

PROLOGUE.

The sound of the front door-bell stabbed through the night and through my sleep. I was immediately awake. In the dark and suburban quiet I heard the faint rustling sounds of someone moving on our front verandah; our bedroom windows are right next to the front door. It was half-past two in the morning.

I always thought I would hear them coming. I thought I would hear the sound of a car outside the house, a car-door closing, heavy footsteps up the path. For ten nights running I had woken before two in the morning and listened, listened to the sound of every car in the neighbouring streets, waiting with pounding heart when a car turned into our street, tense and rigid until it had passed. I lay in an agony of fear one night when I woke to hear a voice outside saying: "Are you sure this is the right number?" - only to realise that it was a new milk roundsman looking for the house next door . . .

And when they actually arrived, I heard nothing until the bell rang like an alarm in the night. "Rusty," I whispered, "they're here." As he got out of bed and fumbled with a dressing gown, the bell began ringing again, and loud knocking on the door, and together with that a pounding on the back door, with the beams of powerful torches flashing past the windows. Two men at the back, two at the front.

Rusty said through the door: "Who is it?"

"Open up - this is the police."

"You must prove your identity before I open the door. If you have a card, put it under the door."

An identification card was pushed beneath the door. Rusty examined it, and opened to them.

"I am arresting you," said Detective-Sergeant Visser. We knew him. He had arrested Rusty in 1956 for High Treason.

"Where is your warrant?"

"I don't need a warrant - this is under the Emergency Regulations. Mr. and Mrs. Bernstein. You can each pack a case."

Then he remarked to me, "What do you intend doing about the children?"

"I want to make a 'phone call," I said.

"Only for that."

He stood next to me as I dialled the number of a friend and neighbour. A man's voice answered. I said "Archie, they've come for both of us."

"This is the police, Madam," the voice replied. "You are not allowed to speak to anyone." The receiver was slammed down.

This was one of life's low moments. These people had undertaken to care for our four children should anything happen to us. There were other friends and relatives who would gladly help, but my greatest concern had been that the children should not be separated, and this was not so easy to arrange. The mind doesn't function at its best at such an hour and under such circumstances. While I was fumbling with thoughts of who I could phone, Archie's wife phoned back. She ignored the police officer in her home who tried to stop her, and said "They are arresting Archie. As soon as they've gone, Andrew and I will get dressed and come over."

'Guilt by association', I was thinking. Why else should they arrest a man who had dropped out of politics at least twelve years ago, and occupied himself with home and family, garden and chess? The incredible reason for his arrest only emerged later.

They began seraching through our books again. In 1956 they had remeved 350 books and pamphlets, including such treasonable literature as Crime and Punishment and Britain Rebuilds. Not a single one had been returned. They were evidence in the ^Treason Trial. Gradually the gaps in our bookshelves filled up again. Now they were painstakingly going through a long bookcase in the passage, taking out, among others, African Awakening by Basil Davidson; Wendell Wilkie's war-time book, One World; Anthony Sampson's book on the Treason Trial, The Treason Cage; old pamphlets and magazines; and from a big collection of Penguin's, a novel by Richard Aldington called Seven Against Reeves. The name had struck a cord in their minds with the Bishop of Johannesburg, Ambrose Reeves, a sharp thorn in the Nationalist side.

They took a long time over it. They read titles and authors slowly, slowly thumbed through pages, added to the pile on the floor. Our eldest daughter, Toni, made coffee, and we sat on our beds telling her people to phone and things to do when morning came. Visser took the telephone pad with the numbers of friends, and the children's friends, but allowed Toni to copy down some of the numbers that she wanted.

We had each packed a small case with pyjamas, toilet articles, a couple of books and a change of clothing. Toni was the practical one. "Pack your curlers - you'll need them." And "Why don't you take your drip-dry shirt - it will be more useful." And finally, when I had put on a light coat (it was still warm at that time): "Take your warm coat." How grateful I was later for her common sense.

But I wanted them to hurry up. We had woken Patrick, who was eleven, and told him, and left him in bed, with tears on his face. Frances, eight, was away with relatives for a few days. And the youngest, Keith, was three years old. No point in waking him to say goodbye. I did not want to see him, and was afraid he would wake up before we left. I would not even go into his room to look at him as he slept.

At last they had finished. They carried piles of books to the cars. We kissed Toni goodbye, and were driven through the early morning streets. It was just getting light, the sky was beautiful with colour, clouds and dark trees. The arrest was not upsetting, it was almost a relief. The real misery was leaving the children. Others would care for them, but the little ones would not understand.

Life has taken a strange new turn. All doubts, hesitations, decisions, are over. Someone else controls our lives, where we are going, what we are doing. We must simply wait and see what is going to happen to us.

So we sped from our quiet suburb through the centre of town to Marshall Square, police headquarters in Johannesburg.

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Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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