the Hitler period and where Russia was our glorious ally and don't forget it wasn't for the Soviet Union, Israel wouldn't have existed. They supported the establishment of Israel in the U.N. It was Czechoslovakia that supplied the um, oh God, what did they call them..the Israeli army, you know, which the underground army, the Palmach and the um... it was really supplied with arms from Czechoslovakia.

Young South Africans went to Czechoslovakia and trained as pilots to fly in Israel. So it was in fact, because of the Soviet Union that Israel came into existence but um, that was say '48 but the Cold War was on and very shortly the Israeli government was taking a very reactionary line and uh, the story goes from there.

JF And these days, you know, the other things was noticing that you name, many, many religious people who take it into the..Syd Luckets Beyers Naudes....

A That is again a change from..well there were..I mean there's never been a Rabbi,; there have been occasional Rabbis who've said a few words about social injustice but nothing really. But we had our priests there, like the Rev. Thompson (ja) and Trevor Huddleston. There always have..but now its become almost establishment (ja) Ja.

JF Are you saying that you have people who were WASPS or Catholics and are practicing work in the struggle and then you have the you know, Albert Nolans, the Beyres Naudes, you know really(religious) deeply religious, but you have, I think you always have Jews who really were cultural but not religious Jews. But I don't think other than the actual religious Jews, as I say, a Rabbi or someone whose (no, none of that)...

A Neither have I, because their orientation is so directed towards Israel (Zionism) and Zionism that um, you know that's how it goes.

JF Do you think there's any potential or are you cut off from the Jewish Community too much to be able to say? Is there any potential for that - do you think Jews are in any way...realising any of the issues and coming to grips with them?

A Look, younger Jewish generation have grown up in tremendous affluence

Interview with Amy Thornton

A and are two generations removed from Hitler and they don't have that sense of persecution, so they've made a lot of money and they've lived very comfortable lives and the Nationalist Government have kept things quiet and many of them, I mean there are even Jews who have been voting Nationalist which would have been unheard of in the '40s and uh, they have taken on the same attitudes of the white bourgeoisie. I mean they haven't been different because they are Jewish and any kind of political involvement in any group is being again orientated towards Israel.

Now you have a situation where Israel is in an economic mess. Nobody <sup>to go</sup> ~~wants~~ there, they don't see..they don't feel themselves committed to life in S.A.. They're trying to go. And there's quite a...there's a large immigration of Jewish people, who have got either money or expertise to export. I don't see um, Jews as particularly wedded to any particular province in life. I think that comes from being generations removed from the refugees from Europe.

JF This is a strange question that I'm quite intrigued by and I think the other thing about, I mean you're the first I've met who was involved in COD who was quite young, I mean Helen was older; and just the thing of you running around in jeans and being you know the story of the side of the road, I mean despite the fact that it was almost absolutely impossible to violate the Immorality Act, is that something you suffered with, where everyone just assumed you were sleeping with blacks, or would no one assume anyone was....

A I don't think anyone assumed I was sleeping with blacks..

JF I mean was there any kind of casting aspersions in that way?

A I mean people would..you would..just sort of beyond the pale and white guys wouldn't take me out because they were scared. They were scared ...it was never an issue for me because I was never, if you're asking was I ever emotionally involved across the colour line, I wasn't.

JF No, but I wonder if people..certainly got with some people these days, you know if you're involved with black friends and...

A I did meet people who thought that sort of it behothed them to cross the colour line by sleeping with a black person. And that was to me something quite alien not because the person was black, <sup>but</sup> because to

Interview : Amy Thornton

A actually go to bed with a person for such a reason, ah, was kind of alien to me. But I do know some people who felt that this kind of proved that they weren't racist.

JF No, my experience has just been that kind of white men just assume that, that about you if you were reporting on black issues and stuff like that, you know in the '70s.

A I think this is probably what a lot of white men would assume amongst the radical feminists and say I'm sure a lot of people are saying..

JF These days but then it wasn't, it was (no) just wierd.

A Because people were too...seperated.

JF So you were just a Communist?

A Ja, that's what they considered you were, ja.

JF Did you actually join the CP when it was legal?

A The CP was banned in 1948 when I was 16.

JF Alright. Ok. And your kids, were born, the first one in what year?

A He will be 22 this year so that makes it 1963.

JF So you never had to...were there ? when the baby was born under the banning, did you ever think of the whole issue of putting him, your children's sufferings or that kind of thing or did you feel...?

A I um, the only child I had at the time I was detained, shortly after my marriage, was Jimmy. And I felt a terrible sense of guilt because he had just begun to accept me as a mother, then I was removed, you know when I was detained. (For the 90 days) Ja.

JF How old was he?

A Jimmy was three.

JF What do you mean he'd just began to accept you?

Interview : Amy Thornton

A I um, Jimmy was my husband's son you see. And when I married him um, he liked..he was like my child, you see and he'd become..he hadn't been with me that long and accepted me as his mummy, and so on and then suddenly I was removed. But we got special permission, Tony was very good at that. He was completely non political and he wasn't scared and he badgered and so on and got permission that Jimmy was allowed to see me every two weeks.

It was pretty traumatic, I mean it was terrible because when he went he would cry and scream, but we really felt it was important that he should see me. And know that I existed. He survived; I mean you know, other kids had it far worse. He had a warm loving family around him.

JF Have you discussed it with him or was he just too young to really...

A I don't think he remembers that period. We haven't had a specific discussion about it.

JF And the year of the Luthuli conference that you mentioned?

A Luthuli came to C.T. I can't really remember what year it was. I've got cuttings somewhere but I can't remember, it was certainly before the Congress Movement was banned so it would have been maybe '58. You can query that.

JF Ok. I won't keep you much longer - do you want..you're not Rietstien? Hey, it's just that I have been talking about for example the Jewish issues and that you mentioned that your name was Rietstein but would you want me to say Rietsteen-Thornton or do you always just say Thornton?

A Some people remember me as Amy Reitsteen and some people know me as Amy Thornton - you can put both.

JF Ok. I guess the other things are just-thought I wanted to ask your advice on a couple of points. I think that'll be enough.