

# Embittered, anti-Communist, and quoted by Radio Free Europe, HOWARD FAST WRITES A NEW BOOK

WHAT has happened to Howard Fast, where does he stand now?

This question is being asked by many of his readers in South Africa, where his books have for a long time enjoyed great popularity within the ranks of the progressive movement.

The answer is likely to come as a shock to many of these readers.

Fast is a prolific writer of talent and story-telling power who since 1935 has written some 30 novels, plays, histories, collections of short stories, critical works and books for children.

In the late 'thirties and early '40s his novels were greeted by the "respectable" critics with hails of joy, and he was described as "one of America's finest writers of historical novels."

## JOINED PARTY

Then in 1943 Fast joined the American Communist Party and soon emerged as one of its chief spokesmen in the cultural field. The critical acclaim died and the publishers became uninterested in him.

By 1951 no big publisher in America would take his works, and he was compelled to publish them himself.

But even as his literary position declined during the Cold War years in America, his books were selling in their hundreds of thousands abroad. It is estimated that his collected works have had a world sale of 20,000,000 with sufficient royalties to keep him financially secure.

People everywhere were inspired by his stories of courageous men and women who throughout the ages had fought against oppression—Spartacus, George Washington, Tom Pañe, Sacco and Vanzetti, Judah Maccabi and many others.

And nowhere was Fast more popular than in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, where

## WORLD STAGE By Spectator

he and Paul Robeson stood as the symbols of decent America steadfastly beating back the attacks of the McCarthyites, the racists and the peddlers of Cold War.

At peace congresses Fast was accepted as the voice of the unvanquished American writer, and he spoke in that vein. In 1953 he was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize.

Then came the report in the New York Times of Khrushchov's secret Twentieth Congress speech in February 1956. Fast was greatly shocked by the revelations about Stalin, and said so in his column in the American Daily Worker.

Shortly afterwards, however, he criticised himself in the same column for being impatient with the Soviet Union.

The Khrushchov report says, he wrote, that you do not easily remake a world. "Human progress is not a picnic but a fact, and men will be like gods, but not all at once. It takes time and it takes doing, and the true wonder of the miracle is that it is done by men and women like you and me."

"I wonder how it is that we could have been so patient and understanding of the long, long night and then have so little patience with the sunrise."

## A NEW TURN

Despite these fine words, Fast himself soon showed signs of losing patience. Within two months he had stopped writing his column, and then in February 1957 in an interview with the New York Times (a paper which until then had for long sneered at his writings) he said he had dissociated himself from the Communist Party and no longer considered himself a Communist.

He said: "I am neither anti-Soviet nor anti-Communist, but I cannot write and work in the Communist movement."

After that interview, Fast's career suddenly took on a new turn. He was sought out for radio and television interviews and for articles in publications which would have none of him before.

Radio Free Europe quoted liberally from him, and the U.S. Information Service spent many dollars in duplicating and distributing what he had written.

Some time last year New Age received, on request, a pamphlet from the U.S. Information Service containing correspondence between Fast and the well-known Soviet writer, Boris Polevoi. Unfortunately it was far too long to print, but Polevoi's main point

to Fast was that although Fast's decision was his private affair, he should not allow himself to be used to add fuel to the fires of the cold war.

Fast's reply consisted of an angry set of questions, which he claimed Polevoi had failed to answer. "It's neither significant nor important that the Voice of America makes capital of my action," he wrote. "One cannot silence any and all criticism with the protest that the Voice of America will use it."

## HIS LATEST BOOK

Two months ago Fast's newest book was published. It is called "THE NAKED GOD," AND IN IT HE MAKES IT QUITE CLEAR THAT SINCE HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE NEW YORK TIMES HE HAS BECOME BOTH ANTI-SOVIET AND ANTI-COMMUNIST.

According to a review of the book by a non-Communist American journalist, James Aronson, "the book is a disjointed one and therefore hard to follow. Strangely, for all its personal quality and the passion which should be inherent in such a history, it is a cold book, written with bitterness and conceit—and without love."

The book deals largely with why Fast came to join the Communist Party and why he recently left it.

He hates the Party leadership, Aronson writes, and he hates many of the people who help the Party financially (describing them as a bloodthirsty pack of man-coats and their consorts).

"There are constant references to the brotherhood of man and the dignity of mankind," writes Aronson, "but in their repetition these glorious words become clichés."

"He is consumed with his battle as a writer against the Party leadership and what he believes was their attempt to destroy him as a writer. The exchanges he describes are often petty, almost always nasty and stupid. They bring to mind the literary evaluations which until recently appeared in the Party publications—some of which read as though composed with meat cleavers."

"But Fast's contempt for this kind of criticism cannot banish the fact that his cleaver was one of the busiest of all."

Fast gives as his reason for joining the Communist Party a deep-going desire to be part of an organization that he believed to be dedicated to building a nation and a world at peace, with equality of opportunity for all.

Asking himself why he endured the torments he describes for so long, Fast writes that "serious people do not leap in and out of such organisations . . . The picture is overlaid with a complex of a hundred thousand threads."

Aronson comments: "Complex indeed the reasons are, but at base there is still this truth—no one forced him to join, no one forced him to stay, no one forced him to leave."

## WRITER UNCOVERED

"The reader asks another question: why, if a man suffered such a history as Fast describes in the Communist Party of the U.S.A., did it require a speech by a leader of the C.P. of the Soviet Union to cause him to make his move? That one speech seemed in addition to negate for Fast the tremendous achievements of the world socialist movement; at least they find little space in his story."

"In a review of such a book it is impossible to separate the work from the author . . . What emerges from the story is the sense of a man with a soaring ego who seems to regard himself as a figure of destiny." Aronson quotes several passages from Fast's latest book in praise of his own writing.

"The great ideals (which Fast shared) remain," the review concludes "and the people working to achieve them, the world over, are constantly showing a surer understanding of them—and of one another."

"Surely there is no room for gods, naked or clothed, in the brotherhood of man; but one is left with the feeling from this book that, in the movement towards brotherhood, it will be Fast, the writer of this book, who is left without cover."



Mrs. Winnie Mngqibisa, who came to Cape Town last September, has been married less than a year. Her husband has been working here for over 10 years. The child with her is Nosisa (9), her step-daughter.



Mrs. Evelina Katshwa has been married 25 years and came to Cape Town six months ago to work because her husband in the Transkei is ill and unable to earn a living. She has three children.



Mrs. Rosie Jamela came to Cape Town in the same year as she was married—1946. Her child Good-night is 8 years old.

# "WE ARE MADE WIDOWS WHILE OUR HUSBANDS ARE STILL LIVING"

LAST week the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev. Joost de Blank, published a statement in "Good Hope," the official journal of the Diocese of Cape Town, condemning the policy of apartheid and White Domination as "inhuman and unchristian."

If you want to know why, look at the pictures on this page, and read the articles in this issue of New Age. They show that life has become a hell on earth for the African people of the Western Cape.

Pictured on the right and left are some of the women and children who are being sent away from their homes in Cape Town because the head of the family does not qualify for permanent residence here. The women whose pictures we print all live in Bionville, but you can find hundreds of others like them in Windermere and other "black spots" in various parts of the Peninsula. The wives and children are sent to starve in the Transkei; the men are sent to "bachelors' quarters" at Langa. And Verwoerd says everything will be just fine by 1978!

## The Archbishop comments:

"Nothing could reveal this (White domination) more clearly than my recent experiences at Windermere . . . On investigation we were left in no doubt that through its officers the City Council was acting as humanely as possible. But there is bound to be inhumanity when the law itself is inhuman.

"Christians cannot but condemn a policy which involves the deliberate breaking up of families . . . I am quite certain that as a Christian I shall never be able to discover any justification for baasskap or white supremacy."

## AT COOK'S BUSH

The other pictures on this page were taken while the houses of the people were being demolished by the Divisional Council at Cook's Bush last week. All the families had been given notice to leave, but when the time came to go they were still living at Cook's Bush, so their homes were knocked down over their heads and men, women and children were left in the open air with all their belongings.

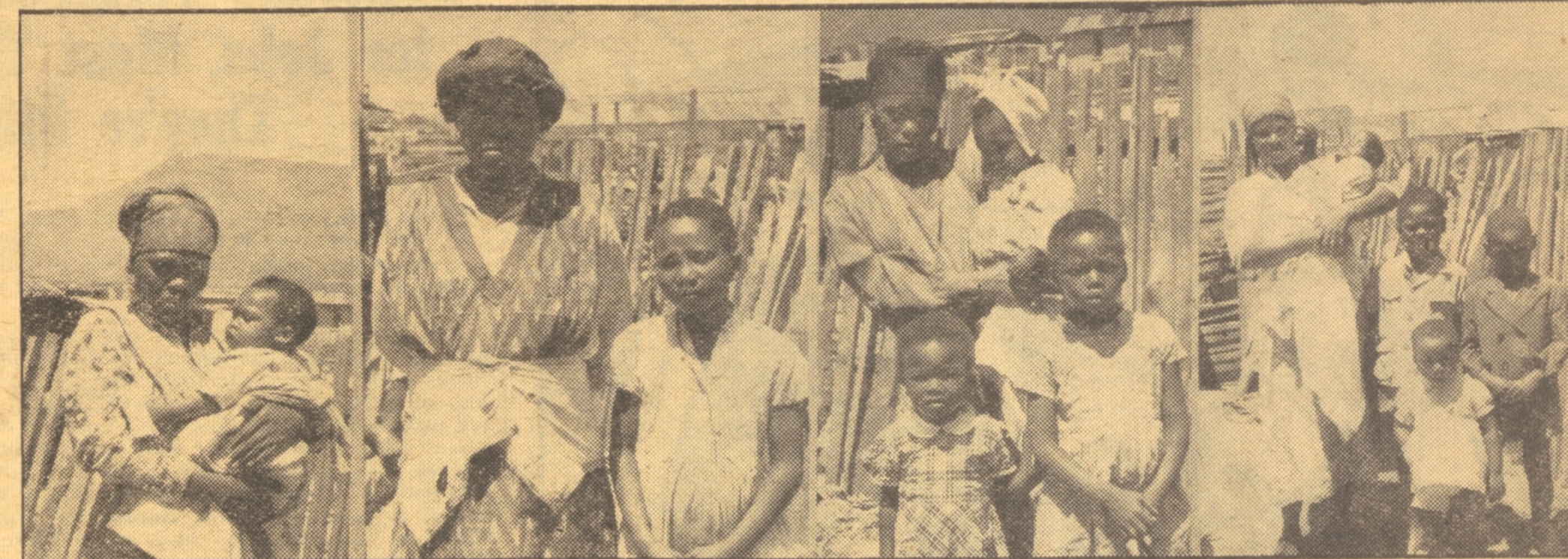
Asked why the people did not move to Nyanga shantytown, as ordered, Mrs. Tamela, whose home you see in ruins on the right, said: "We haven't got money to go and build in Nyanga. My husband is unemployed and has been looking for work for a week. How shall we get money to buy materials to build a new house?"

Mrs. Tamela has a 9-month-old baby on her back.

The other pictures show (below) two African employees of the Divisional Council in the act of demolishing Mrs. Tamela's home; and (below, right) a six-month-old baby of one of the families left lying in the ruins of her parents' home.



HELP SELL NEW AGE



Mrs. Nongathenjwa Gwagqwane has been married for 14 years. Her baby Ndawenzima is only 12 months old. She came to Cape Town a bare 8 months ago.

Mrs. Elsie Zinja has been married for 12 years and came to Cape Town in 1955 to join her husband. With her is Nomlibaziso, aged 10.

Mrs. Priscilla Gaga was married in 1945 and came to Cape Town to join her husband in 1956. Her three children Miriam (7), Rebecca (5) and Frida (born 1956) will have to go with her if she is forced to leave.

Mrs. Enid Matshayana has been married 15 years and has lived in Cape Town since 1940. Her child Eric is 6 months old, and the other children are Mbuyiselo (8), Mvuyiso (6) and Winitfred (3). There is an older child of 9 living with relatives in the Transkei.



## BABIES ARE LEFT WITHOUT SHELTER



## SHOCKERS

## NEW RACE TEST

JOHANNESBURG.

Delegates to the council meeting of the Institute of Race Relations were told by an African delegate, Mr. Rathebe, that some Government officials charged with the task of classifying people as African, Coloured or White for the Population Register were in the habit of sticking pins into people who came to be classified.

Mr. Rathebe said that if the people pricked responded with the expletive "Shu"—an African expression—they were classified as African. But if they said "Eina," they were classified as Coloured.

—Reported in the Cape Argus, Friday January 17.

## WOMEN FIGHT PASSES IN SPRINGS

SPRINGS.

Tension is mounting at Springs in the Payneville and Kwa-Thema locations where the City Council is forcing all the African women to take documents which resemble passes.

Already notice has been given the Location Advisory Board to tell the residents that on February 3 this year all schoolchildren over 16 years and all women should go to the Location Superintendent who will issue them with these documents.

This system of "passes in disguise" was introduced by the City Council in Springs when employers were instructed not to employ any servant unless she was in possession of this "card."

The Springs ANC Women's League will organise a mass demonstration to the Mayor to protest against this new system.

## WILDEBESSPAN

The Native Commissioner of Wildebeespan, in the Klerksdorp district, ordered all African women here to go to the Native Commissioner's Offices on January 22 to be issued with passes.

In reply the women assembled and resolved that they would send a deputation to the Native Commissioner to tell him that they are not prepared to carry passes.

## LAST WEEK'S DONATIONS:

Cape Town: A Highgate Reader 15s., Anonymous £23.2, Harold £5.

Johannesburg: J. £15, Mr. Angel £3. TOTAL—£46 17s.



WILL THESE HOUSEBREAKERS ALSO GET THE DEATH PENALTY?

## Swart Puts The Clock Back

BY proposing the death penalty for robbery and housebreaking the Minister of Justice, Mr. Swart, is putting the clock back at least 150 years. For it was in Britain, at the end of the 18th century, that a Parliament representing the upper classes, terrified by the French Revolution, added the death penalty to hundreds of fresh offences in the hope of "ending the crime wave" which was surging at that time.

The crime wave was largely of its own making, for the condition of the common people of Britain in 1800 was shocking beyond description. In fact, the only parallel which can be drawn is with the South Africa of our own day, in which the apartheid policies of the Nationalist ruling junta have reduced the mass of our population to a state of helotry from which the only escape, often, is a career of crime.

Similarly in the England of 1800 the desperate poverty of the people drove thousands into crime. Men and women who were forced off the land and herded into the new towns which were being thrown up by the industrial revolution very often relied on robbery and theft as a means of livelihood. For wages were abominably low, work often scarce and housing of the most primitive. Sanitation and piped water were as scarce as in our shantytowns.

### STARVATION

A social worker who visited Colne in Lancashire in 1842 reported: "I visited 88 dwellings selected at hazard. They were destitute of furniture save old boxes for tables or stools, or even large stones for chairs; the beds were composed of straw and shavings. The food was oatmeal and water for breakfast, flour and water with a little skimmed milk for dinner, oatmeal and water again for a second supply." He saw children in the market grubbing for the rubbish of roots. At

Burnley he saw the weavers "haggard with famine, their eyes rolling with that fierce and uneasy expression common to maniacs. 'We do not want charity,' they said, 'but employment.' I found them all Chartists." (They would be called Communists today.)

Are not similar conditions to be found in District 6, Cape Town, or Windermere or Moroka or Cato Manor or Korsten in present-day South Africa?

### By Brian Bunting

Then, as now, the governing classes regarded crime not as a social disease but as a personal sin. They tried to stamp it out by terror. Petty theft was punishable with the death sentence, and indeed almost every crime could be so punished at the discretion of the judge. Transportation to the colonies was regarded as a fate worse than death.

### CHILDREN TOO

In 1831 the governor of a prison said he had under his charge a boy of ten who had been imprisoned eight times; in 1813 two brothers aged 12 and ten were transported for seven years for stealing some linen; in 1800 a child of ten described by the judge as "wearing a pinafore" was condemned to death for stealing notes and the sentence commuted to transportation for 14 years. In 1814 a boy of fourteen was hanged for stealing.

A woman whose husband had been transported for theft committed the same crime in the hope of joining him in exile, but the judge decided to make an example of her and sent her to the gallows instead.

The following is an extract from a London newspaper printed in the 1790s:

OLD BAILEY, Sept. 24

The following prisoners received sentence of death for the following offences:

John Griffiths for horse-stealing. Elizabeth Hill for stealing goods to the value of £2 15s. privately in a shop.

Sarah Dancer for the same offence.

Thomas Pearson for a robbery in an open field near the King's highway.

John Spencer for sheep-stealing.

Erick Hanson Falk for forgery.

John Lewis for unlawfully assembling with twenty other persons and more, to the disturbance of the public peace, and beginning to demolish and pull down a dwelling house.

Thomas Hassell for a burglary.

Henry Hale for the same offence.

Richard Smith for stealing goods of the value of 40s. and upwards, in a dwelling house etc.

William Tooke for the same offence.

\* \* \*

Swart is back where the English, "whose penal code," in the words of one historian, "was among the most barbarous in history," left off more than 100 years ago. He has introduced compulsory flogging for certain types of offence, and is not in the least dismayed by the fact that the number of those crimes committed has increased, not diminished, since his Flogging Bill was passed.

Now he introduces the death penalty for robbery and housebreaking. It is but one step to make plain theft a hanging offence. We already have the punishment of transportation under various of Verwoerd's laws.

### DRAGGING US BACK

Truly the Nationalist Government, with unparalleled sadism and ferocity, born of hatred and contempt for the majority of our people, are dragging us back into the worst horrors of the Middle Ages from which humanity has so recently and painfully emerged.

But the brutal laws of the English did not save them either from disorders or from the ultimate necessity of reform. It can safely be said that Swart and his cronies will also find that not all their savage laws will preserve their diseased apartheid society from the destruction which already threatens it.

## FORCED LABOUR IN CAPE TOWN

### Africans Forbidden to Look for Jobs, Must Take What They're Offered

CAPE TOWN.

THE policy of forced labour at which Verwoerd has been aiming for some time is now in force in the Western Cape. Since last week, the authorities at Langa have been refusing to issue seek-work permits to Africans who have lost their jobs.

The procedure now is that any African who loses his job is forbidden to look for another job. He goes into the pool of unemployed, and may only take the jobs that are offered him by the Labour Bureau. If an African refuses to take the job that is offered him, and his refusal is regarded by the Bureau official as "unreasonable," he is endorsed out of town.

A SENIOR OFFICIAL AT LANGA ADMITTED TO NEW AGE THAT HE HAD ENDORSED OUT OF THE AREA AN AFRICAN WHO HAD DEMANDED A WAGE OF £3 15s. FROM A GARAGE PROPRIETOR.

The official said the starting wage in the garage industry was £3 1s., and the African work-seeker had no right to expect more than this. Furthermore, he was selected from about 24 people with similar qualifications who would have been keen to take the job.

### "GIVE US A CHANCE"

This Langa official said he was satisfied that if the new scheme were given a chance, it would work out to the advantage of the Africans because it would lead to a levelling up in wages. He claimed that he personally had used his influence to direct labour away from people paying low wages, or had forced such employers to raise their wages before sending labour to them.

He also claimed that the Africans themselves were grateful for the pool system, because it saved them the trouble of travelling in and out of town looking for jobs, as well as the considerable expense of train and bus fares. Now all they had to do was wait in the pool for the right job to turn up.

### INDIGNANT

Africans waiting in the Langa unemployed pool, however, are most indignant at the change. They say it puts them at a disadvantage vis a vis the employers, who know they can slap down any African demanding a wage above the minimum.

And the African himself will be scared to ask for a wage above the minimum because he may be endorsed out of town as "unreasonable." In other words, there can be no free bargaining when one party is not free to bargain.

Moreover, the Africans say that wage rates are uneven. In one trade a wage of £3 10s. may be common, in another the ruling wage may be only £2 15s., though there may not be much difference in the type of work done. But if a man who has been on the higher rate refuses a job at the lower wage, he may again be regarded as "unreasonable" and thrown out of town.

The Langa official admitted this. "But," he said, "we try as far as possible to give people the same sort of job as they have had in the past. We wouldn't ask a teacher to go and do farm labour."

### UNEMPLOYED

Meanwhile there are about 700 unemployed Africans waiting for jobs at Langa. Last week, when told they could no longer seek jobs themselves, there were disturbances in the labour queues.

"The trouble was caused by a minority of young people," the Langa official said soothingly. "They are people born in Langa whom we are not allowed by law to endorse out of town."

In other words, free labour is likely to prove scarce and expensive—and independent. Verwoerd's labour will be dirt cheap and docile—or so he thinks.

BUT THE PEOPLE OF LANGA THINK DIFFERENTLY.

## Union-Wide Activity For Workers' Conference

### Cape Town

Under the banner, "THE NATS MUST GO" the congresses in the Western Cape have started their campaign for £1 a day minimum wage, against passes, against apartheid and job reservation.

Last Sunday well over a thousand people attended meetings in Nyanga, Langa, Elsies River, Rylands and Paarl. Resolutions were passed supporting the Congress campaign. All speakers reported a very warm response from the audiences.

Next Sunday a number of meetings will be held in the country districts and meetings will be held every Thursday during the lunch hour on the grand parade.

### Durban

Last week over 50 delegates from Congress branches met to plan the campaign leading to the workers' conference on February 15-16.

Factory and area meetings have been arranged. Shop stewards reported that in some factories fund raising for the conference has already started, and they are confident that the £300 needed to organise the conference will be raised soon.

### Johannesburg

A Sophiatown meeting of 2,000 last week-end passed resolutions inter alia condemning the police action in Zeerust and Mabieskraal. The meeting was called by the ANC Youth League to protest against passes and permits following large-scale police permit raids in Sophiatown.

The meeting resolved to refer the pass issue to the regional conference on February 16.

Speakers bitterly attacked the newspaper the "World" for its anti-Congress campaign aimed at sowing discord in the Congress movement and the people were warned against disruptive elements like the Africanists.

Other speakers spoke of the forthcoming workers' conference for £1 a day.

**Collection Number: AG2887**

**Collection Name: Publications, New Age, 1954-1962**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand

*Location:* Johannesburg

©2016

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.