

Andre Meyer

replied 10/10

545 Ndlovu Street  
Jesbe Village  
P.O. meadowlands  
Soweto 1852  
Rep. of S. Africa  
17/8/92

Dearest Shirley

I must first apologise for two things:  
(1) the delay in replying to your  
letter dated 14/4/92 and (2) the  
pad on which I am writing the  
letter.

I have been terribly busy since the  
unbanning of our organisations in S.A.  
You are probably aware that I  
have been elected into the N.E.C.  
of the ANC and that in itself has  
been enough to take much of my  
time, but more than that I am  
the head of the Transport Department

a "killer" job and very demanding. I get home at night very tired and that is no good from all points of view. I hope you will understand what I mean by that. But most importantly, your letter reached me at the time I was preparing myself to go to Tanzania and as a result I could not respond promptly my dear.

We have been scaling down our activities in our foreign missions and that has meant considerable travelling on my part especially to Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. I came to London once and that was in May 1970 or 1991 only for a short while and I do not remember whether I met you or not and if I did not meet you, I am certain I must have inquired about you & Bob.

About the other letters you say you wrote, I remember only one I received soon after our release and obviously it would not have been possible to respond then because of the number of rallies, meetings and interviews, etc, in which I found myself. Nevertheless I apologise my dear, I should have 'made' time to reply you.

I am writing this letter from Denmark where I am spending two weeks of my 4 weeks holiday. My son is married to a Dane and I am here visiting them. I'll be leaving on 19/8/9. back to J.H.B. where I will spend the remaining two weeks before I go back to my office, and this, I hope, explains the reason why I do not have a decent writing pad on which to write this letter to you dear Shirley,

+

I did not want to bother them about a pad. People have lost the art of letter-writing, they <sup>rely</sup> ~~reply~~ too much on telephones, what a pity!

People have become too independent these days. we annoy each other too easily, we do things we promised never to do when we were deeply in love and our marriages were still new and fresh. As the days grow older we get tired of each other and we start to see new young faces - split. I don't know whether that is part of our life, but I can assure Shirley that it happens within the best of families. It also happens within world famous families - Nelson and Winnie are separated. What does that tell? It tells you that you and Bob are no exceptions. I suppose ~~we~~

we will have to take life as it comes  
and try to make the best of it.

Remember dear Shirley, it happens  
within the best and most famous  
families.

You and Bob were some of my best  
friends. I knew you long before you  
two decided to get married. I am  
happy that both of you are on  
speaking terms. Both of you will  
remain my friends and comrades.

Walter is getting old but still going  
strong. Elias and Caroline were  
in Taiwan. Taiwan? Yes recently  
for a holiday. Yes? Yes!

My regards and best wishes to your  
children Shirley. Please don't hesitate  
to write whenever you get a chance.

Love

PROFESSOR B. A. HEPPLER, Q.C., LL.D.

*The Master*

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20 May 2000.

Rusty Bernstein  
57 Lock Crescent  
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Kidlington  
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COPY

Dear Rusty

*Memory against Forgetting* is a compelling account of your memories. Mine coincide in many respects with yours, but I believe that there are gaps and inaccuracies in your story, particularly as it relates to me. So I am sending you a copy of the memoir which I wrote in May/June 1964 while the events of Rivonia were still vivid in my mind. I have not published this, but I have lodged it in the Mayibuye Centre and the Bram Fischer Library.

I cannot comment on what you write about my parents (p.44), because they never confided in me about these matters. They were able to play the role in later years which you rightly acknowledge by maintaining strict secrecy. I do not understand what purpose is now served by making these disclosures. (Incidentally, Alex did not "inherit" - he worked as factory manager for the company founded by my mother's father and resigned in 1948 when he became an MP - and there is an unfair innuendo that he worked in the Labour Party rather than the CP because of some personal ambition to play a leadership role.)

With best wishes to you and Hilda,

Yours ever,

B.A.

57 Lock Crescent,  
Kidlington. OX5 1HF  
25. 05. 00

Professor B.A. Hepple,  
The Master's Lodge,,  
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Dear Bob,

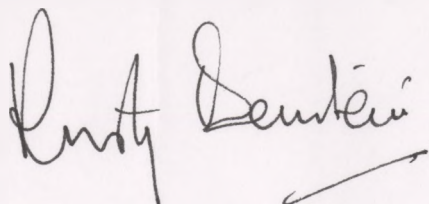
Thank you for your letter, and for your own memoir of the events at and around Rivonia. As you say, they agree in most respects with my own much later memories. I cannot see that any purpose would now be served - forty years after - in arguing over what differences there are, unless those differences can substantially alter the reading of the historical record. I doubt if any do.

But I must say that it appears to me to be a distortion of history that your account makes no reference to the Communist Party, which was so central to the happenings at Rivonia and to your own part in them. I assume that your account - written in 1964 - was circumscribed by codes of "secrecy" and "security" which we imposed on ourselves at that time, but which are now surely inappropriate in serious historical writings.

I am not sure what "disclosures" about your parents puzzle you. I can only think that you refer to my "disclosure" that, at one time, they were both members of the Party. That fact is not in question, though it was almost never voiced at the time - again for reasons of politics and "security". You may be distressed that it has now been voiced. But I think it is one of the many secrets of the past which are germane to a South African understanding of its own history. So, any years beyond the time when it can possibly affect you, your parents or the movement adversely, I would ask Primo Levi's question: "If not now, when?"

You are wrong to suggest an innuendo that Alex' decision to continue in the Labour Party rather than the CP was for reason of a personal ambition for a "leadership role". He took a considered and principled reckoning of the best contribution he could make to our cause. I approved and supported his decision, although I took a different view of the right direction in my own case. I had a high regard for both your parents, which has remained with me since those times.

Sincerely, and with good wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ruth Denton', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

# Who are Rivonia's children?

PAUL JOSEPH examines an account of the contribution of white South Africans to the struggle against apartheid.

**I**T has now become fashionable among white South Africans to say that they were against apartheid — a trend which the increasing numbers of white South Africans taking up residence in Finchley, London have brought with them.

There is an anecdote about a black South African woman who was in exile for 25 years and, after the unbanning of the ANC, PAC and the SACP, went on a visit to South Africa.

Seated next to her on the flight was a white South African woman who did not bother to enquire whether her co-passenger and daughter were South Africans. Gushing about the new South Africa and full of praise for Nelson Mandela, she went on to say how they, the whites, had been against apartheid.

At this point, the quiet black woman exploded in anger.

"Excuse me!" she said, "I don't remember seeing you around when we fought against apartheid. There were some whites and we knew most of them — and, if we did not know them, we would have heard of them."

**'Rivonia's Children is a unique work of scholarship and should be a source of valuable reference to the history of South Africa and for those involved in struggle against brutal and tyrannical regimes. It is an inspiration.'**

"So don't give me that rubbish — you whites had a good time. Besides, if you whites had been with us, we would not have waited so long for our freedom."

By and large, the black people of South Africa have always accorded those whites who chose to join the liberation struggle high regard — 60,000 black people attended Joe Slovo's funeral.

So what was the role of the white people in the struggle? Their involvement is told in *Rivonia's Children* by Glenn Frankel.

Frankel was the bureau chief of the

Washington Post in South Africa in 1983. He is also holder of the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting.

Frankel tells the story through four families and their children. They are Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, Ruth First and Joe Slovo, Harold and Anne Marie Wolpe and Bram and Molly Fischer. The first three are of Jewish and the last of Afrikaaner background.

Of those several hundreds of white people who supported the liberation movement, the majority came from the Jewish community. But Frankel quashes the notion that all Jews were against apartheid.

At the outset, he tells of his interview with Dr Percy Yutar, who prided himself on his Jewish background yet was the ruthless chief prosecutor in the Rivonia trial in which Nelson Mandela and his co-accused faced possible death sentences.

Now, Yutar claims that he "wanted to save their lives." He wanted them to be charged not with treason, which carried the death penalty, but sabotage. But, at the time, sabotage also carried the death penalty.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies comes in for a drubbing for its duplicity and acquiescence with the apartheid regime.

By and large, all white South Africans benefited from the system of racial oppression, irrespective of their origin — English, Afrikaaner, Jewish, Portuguese, Greek or Italian.

Whites were "Europeans" against the "Non-Europeans" and they voted for successive white governments to entrench the privilege that they enjoyed.

However, the four families who feature in Frankel's account bring into focus those whites who made the courageous moral decision to go against apartheid.

It was never an easy choice. It entailed years of terror which took the form of prosecution, solitary confinement, imprisonment, house arrest, house raids, loss of employment, torture and deaths in prison — in one case, the execution of the young liberal John Harris.

Many were ostracised by relatives and friends and their children were tormented at school.

Their involvement in the fight against racial domination is also, in part, the history of the Communist Party. They were members of this small but highly disciplined and skilled party which was the first non-racial organisation on the political scene.

While the party acquired the reputation of being one of the closest allies of the ANC, it also became known as one of the most hard-line pro-Soviet parties in the world, from the days of Lenin and Stalin to Brezhnev.

In an interview with Joe Slovo, Frankel tells of Slovo's regret in not questioning the excesses of the Soviet



**LIFE-LONG STRUGGLE:** Ruth First with two of her children, Shawn and Gillian. She fought against apartheid until she was killed by a parcel bomb sent by apartheid death squads in 1982.

government.

From a wealth of talent, the Communist Party produced some very effective publications which provided the liberation movement with channels to articulate their views. All other publications and radio stations were white-owned or controlled.

The courageous reportage and editing was done by people like Ruth First, Rusty Bernstein and Brian Bunting in the

pages of *New Age* and *Fighting Talk*.

These publications were sustained by a core of people in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg who raised money and saw to their distribution.

Many functioned in the trade union movement and Frankel writes of Ray Alexander (Simons) and Eli Weinberg as being among the leaders.

He also praises the talents of the legal people in the CP — Bram Fischer, Vernon Berrange, Joe Slovo, Harold Wolpe, Roley Arenstein and Franz Boshop — all of whom rocked the racist judicial system.

The sincerity of the whites in the Communist Party certainly impressed many leading ANC members — see Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk To Freedom* — so much so, that Walter Sisulu, "the father of the ANC," reveals for the first time to Frankel that he joined the Communist Party in the early '50s.

Suffice to say that it would have been the involvement of the white members of the party — and to a large extent, the alliance of the Indian Congress — that helped shape the ANC programme for a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

By way of balance, the author draws at-

tention to those whites of non-communist persuasion who also made a distinguished contribution in bringing about the new South Africa.

There is a galaxy of names such as Helen Suzman, Helen Joseph, Nadine Gordimer, May Benson, Alan Paton and the brilliant barristers George Bizos, Arthur Chaskalson — now a judge and president of the Constitutional Court — Sidney Kentridge (now Sir) and Joel Joffe (now Lord), who together were part of the powerful defence team in the Rivonia Trial.

Glenn Frankel should be congratulated for writing a moving and an impressive account of the involvement of those white members of the Communist Party.

In spite of the fact that he is not a communist, Frankel has given due credit with objectivity and respect for those who made such sacrifices in the fight to end racial domination.

*Rivonia's Children* is a unique work of scholarship and should be a source of valuable reference to the history of South Africa and for those involved in struggle against brutal and tyrannical regimes. It is an inspiration.

● *Rivonia's Children* by Glenn Frankel is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson at £20.

## Ardleigh's DIARY

**R**ED Ken Livingstone might turn even more crimson when he spots the bomb made by his campaign team in an election mailing to the GMB.

Mr Livingstone is keen to win support among trade unionists in his bid to become Labour's candidate for mayor of London.

Fly, then, that aides sent out a previous address helpfully telling GMB members that Ken would "directly involve the TSWU in his taskforce to tackle poverty and regenerate the Lon-

don economy." Oops.

● Puzzlement abounded in the Morning Star newsroom late last week when a Press Association report reached the office quoting Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams condemning David Trimble's "Lenin-like stance."

What was Adams referring to we wondered? Could he be claiming that the First Minister was some kind of closet comite?

All became clear within minutes when the agency rushed through a correction, with the Sinn Fein leader's

widely reported comments of a "lenin-like stance."

● Animal rights campaigners got into a stew over protesting farmers using a live pig at their vigil outside Parliament.

Passing animal lover Julia Fletcher paid them £50 for the porker, which she passed on to an animal sanctuary.

But she was appalled when the farmers returned to their vigil yesterday with a new pig.



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