

## Anna Louise Strong In Laos

# An Exclusive Interview With Souphanouvong, The People's Prince

By Anna Louise Strong,  
of the U.S. National Guardian

SAM NEUA, LAOS.

**PRECISELY** where I met Prince Souphanouvong must be off the record. But with three other correspondents (I was the only American and the only woman) I sat and talked for an evening with the half-brother of Laos' exiled Premier Souvanna Phouma, who organised and for 15 years has been the chairman of the Neo Lao Haksat, the Patriotic Front of Laos, better known as the Pathet Lao.

The meeting place was not far from the Prince's present base in the capital of Sam Neua Province, the north-eastern province of Laos, in a simply furnished reception room.

The Prince is a solidly built man, bronzed and muscular from outdoor living, with thick black hair clipped close. He wore an ordinary civilian tan suit, with a tan and dark red necktie flowing free. His manner was confident, without exaggeration and his words were clear in a way that indicated long experience in politics and battles, combined with a quick, keen analytical mind. He spoke English correctly but rather slowly and was more at home in French. So the talk was mainly in French, with his interpreter translating; but the Prince quickly picked up questions in English and seemed to check carefully the translator's words.

### WHAT IT MEANS

"How shall I most simply explain to Americans the meaning of the 'Pathet Lao'?" I asked. The Prince said: "The name was given us in Geneva. Our official name is 'Neo Lao Haksat.' We were organised to fight for the independence of Laos against the Japanese and then against the French. We fought as did similar patriotic organisations in Vietnam and Cambodia until the famous victory at Dien Bien Phu. Then we sent our delegates along with others to Geneva to negotiate the peace.

"We had the habit of putting the words 'Pathet Lao' at the head of our documents and letters, to distinguish them from all the other documents. The words mean 'Land of Laos'... So the French began calling us the 'Pathet Lao'.

... The name was given not by ourselves but despite ourselves. We let it stick. We are a wide front of many organisations that has fought for more than 15 years for the independence and unity of Laos as a sovereign and neutral state."

### CEASE FIRE

The talk began with recent reforms in Sam Neua and passed by easy stages to the international situation and the question of negotiation and a cease fire. The Prince at all times spoke without hedging; but he prefaced his remarks on the last question by saying that the matter was "delicate" and the situation subject to change.

If the "beautiful words" of the Americans about peace and neutrality in Laos are sincere, he said, "if they really want peace, unity, neutrality and independence in Laos, then we can come to agreement with them." But, he said, it was difficult to believe the Americans were sincere because both their past actions and their present "are not directed towards peace."

"Why is the U.S. just now demanding a cease fire?" he asked. With a smile he continued:

"You are journalists and to you the reason must be clear. Our patriotic forces are winning while the enemy forces are demoralised and even disintegrating. So those who are losing want to negotiate."

"Now, since our basic policy is peace and neutrality, we also are willing to negotiate. Our Neo Lao Haksat has declared that we are for any talks that will establish peace in Laos. But we want to feel sure that what we are getting this time is a permanent peace, a permanent cease fire. We think the U.S. wants just a temporary cease fire in which to strengthen their disintegrating forces and prepare a bigger counter-attack."

"They use beautiful words, but what are their actions? They are parachuting troops into new areas to widen the war. They are bringing in new and heavier weapons, and helicopters for wider troop transport. They set up bases in Thailand close to Laos for more rapid invasion. They issue war threats by eight nations through SEATO and stage big war manoeuvres off Borneo, and the U.S. Fleet keeps threateningly close to our borders. This is not the spirit of peace that the U.S. shows, but the spirit of an invading war."

### THE "ADVISERS"

As the Prince saw it, the question was not even whether or not the U.S. forces would invade. In his view, they had already invaded—in December, 1960, together with "several thousand troops from Thailand, from Chiang Kai-shek, from South Vietnam and several hundred Filipinos and Americans, the latter as 'advisers' but actually in command." The question, therefore, was: "Will the U.S. widen the present invasion into a large-scale war or will she stop invading and negotiate?"

"For us it is a big concession to negotiate, for we are winning," said Souphanouvong. "But in view of American actions, we must be vigilant. In our view, the conference of the Fourteen Nations is the only correct and reasonable way."

Such a conference, he said, including the big powers of the Geneva settlement and the smaller nations neighbouring on Laos, had the ability to ensure neutrality and peace in Laos. In his view, until such a conference could authorise and direct an international control commission, no such commission derived from an

earlier situation had the power to halt what the Prince regarded as an American-incited war of invasion.

### EXAMPLE OF KOREA

Bitter Asian experience lies behind Souphanouvong's suspicions. In Korea the cease fire promised a later political conference to unify the nation; but for 10 years Washington has blocked this and Korea remains divided. In Laos, the Pathet Lao, winning against France, were promised in Geneva that they would be incorporated into the Royal Army with officers' ranks preserved and that the Neo Lao Haksat would be legalised as a political party in free elections.

The Pathet Lao turned in their arms (5,000 rifles, according to Prince Souphanouvong) and dispersed most of their men to their homes. Two battalions remained for incorporation into the Royal Army. The First Battalion was split into small groups under new commanders, with their officers' ranks unrecognised. When their leaders protested, an American-financed coup d'état installed a new premier, who rescinded the parliamentary immunity of the Neo Lao Haksat leaders and jailed eight of them, including Prince Souphanouvong himself. At that time he was Minister of Reconstruction and Planning in the cabinet.

### THE JAIL-BREAK

The Second Battalion of the Pathet Lao, with its political leaders jailed, was encircled by a vast number of hostile troops which sought to disarm it. But the battalion collected its families and together they fought their way through successive encirclements for more than a year, and finally made their way to home bases to organise and await events.

ON MAY 23, 1960, AFTER 10 MONTHS IN PRISON, SOUPHANOUVONG AND THE OTHER SEVEN LEADERS MADE A SENSATIONAL JAIL-BREAK, TAKING THE JAIL GUARDS WITH THEM OUT OF VIENTIANE.

"We were without arms and our forces had been dispersed to their home provinces," the Prince recalled in our interview. "I myself walked all the way to Sam Neua. It took many months, for I had to organise every province as I passed in order to get through."

"By the time I reached Sam Neua the bloodless coup by Captain Kong Lae in Vientiane on August 9, 1960, had returned to power the government of Prince Souvanna Phouma, which the American-inspired coup had thrown out more than a year earlier. Then all over Laos the people began throwing out the local despots installed by America's strong man General Phouma Nosavan. Sam Neua was liberated at the end of September, 1960.

"We began rebuilding our forces at once."



## PUBLIC COURT —BUT NO ROOM FOR THE PUBLIC

ABOVE: About 700 arrested Africans locked into the yard of the Johannesburg Native Commissioner's Court, and thick crowds of relatives outside, waiting for hours to see if their missing men are in the court, to pass in money for bail and food for the prisoners. The hearings are supposed to be in public but the court is too small to accommodate all who want to get in. RIGHT: NO CASUAL PEEP-SHOW THIS, but a search for arrested men locked up in the yard of the Native Commissioner's Court in Fordsburg. It is high time relatives were given decent facilities to trace prisoners at this court.



# Mass Arrests Cause "An Ocean Of Misery"

## Women's Deputation To Johannesburg Official

**JOHANNESBURG.** THE mass arrests of hundreds of African workers in Johannesburg last month charged with various petty pass offences in order to smother the anti-Republic demonstrations have merely increased the burden on the African residents of Johannesburg, and the City Council will have to take the consequences of this police swoop.

There are now more people behind their rent payments than before the advent of the Republic. Thousands of residents have already been prosecuted and many convicted for failing to pay their monthly rentals. Now more workers are out of work owing to the arrests. Their families suffer terrible hardship.

A women's delegation led by Mrs. Ruth Matsone told the Senior Superintendent, Mr. De Ross, that the situation had become intolerable.

"It fills us with indignation and resentment to have our husbands and sons dragged before courts like common criminals," she told Mr. de Ross. "But what is more intolerable is that those people branded 'idlers' and 'totsi elements' by the police are responsible workers who merely failed to have their passes signed by their employers or who are in arrears with their general tax. Now more people are out of work because of the arrests."

Mr. De Ross gave the women's delegation a sympathetic hearing. He said the Johannesburg City Council was aware of the difficulties of some of the residents in the Townships; that the City Council had dropped certain cases against defaulters, although the Council was faced with an amount of R500,000 in arrears to be collected; and that in cases of severe hardship food and parcels were being issued.

The women acknowledged this but added that it was just "a drop of good in the ocean of misery."

## June 26 Issue of Fighting Talk

JOHANNESBURG.

The June 26—Freedom Day—issue of FIGHTING TALK features special articles on the history of the freedom struggle in South Africa. Joe Matthews writes in 'The Roaring Years' the 50-year history of the now banned African National Congress; Fatima Meer writes the history of Indian political struggles in this country; and the issue includes articles on the 1922 mine strike and the great African mine strike of 1946.

This souvenir number also contains a Freedom Calendar covering the last 60 years of struggle.

'Fighting Talk' is sold at 6d. (5 cents) a copy. Bulk copies (over one dozen) will be supplied at 4d. (3 cents) a copy. Single and bulk copies can be obtained from the 'Fighting Talk' Committee, P.O. Box 1355, Johannesburg.

# HUNT FOR SCAPEGOATS AT FORT HARE

## Student Solidarity Places Rector In a Dilemma

JOHANNESBURG.

FORT Hare students ordered home after the closing of the College for three weeks as a result of the 100 per cent stay-away there on May 29 and 30 are amazed at the recent statement by the College Rector that packing them off home had nothing to do with the strike.

One of the 300 Fort Hare students told New Age: "After we had stayed quietly in our rooms for three days we came to breakfast on Thursday morning to find notices on the boards that all lectures had been cancelled because of our action. Later we were informed that the College was closed till the beginning of next term, and the information from the Rector was again linked with the holding of a successful strike."

The student went on to say that

the change in official policy might be due to the desire of the authorities to find some scapegoats who could be expelled as a warning to others.

This was difficult to do at present, because even the police informers and the sons of the Chiefs had participated in the strike.

If earlier incidents in which students had expressed severe criticism of the College Council to Mr. Saul Mabude, who is one of its members, were to be used instead as a pretext for disciplinary action against the students, it would make the job a far easier one for the College staff.

The student group as a whole is certain that not all their members will be allowed to continue with their studies next month, because when they applied for the usual Railway concession forms they were told that they would be sent to them by post.

A number of students interviewed by New Age said that they expected

to be in difficulties with their studies as a result of the extra three week break.

They were all in good spirits, however, and proud of the success of their collective action. As one student said: "This strike was not undertaken in an irresponsible manner. We know that it is impossible to make people listen to our grievances without strong joint action on our part."

### HEARTENED

The student went on to say that they had been most heartened by the solidarity shown by the Rhodes students, who had stayed away from all lectures and sporting activities for two days last week in protest against the closure of Fort Hare.

He said: "The militant spirit of students of all races in our country will help to ensure the establishment of the type of non-racial democracy that will enable us to hold our head high in the community of African nations."

**FOOTNOTE:** The closing of Fort Hare is condemned in a statement by the Natal Indian Congress as "another cowardly act of the Nationalist Government in dealing with legitimate and genuine grievances of the African people." The Congress demands that the college be re-opened immediately and the students allowed to complete their studies.



Sixty-three African furniture workers in a Johannesburg factory were brought to court last week on a charge of striking illegally. Their case was postponed to July 22.

## Furniture Workers Charged with Illegal Strike

# BOSS DIDN'T COMPLAIN BUT STATE LAUNCHED PROSECUTION

**JOHANNESBURG.** SIXTY-THREE African furniture workers appeared in the Magistrate's Court here last week charged with participating in an illegal strike.

The charge is a sequel to a dispute between the workers and the owners of Marshall Manufacturers in January this year, when the workers asked for an increase.

Mr. Rudolph Samuel, a director of the company, told the Court that he was approached by representatives of the workers on a Friday prior to the 'strike.' The spokesmen requested a general increment in wages. He explained to the workers that the Company would not give a general increase in wages, but that increments would be given when

they were merited. The workers then left.

### DEPUTATION

On Monday—the day of the alleged strike—he was summoned to the factory, where he found all the workers standing outside the gate instead of at work. He received a report from his foreman on the situation, and as a result a further deputation of workers came to see him.

In the discussion with them he repeated his earlier promise and promised further that an incentive bonus scheme would be introduced in sections of the factory to enable these workers to earn more.

After the deputation had reported back to the workers he was told that they would accept his offer on condition that they were paid for

the two hours work that they had just missed. Mr. Samuel told the deputation that the firm would only pay them for half this period. At this the entire labour force went home, but they returned to work the following day, and there had been no further difficulties.

### LOW WAGES

Under cross-examination Mr. Samuel admitted that the wage of £2. 5. a week was very low. He said that at no stage had the workers threatened him, that both these and earlier wage discussions had always been amicable, and that his firm had definitely not wanted to institute proceedings. (The case was brought by the Department of Labour.)

Mrs. Muller is appearing for the workers, and the case is proceeding.



Verwoerd thinks "Civilisation" was made by and for Europeans only, but the facts show that Black Civilisations flourished in Africa long before the coming of the White man

# HISTORY AND CIVILISATION

DR. Verwoerd recently assured us once again that "it is the White man to whom all progress must be ascribed of which people all over the world at present boast."

The learned Doctor obviously knows nothing or prefers to know nothing about the history of Europe, Asia or Africa. He finds it more convenient to replace history by myth, just like his admired model, Alfred Rosenberg, the "philosopher" of Nazi Germany.

According to one of the most cherished myths of the racialists Europeans created civilisation out of nothing, rather like God creating the world out of chaos.

But the blessings of civilisation are not the property of any one human group which they can graciously distribute or rightfully keep, as they see fit. Civilisation happens to be the product of mankind as a whole and to its development peoples from all over the world have contributed. No group, least of all the people from the North and West of Europe, who arrived so recently on the historical scene, can claim a monopoly of contributions to civilisation.

## West Came Late

One wonders where civilisation would be if Asian and African peoples had not invented the use of writing, discovered how to smelt iron and cultivate grains, created the wheel, produced multiplication tables and minted coins thousands of years ago before the people of Europe emerged from the most primitive savagery.

We could easily fill several issues of New Age if we tried to give an exhaustive list of Asian and African contributions to civilisation because it would turn out to be practically a history of human civilisation as such.

White civilisation, in the "purity" with which it is propagated in Verwoerd's South Africa, does not compare too well with the ancient civilisations of Asia and Africa.

Just to take one example from the material sphere, it may surprise some of the pundits of apartheid to know that the elaborate drainage system of the ancient Indian cities which flourished on the river Indus about 4,000 years ago was superior to that provided by White civilisation in that part of its towns which it refers to as the "location."

## Moral Ideas

And the moral ideas of these ancient civilisations would seem to have risen to a conception of universal justice and human brotherhood which is far beyond the grasp of the "civilised" defenders of Afrikaner tribalism.

"Behold it is not to make for himself slaves of any people," stated the traditional address delivered by the Egyptian Pharaoh two thousand years before the birth of Christ.

Upon assuming office, high state officials in Ancient Egypt were told: "Forget not to judge justice . . . Look upon him who is known to thee like him who is unknown to thee; and him who is near the king like him who is far from his house."

The social philosophy of Ancient Egypt reached its climax in

## The first of 4 articles written for New Age by A Special Correspondent

the universal moral doctrines of Ikhnaton (fourteenth century B.C.). In his beautiful hymns Ikhnaton makes no distinction between his own people and foreigners.

All men are in the same degree God's sons and must regard themselves as brothers. For the first time in human history religion is conceived as a bond uniting men of differing colour, language and custom.

## Greek Learning

The wisdom of the Bronze Age civilisations of the ancient Near East provided the basis for the later cultural achievements of the Greeks who were great traders and travellers and so were able to benefit by learning from the Asian and African peoples with whom they came into contact.

Subsequently, the barbarian invaders from Northern Europe destroyed the old Graeco-Roman slave civilisation and most of its cultural achievements. Europe entered the long period of its Dark Ages, while the cultural heritage of the ancient world was productively developed by the great civilisation of the Arabs.

When the Crusaders from Western Europe invaded the Near East from the end of the eleventh century A.D. onwards they were amazed to find themselves in the presence of a civilisation far more advanced than their own. The same discovery was made by the Venetian traveller Marco Polo when he visited China in the thirteenth century and found there a degree of culture which made most of Europe look like a jungle.

## Surprise In Africa

And a similar surprise awaited the readers of the first reliable description of the Negro civilisation of West Africa to be published in Europe.

Its author, Leo Africanus, described to his astounded readers the huge libraries of African scholars in university towns like Timbuktu, the great wealth of the African rulers and merchants, their efficient and peaceful administration and other matters which might make many an inhabitant of war-torn sixteenth century Europe feel envious.

Civilisation has never been confined to particular human groups but has grown step by step through the contribution of people of every race and colour. At different historical periods different kinds of contributions have been made by different kinds of people. Some contributed new technical discoveries, others new ideas and others again new kinds of artistic production.

The European pirates and traders who penetrated into the Indian Ocean during the sixteenth century did not and could not consider themselves more civilised than the ancient communities which they attacked. They killed and plundered in the name of the Christian religion, not in the name of "White Civilisation."

Western technical superiority is hardly more than two centuries old, and it is already being lost again.

(To be continued next week)

## As Legislative Council Meets

# BATSWANA DEMAND REFORMS

**WIDESPREAD** dissatisfaction has been voiced in Bechuanaland because no move has been made to amend the constitution in regard to the establishment of the Legislative Council.

The Council, which is due to meet this month, consists of non-African members elected by the White and Asian communities and Africans chosen by the Chiefs in their African Council.

The creation of the Legislative Council has been welcomed everywhere, but not its colour-bar constitution, which deprives the African people of the direct vote, although both Asians and Europeans enjoy this right.

## UPHEAVALS LIKELY

Both Mr. Patrick Tshane, chairman of the Palapye Branch of the Bechuanaland People's Party, and Mr. K. K. Motshidisi, the secretary, have sent statements to New Age condemning the present set-up.

Mr. Tshane says that if the Legislature does not reconstitute the Legco, this will provoke controversies and upheavals which might well make the Legco unworkable.

A resolution demanding polling by ballot on a common roll based

on universal suffrage for all races, tribes and peoples of Bechuanaland was passed unanimously at the first public meeting of the Bechuanaland People's Party held in Lobatsi recently.

The resolution demanded an African majority in place of the present minority, and postal voting for Bechuanaland citizens living temporarily outside the territory.

## JO'BURG DELEGATION

More than 300 people, including seven delegates from the BPP's Johannesburg branch led by the branch secretary Mr. Anderson Mbakile, attended the meeting.

Speakers included BPP President and Secretary-General, Messrs K. T. Motsete and Motsamai K. Mpho respectively, and Messrs K. K. Motshidisi, G. Mogotsi, Phillip Matante and Mbakile.

The peoples of Bechuanaland must unite to form one nation, said Mr. Mpho. The people were no longer prepared to live as "boys and girls," hewers of wood and drawers of water. Colour bars and discrimination must go.

At a Bechuanaland People's Party meeting held at the Francistown Location on May 28, Mr. Phillip G. Matante, Vice-President of the Party, told a crowd of 700 men and women that one man one vote was the only way to peace and the present constitution should be rejected by the people.

# AFRICAN IN COURT IN PYJAMAS

JOHANNESBURG.

**AN** African arrested during the police pre-strike swoop on Alexandra Township spent 22 days in the cells and finally appeared in court dressed in a pair of pyjamas.

In court he was sentenced to 60 days in prison or a fine of R20.

James Musa Sadika was arrested in the early hours of the morning of May 17 between his room and the lavatory in the yard where he lives. The police refused to allow him to dress. He was put in a van and driven to the Wynberg police station.

From there he was sent to the Modder B jail where he spent the cold winter days in his pyjamas.

His wife had given birth to their first son the day of her husband's arrest and was unable to send any clothes to him in the cells. When she tried a few days later she could not trace his whereabouts.

In court the same day that Sadika appeared were numbers of other so-called "foreign" Africans rounded up and charged for pass offences as part of the mid-May mass arrests.

**FOOTNOTE:** New Age readers have met James Musa Sadika before. He was the African, sent illegally to the Potgieter farm under the farm labour scheme, who was traced by New Age and freed by a habeas corpus application to court. Sadika is the African in sacks in the cover picture of the New Age booklet 'The Farm Labour Scandal' by Ruth First.

# POLICE SHOT HIM DEAD

(Continued from page 1)

who said that they would only repair the tank if they were paid for their labour and if their womenfolk were paid for filling the tank week by week.

In an interview with New Age, Mr. Vitus Mdinge a tribesman, said that the people in the area were brought before a magistrate on two occasions and on each occasion they were discharged.

Last Thursday the police arrived at the kraal of Mr. Dhladhla to serve him with another summons. Fourteen Non-White and five White armed police were in the contingent which arrived, said Mr. Mdinge.

Mr. Mdinge did not know what happened between the police and Mr. Dhladhla, but when the police left, Mr. Dhladhla was lying dead

in a pool of blood in his yard with three bullet holes in his body.

Mr. Mdinge rushed in to Durban on Friday morning to report the matter to the lawyer who appeared for the people in the area when they were charged.

## POLICE DIDN'T KNOW?

Mr. George Mbele, acting on behalf of Messrs N. T. Naicker and Company, phoned the Inanda police and was informed that the police were surprised to hear that Mr. Dhladhla had been killed.

In the meantime, however, according to a press interview published in the 'Natal Mercury' the following morning, the police had stated that they were fired on by Mr. Dhladhla at point blank range, that his gun misfired and that when he tried to fire again the police were compelled to shoot him.

After they had told Mr. Mbele that they did not know of the death of Mr. Dhladhla, the police asked that Mr. Mdinge, who had reported the matter to Mr. Mbele, should go to the Inanda police station to make a statement.

They promised to send a van to pick him up and take him to Inanda so that he could accompany them to Mr. Dhladhla's kraal.

I was present when the police arrived to meet Mr. Mdinge. They promised that nothing would be done to him and further promised, after giving their names to Mr. Mbele, to bring Mr. Mdinge back to Mr. Mbele's office.

## SENT HOME

The next morning (Saturday) a boy from the location arrived with a note stating that the police had refused to take Mr. Mdinge to the kraal and that he had been sent back to his home.

The youngster said that Mr. Mdinge had therefore sent him with a note which stated that the police refused to go to the dead man's kraal and asked Mr. Mdinge to get the people to carry Mr. Dhladhla's body about five or six miles to a spot which was "safer."

This the people said they could not do as there were not enough male members of the tribe available to carry the body such a long distance.

Even telephone calls to the local magistrate failed to get the police to go into the area to investigate this matter.

Frantic efforts were being made to get the body to the police station over the week-end.



**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.