

## Hilda Bernstein

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadolan@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 13 April 2003 11:55 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Thursday 5th May

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> May

Wrote note to the girls re Passover and giving other news. Mrs L called Freda to go with Special Branch men for yellow fever injection. We lined up once more for Super to say "Several of you made applications to see your children. You must each put in a personal application – today". We wrote out applications giving reasons which were also requested. Each one seemed sad, some genuinely heart rending such as Molly: I have a son of 12 suffering from diabetes and cystic fibrosis – both incurable diseases and Gert: with son having nightly asthma attacks and beloved grandma who died Myrtle with a ....8...., Yetta: with Treason Trial memories etc. At lunchtime for the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Shul spoke, this time of events in Sekukuniland and cried when she spoke of one woman. It was genuine, moving and a sad indictment of our organisations, but as soon as discussion began, Rose drove me into a temper. Shul accuses from the standpoint: Why did the ANC etc fail? Rose from a sort of satisfied righteousness – almost pleasure at the failures. This ends discussion each time or removes it from the basis on which it has any value for us.

The promised "India Summer" seems to be here. It is really hot outside, beautiful.

After waiting two weeks only 3 of the books I asked for arrive – and not the ones I most wanted.

More annoyance. I am sulking in a corner. Went around all afternoon seething, at myself, Rose and life generally, but after discussion with others, felt she was definitely in the wrong.

Super called back to tell us to get our husbands to apply as well – this we can discuss with them on Monday. At least this bloke puts in an appearance, and gives a direct reply. I suppose I am entitled to feel that this life is getting me down.

Line up of new African prisoners tonight. Through the windows showed Maggie and Kate incitement IG58, 9 months each. Their smiles and signals cheered us up.

Oh, I am tired of this place! The desire for home and family! Lying in bed at night, hearing within one's head through tiny ear piece the flood of music from an orchestra – a Chopin piece – the music delicate and overwhelming, and heard only within my head. Then I close my eyes and think of a darkened room, flowers, disorder after a busy day, but the disorder of home – and music. There is terrible loneliness in such a place.

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 18 April 2003 08:58 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Friday 6 May

Friday 6 May

One morning out of every three the lav is blocked. Another hot day, this is the Indian Summer. The push-pull squad arrives with their guard and golf bag. I have a somewhat inconclusive argument with Rose – told her self-searching is the only answer. Rica emerged looking ready for a stroll down Eloff Street – high heeled shoes, the smartest of black and yellow suits, stockings, make-up. If the men could have seen her, they would have whistled!

Man from Public Works came obviously re water and lav for cell 3. Blair returned. Said he had seen lunches for Africans, was satisfied with their condition. "An educated kind of non European".

An answer from our 4 friends that they support our action. Stores arrived before lunch – the significance of this we did not realise at the time. Bram came to see me, Molly and Sonia.

Impossible to talk of anything except the most petty of family affairs. While in office, Babette arrived – saw her close – letter from Parents Magazine re articles £3.3.0 for 1000 words – all about office affairs – my job is waiting for me. Fife of O.K. has been helpful etc.

Freda reports Matron counting and checking watches in office. Margaret's son reported are you going to Pretoria. Rose came to see Sonia and said men are going to Pretoria. Called to surgery where Matron said we must pack and be ready in ½ an hour to go to Pretoria. Decided not to move. Steyn came to argue with us. We explained our reasons, family, distance, children, not knowing what was to happen to us etc. He went away, came back with Colonel Snyman. Presented the same arguments and put it to him that he must communicate with a higher authority and put our point of view. 1<sup>st</sup> impression of Snyman: Steyn nervous, face ticking We went to room, discussed, in a state of nervous tension. Colonel came back and argued with us again. Said men were all going without protest, why not us? Left us, we made coffee (a mistake!) Then Sonia called to office, refused to go, went eventually with Shulamith. Came back grinning. They were phoning.

Sat on beds and waited. If tapped on shoulder, would we come? I e was it only a token resistance?

We said no. Steyn stood at the door arguing We said perhaps if we had seen newspapers -- been charged – it would have been different. Molly was taken first. Sat down. Sarah next. Wardresses struggling, panting. Matron pleading. An army of officers standing outside. Snyman talking to me in the van. We hear the men singing. We sing loudly. They bang and shout to us. We called out why they had been kept waiting. Their van was then moved outside. The women are brought in one by one Angry officer said he could handle us all. Matron said no, they dare not touch us. We apologised to Matron and the wardresses for the trouble, not directed against them. Then van started, driving first with Johannesburg evening traffic, street lights, cars. Tried to sing in noisy, dark, clattering van. Lights make pattern on the van wall, the car lights following. Pull into Pretoria Road. Cool night wind, stars, the darkness and the rush of the van. We were elated and satisfied. Arriving in Pretoria, an army of officers standing round the van. We sprang down into huge jail, matrons and wardresses all gathered at the foot of the stairs. Up past cells into huge room – beds on either side in rows, ready and waiting – 2 huge rooms, an electric stove, tables, chairs, box full of news cuttings, cups, plates and two beautiful urns – even a table cloth.

We sit talking in rec room, lights off in others.

This ghastly institutional like atmosphere! Prison windows too high to see out of, all sense of intimacy lost. We can't even talk together at night.

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 18 April 2003 10:40 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Saturday 7 May  
Saturday 7 May

Ghastly night of shunting and parking trains slamming their indecision into us through the dark. Cold water to wash, no toothbrush, toilet articles, dirty clothes after the dragging of the evening before. And the place! The vast halls, the jail like atmosphere.

We wash as best we can with one tap and one towel. Pace up and down the huge hall, breakfast arrives, new roasties (?) with porridge, separate dishes with jam, sugar, fat. We sit at long tables with cloths and unaccustomed cutlery and crockery. Dr. arrived – a fierce and nasty looking character. A little later we are unlocked and taken down into the yard. Formidable and ugly walls surrounding a small area of grass. A palm tree. A wardress on duty to watch us all the time. A constant coming and going of wardresses, officials etc. Up again – lunch arrives. We are astounded at the food, really tasty stew, mashed potato and beans. I enjoyed a cooked dinner for the first time in four weeks.

Spoke to Helen about her three weeks alone: Arrested by Vavies (?) at 2. Taken to Marshall Square. Next day to Pretoria. Case was adjourned. Next day she was put into a cell by herself. Read same books over and over. "Lived in a world of voices –the African women outside. Then one day Lilian spoke to her. Madanoka (?) condemned to death, had wardress outside her cell 24 hours a day except for 20 minutes at noon. Madanoka told the others, they kept quiet to allow Lilian to speak to Helen for 10 minutes each day. Then she was taken out at the same time as Hannah Stanton for 3 hours a day. Later they asked to be put in 1 cell. Hannah is lovely, pretty, gentle and refined, sincere. To have so many "high-powered" people flung on her at one time must be a bit overwhelming.

Out again for an hour in the afternoon, cold baths. Washed clothes in cold water. Wardresses watch us all the time.

We think Joe has won his application.

Helen believes Madanoka's sentence has been commuted to 15 years.

Sat writing and copying out memo, trying to draw the big hall until about 5. We all did exercises together – Lt. Aroused when we were on our backs, legs in air. Then supper – soup excellent. Kept hot on stove. Lovely coffee. Lights in main room stayed on till 9. We sat late in other room talking round the table.

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 18 April 2003 02:29 PM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Sunday 8 May

Sunday 8 May

Rain in the night, through the window, on to my face. Raining and grey this morning. Standing on the wardrobes to look outside. to see what wardresses were shouting at, we saw African women detainees in yard filling pails of water. We whistled "Mayibuya" and they saw us and smiled but guards were watching them all the time and Lilian was there Bertha etc. Brooms, dustbins and cloths brought in this morning for us to sweep the floors. How it cheers us to see our other friends. We saw them again later patrolling in the yard – 15 women, 2 babies. They saw us. We were kept in all morning. I prepared poetry reading. Lunch was positively delicious. Col Snyman came before lunch with our attractive Lt. Klopper of yesterday. He is friendly, approachable and as pleasant as could be. Have we tamed him or are they training us? After lunch, gave poetry reading for which I had been preparing all the morning. Interrupted for "lock-out" lasting about 1 hour, during which time I wrote to Rae and Ed. Came back to finish it and knit when Betty ran past shivering and ill. Stood next to her for over an hour while she shivered, went stiff and moaned with pain. Wardresses took 15 minutes to call Matron who tried to get a doctor, brought back medical orderly – finally came with doctor 1 ½ hours later. He had an argument with Margaret re getting a specialist. In the evening we worked on TT index and I was in the doghouse for rowdy, undisciplined behaviour. Miserable as all hell. Some of us stayed up till late with coffee, knitting and I rehabilitated myself by singing –late. Bed at 11.30! Such dissipation!

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 18 April 2003 03:02 PM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Monday 9 May  
Monday 9 May

On kitchen duty today. For the first time here, we were not wakened by lights --- just one word to the Colonel and everything is done! Had no sooner finished with cleaning up when we were ordered outside. Had discussion first with Helen (?) re fast. She has dozens of difficulties as usual and creates hornet's nests.

Visiting much better than at the Fort. Told E about how we left the Fort. She said Spengle had given his personal assurance to someone on Friday that we were not going to be moved. She told me what the children were doing --- they all go out over weekends. Everyone says Keith is lovely. Fuzzy advised we should not see Keith. Frances says she would not be too upset. The men are 100% behind us. Relatives want to organise demos outside. All is quiet at the moment. Bathed after she left. Before lunch, furious arguments with V., must say I find myself more in agreement with MB's attitude than anyone.

We had continued poetry reading after lunch then began on documents again, but we were brought out once more. It is cool, bright, windy. The whole jail's towels are spread out, over the grass, on fences, on bushes and also on the gravel. Klopper came, gave me 4 poetry books and warned us someone had been seen passing something to another person. If done again, both would be charged with unpleasant consequences. Tried all day unsuccessfully to conspire -- we are too much together. After supper, discussion. H brings opinions from her associates -- points of disagreement, time of action -- whether to wait on others -- whether to take decisions ourselves -- how to coordinate calling off if we don't agree on time; and in fact the whole nature of the thing, whether as a small demo or serious attempt to force action. About 8 or 9 spoke out supporting our view. Only MK stood out for 2 days. Except for her and H it was unanimous. I greatly admire these women, their courage and determination, especially in the light of their backgrounds and for many their lack of contact with organisations, discipline etc. We discussed possible action against ourselves, sentences, deprivations or solitary confinement. We did not fix time but must be flexible. Afterwards I wrote few points on paper for H to take then we worked on the other deadly material for a while.

Forgot to mention that 6 African prisoners, 2 workmen and a third with a gun arrived through yard to install 3 plugs in the bath.

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 18 April 2003 06:08 PM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Tuesday 10 May

Tuesday 10 May

We have been in all morning while workmen erect benches for us in the yard. Things keep arriving for our comfort. We view them all with distaste and disfavour: basins, dishes for salads, dish racks, ashtrays, new mops, dustbins etc. It all seems terrifyingly permanent. Colonel came, mentioned that Kay was seen trying to give a cigarette to an African woman – penalty £200 or 2 years: also pile of stompies was concealed in the grass outside. Warned us. We asked again about seeing husbands, he said he had forgotten yesterday, would see to it ---joked re not seeing them this week. A very genial chap. Lunch hour talk – Myrtle on the Union of African Artists, an amusing talk that was interrupted when we were called to go outside. After a little while in the garden we were told that 6 of us should be ready in 15 minutes and we were all taken to the visiting room together. Overjoyed to get all our decisions confirmed, a completely wrong impression was given to them. Agreed on time, on method of taking decisions and so on. Gave him an account of our removal which he enjoyed. I was excited and exhilarated by all this knowing that we were right and that they had same opinions. Evening we discussed again and were disturbed by a splitting tactic in appealing to certain people. Own attitude unchanged although H did make very serious plea to us to wait: Later worked half heartedly on the (?) index,, nattering endlessly in groups in between – in fact spent most of the evening nattering in whispers in the bedroom or other room. Wrote to the children in the morning and rhyme and drawings for Keith. Listened to those impatient trains at night.

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 19 April 2003 07:34 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Wednesday 11 May

Wednesday 11 May

We sit around while workmen down below make another bench. To see outside we must stand on top of the wardrobes and stick our faces against the iron mesh. New things arrive – dustbins, a big bath, everything has a look of great permanence. Down in the morning to bath and wash clothes. Up again for lunch – cottage pie and not bad. Later on, down again, called to Colonel's office for questions about our children, number, ages, sexes, are our husband's detained. This, and signing a book for money and watches takes hour of waiting around and completely messes up the afternoon. No sooner settled on the grass once more when the Colonel asks us if our quarters upstairs are tidy. As he has a very important visitor coming and she will inspect them, then come and talk to us informally outside. We speculate correctly on identity as being Helen Suzman, looking smart and attractive. All reasonable conversation was inhibited by the Colonel saying we may not discuss our detention with her. I asked if it was permitted to know if she knew of our petition to the Minister and our proposed action. She said she did. She brought love from the men. She said we were not forgotten, she was pleased with our appearance --- smiling faces and high morale. She promised they would do everything possible for us. We are satisfied there is nothing left for us to do about the matter, and I have only one fear, that they might release mothers of young children whose husbands are detained. I would hate to go under such circumstances. How difficult it would be. I would rather stay here with the others until all go, than go before them to my children.

I skipped work tonight, read poetry until the lights went out, feeling a little guilty at all the others working away. Then made coffee and nattered again. Rica moved her bed up so we could whisper. This is the best and most relaxing way of ending the day and the thing I miss most here!

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 20 April 2003 07:33 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Thursday 12 May  
Thursday 12 May

Cold this morning. Rica is combing hair – after setting about 10 yesterday. I feel “off colour”: Roll on tomorrow! Visitors morning: they bring news of Black Sash and others demonstrating on Pretoria Road; that our petition to the minister was published in full in Tuesday night’s Star; there will be Sat demo of children, and the party on Sunday is a party, the Press will be there. We build up suppositions on the flimsiest basis – a cell upstairs is having a chair and table put into it. Is this for SB questioning? Colonel comes round: any questions or complaints? We just want to know if any reply from Erasmus. No reply. Yesterday Betty was told of letter written by her to Peter N could not be sent, and code from her to Rosie, a girl in her office, would also not be sent. No correspondence between people of different races. Also Rosie cannot visit Peter because she had not taken out a reference book, so they won’t give her a permit.

Tony and Jean came this afternoon. Tony did not look as well as usual. We talked of children and other small things. Keith loved my drawings, carried them around and refused to let anyone see them. I also saw Bram and Ilsa. Another stamp of approval. Bram also said H Suzman found the visit to us very worthwhile.

Hannah upset when we returned to our hall, due to unpleasantness when her brother visited. We do vigorous exercises before our last supper. Bean soup was good and we had tinned salmon, hardboiled eggs, tomatoes etc. Afterwards the scene was like the night before Christmas as we all brought out our private stocks of biscuits, chocolate, cheese and packed and packed these together with the remainder of our stores, into cardboard cartons. We finished off a somewhat hilarious evening by all eating too much in an endeavour to get rid of open tins and perishables.



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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadolana@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 21 April 2003 07:21 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Friday 13 May

Friday 13 May

5 weeks, 1 in Pretoria and our first day. Lights went on this morning. We were all up early. Did a cleaning job of the odds and ends, bottles, tins, jars and csraps remaining. Food came. We left it outside. I had cups of hot water. We were very cold inside and they seem to take such a long time to let us out. But once out the sun is wonderful – I enjoyed the resonant sound of singing in my bath! Distressed to have my letters to the children because of some nonsense about 2 straight lines! The letter is nearly a week old and I hated re writing the first page -- also miserable because I only had one letter in all these five weeks. Colonel visited us and asked how we were, explained that the food must be brought up – this being regulations, so was not done simply to aggravate us. All very cheerful and pleasant. Also said children under 12 would be allowed a “contact” visit. Over 12 they would be permitted the ordinary “behind bars” visit. We go upstairs to our cups of hot water, classes, books or knitting. The days are going to be a great deal longer without the social ceremony of meals. We all feel sleepy and yawning, a few have headaches but not too severe. This evening we had a lovely message from CC – this was such a kind thought it cheered us tremendously. 7.30, some sleeping, some working, some reading. I am feeling well but extremely hungry. Bet the men have had an A1 meal!



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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 23 April 2003 08:10 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Saturday 14 May

Saturday 14 May

Cold wind blew in the night. We all went to sleep very early. Awoke to freezing morning with wind blowing through open windows. Most feel very well. I am a little headachy but not very hungry. The wardress who brought up our cigarettes and other orders from the stores said (when something was missing): "Well perhaps it got with the native women's ---oooh I mean African women's things". Question: who is brainwashing who? Margaret is keeping a record of all our reactions – also pulse rates, bowels and all the other symptoms. We had short spell in the yard when I felt sleepy and dopey. Colonel came and said we couldn't expect reply to our petition before Monday. We drink hot water, lie on our beds, knit, read, play Scrabble, sleep. The day is very long without meals to break it up.

Bearing out our theory that there is always something happening, Gert is called out, away a long time. Helen comes back to tell us she is going home, but won't be allowed to communicate with any of us. She was away more than an hour, came back with Matron to pack; we surrounded her. She was released conditionally on signing an undertaking not to communicate with or have anything to do with anyone detained or released under Emergency Regulations; not to go out at night---what else, we don't know. Well it's two gone! I slept in the afternoon, as everyone seems to. We are tired, some of us feel very hungry, but most are cheerful and well. Hannah and Helen both succumbed this evening! We had a lick of salt – and that deadly water! It has turned very cold. We couldn't even keep awake until lights out – it was difficult to meet the 9pm deadline. Could not concentrate on my knitting!

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 27 April 2003 09:38 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Sunday 15 May  
Sunday 15 May

Woke feeling out of sorts, headachy and without energy. We all lay in bed after 7 although Matron came in. After getting up, dressing and doing sweeping duty in the other room, I felt a lot better. At about 9 Rabbi Katz came, sat down with us at the table and had a little informal talk. He asked if we needed anything for ourselves or our families, said there was money set aside for this purpose, told us he had only once before visited a Jewish woman in jail. Matron came and asked if this was a sermon? He explained that he could only give a sermon with 10 men present. Then followed quite an interesting discussion about women's place in Jewish religion. He put the emphasis on her importance in the home, we argued from the viewpoint that she was not accepted as a person in her own right, only through her family role. We then had a long spell outside – were permitted to stay longer in the sun when we asked. Junod (?) came and shook each of us by the hand and blessed us and assured us that that we were very much in everyone's minds. Back to our rooms for a lick of salt and water. Rea is not feeling well. She has a headache and is getting a cold. Except for the 4, none of us has touched anything for three days. Wonder how the men are feeling. We are subdued but still determined. We heard the other women singing Mayibuye and Nkosi sikilele. This was like a greeting to us. In the afternoon Fr. Lovegrave came to us on the lawn. We sang two hymns, said the Lord's Prayer and he read a psalm and gave a short sermon about being still and letting the Lord enter – a little pompous and smooth. We cooperated to please Hannah. At 4 I read humorous poetry. Then Zulu class – there was shorthand this morning. This does help to cut the day up. I hate not having meals to look forward to! Now I think the worst is over and things may start happening tomorrow!

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freemove.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 04 May 2003 10:58 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Monday 16 May

Monday 16 May

We all feel considerably weaker: some complaining of back ache. Hunger symptoms have quite disappeared. Making beds requires some effort. A discussion on a telegram to the Minister. We decided rather to ask relatives to wire Ministers, Programmes etc.

Such a busy day! So many things and so much to write and I so feel less interest in writing. Forgot Snyman came in the morning, told us we had made our demo and should now stop. Said we would be separated. When we asked if we would be put in cells by ourselves he said in offhand way there was plenty of room for us elsewhere eg Nylstroom – this is a bombshell!

Visitors came in the morning and it was wonderful out in the sun. We saw our husbands but first Sarah was called out for questioning, came back after a little while saying they were calling her again, but they told her they had an urgent application for Mrs K and wanted to see her. May went and was gone. We heard her voice and theirs in the room at the end of the passage. Then we 5 saw our husbands. Rusty gave me lots of news. The men are all well and taking the foodless regime well. Said 6 of them had been interrogated so far, none returned. They were completely agreed not to answer questions and had highest legal backing for this. (I can't concentrate and keep getting interrupted). Sarah told us they said she had 100 questions to answer, that she might refuse if she thought her answer might incriminate her. We came up for period, went down in the afternoon, summoned to stand before Snyman and Brigadier Stein (Deputy-Director of Prisons). He was nervous, his cheek was twitching and he kept bending a rubber baton. He told us he had just come along to say that we saw now people were being taken for questioning, things were moving and there was no longer any need for us to continue with our refusal of food.

We said we were awaiting a reply from Erasmus, who had not even had the courtesy to acknowledge our request to him. Steyn said you saw the results on Saturday – what more do you want? Also said we would definitely be separated "for administrative reasons". They will definitely have to carry us down the stairs if they intend taking us to a different jail. We informed him we would continue.

Next Tony and Anne Marie came, Tony with cuttings with her picture among those of Saturday. Ilse, Tony, Mark and one of Pahad's daughters took the petition to the Mayor, came out to find the children were arrested, rushed to Marshall Square "to give themselves up". She said Pat had his picture in the paper, was delighted, the Times was chock full of it, also all other Sunday papers. An Express reporter wanted to buy the kids buns, police refused to let him give them. TV cameras were there, they were all on BBC television. E kids taken by car, Man E's in a van. Incredible that they should have arrested them! What will world think!

Betty was taken away (saw specialist this morning) told us through railings she was being put in a cell by herself, for her health's sake. We demanded to see Matron, told her they must not keep Betty by herself. She became furious when someone mentioned the word solitary, said we must talk to the Colonel and stalked away. When we came upstairs we found Betty by herself in the question room, excited and on the verge of tears. She will not eat. Also MK and Sarah in a cell together – with some food. They said through the door that they did not know what would happen to them. Sarah has evidently made a statement. Matron meanwhile had reassured Myrtle that Betty was in hospital. We began ringing the bell – got no response. This went on until 9 when wardress came to turn off the lights. We asked for someone to go to Betty. Nothing was done. Mary keeps me very busy. She needs lots of attention.

**Hilda Bernstein**

**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 25 May 2003 07:54 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Tuesday 17 May

Tuesday 17 May

A poor night – sleeplessness, a thumping heart. We all lie in bed longer than before. That foul taste in my mouth. Dragged myself out of bed, but once up felt much better. On the whole we are reasonably well on this fifth day, if a little slower. At about 8.45 we called together for a “natter” and discussed V’s suggestion re Betty – to ask the Colonel to let one of us to go in with her. We also wanted to discuss some having something but went downstairs first. There they divided questions, omitting me, Shul and Myrtle. Went to the bathroom and heard Trudy and Winnie had gone. Also Freda came back and said, well they won’t take me until one of the last, no sooner said this when my name was called. There was one man in uniform with lots of stars and three plain clothes S.B’s including Strydom. Uniform began by reading Section 9 of Emergency Regulations re detaining people believed to have committed offence, and that such people can be summoned for questioning, and not entitled to legal adviser. They then said they had large number of questions “about my political past and names of people” and I must understand that the answers I gave may be used in evidence against me in some future court action.

I said I couldn’t answer questions unless I knew what offence I had been charged with. They said I was detained under the Emergency regulations and it was not necessary for me to be charged. I then said I had only one thing to say. I had four children, my husband was also detained. I would do anything I possibly could to get back to the children, (eyes filled with tears). However I had committed no offence. What I did in my “political past” was legal when I did it. Since then I had not to my knowledge violated the laws of the country. I was prepared to face charges in a court of law and to answer questions then. But until then I could not answer questions without knowing what the charge would be. I also said I didn’t know all the questions they wanted to ask, but had an idea of what some of them would be. They would start on my political past and then continue on my attitude to the Government today and what I thought about things. I didn’t see what good that would do. I asked for my immediate release. Asked to sign a statement on those lines, I signed “Have read section 19 etc, I refuse to answer questions”. Then I dictated “I have committed no offence of which I was aware against the laws of the country. I am prepared to answer any questions before a court of law, if a charge was laid against me. Unless or until such a charge was laid, I ask to be reunited with my family. I therefore ask for my immediate release.” After this one asked me about the children; how long I intended continuing fasting. Said I could not say how long, as long as I possibly could. I had no intention of stopping. I was then taken to get my things and transferred to a tiny, dark, cold cell with Becky. We were then: Sarah and Margaret, Trudy and Winnie, me and Becky. We were then told we could all sit together which was cramped but more pleasant. A little later taken downstairs for a short period. Several African women detainees were walking around behind a fence in a small tarmacked area. They looked like lions in a cage. We could smile but nothing else. We were called into the Colonel’s office. He told us we were going to be moved and suggested that it would be Jhbg. Said he had already sent 24 plates over there. Said there was no point in continuing our hunger strike. The present arrangement was definitely temporary – we would be moved by tomorrow. And he had recommended Jhbg. Said we must be good and not get ill as there were no hospital facilities. I asked him not to joke with us, it was a serious matter, and before we moved we must know that we were going to Jhbg.. He also said the men would definitely stay here. Mary sent then with embroidery upstairs again – saw the main door open and Sonia walking towards it. Called out to her not to be mean about Jane and May and that they could send somethings through to me. Short time later my Fab, embroidery and Mary came. From conversations: Sarah did answer some questions, but gave back plenty to them. Becky also and gave silly answers re hunger strike. Margaret talked. Freda (with us) told us how she played the innocent, but answered questions. Trudy and Winnie refused. Sarah took some tea last night but did not eat. Then Freda was called out. She is going, so excited she could not pack. But was off in 2 minutes. Then Margaret called out. Then we hear Betty being moved back to main cell (after Dr had been to see her). This is

good. We were allowed out in the yard in the late afternoon after the main cell had gone up. Mk joined in – she had a visit with Willie. We sat in late evening sun, cool but pleasant and had a little shout to our friends before we were stopped. Locked in our tiny, dark, cold, miserable cells at about 5.30. In such a tiny space there was nothing to do but get into bed to keep warm. The light was so poor that I could not read properly, and leafed through magazines, reading recipes and tearing them out for future use. Becky kept seeing cockroaches on the wall next to my bed which caused me great pain and suffering. Lights went out at 9 and then there was nothing to do but lie in a most uncomfortable bed. These cells are terribly noisy. We were all awake with the shunting of the trains, sounds of machinery and other noises.

The SB men told Sarah she would never rejoin her friends again --- the liars!

**Hilda Bernstein**

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**From:** "linda dolan" <lindadol@waitrose.com>  
**To:** "Hilda Bernstein" <hilda@bernstein57.freeserve.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 06 July 2003 10:10 AM  
**Subject:** HB prison diary Wednesday 18 May

Wednesday 18 May

After being awake for hours and hours, we were taken down to bath at 7. Had a wonderful hot bath. Feeling well, but weak. Climbing the stairs is difficult. Saw Rica through the window while we were waiting to come up. Five of us came together in one cell to sit in company. The lighting is terrible. The other four are playing scrabble. A C.I.D. man came round and asked us: names; how many children under 16; if husband is also detained. We heard the girls go down and called to them. Told them where we would leave letter. Little later we were let into big cell to go to lavs and I stuck letter. After, four things happened fast, 1 by 1, all but 4 (Kay, Sheila, Letta, Betty) were questioned, refused to answer or to sign anything. It was like a game of sardines – the tiny cell filled with two beds and a little cupboard, and 13 of us piled on to them. Downstairs again. Then up and locked in 2<sup>nd</sup> room while others fetched their things. Then moving again, -- mattress, blankets, clothes, books, toilet articles – oh what a waste of time and effort. I'm sorry for the unlucky four, but so grateful to be back in our barn again.

A lovely letter and two snaps from Frances. We drafted telegram to Erasmus and copy to Suzman after Mary raised our blood pressure. After re settling all my clothes and tidying, making my bed, I felt completely exhausted.

Note: Marcelle refused permission to visit Vic because she's confined to Jhbg!

Climbing stairs is too much effort. After tomorrow, I'm staying upstairs. Energy declines steadily day by day. We sent telegram to Erasmus and Suzman asking for reply to our petition. Decided to make 10 days minimum. Tell men through visitors tomorrow.