

Hilda Bernstein tvingades lämna Sydafrika

Bannlyst för allt hon gör

— Situationen för sydafrikanska författare kan synas paradoxal. De hamnar inte i fängelse eller bannlyses för vad de skriver, utan för vad de gör vid sidan av sitt skrivande.

Det säger Hilda Bernstein, en liten intensiv kvinna i

**bok
& bibliotek '87**



60-årsåldern. Hon har levt en stor del av sitt vuxna liv i Sydafrika, men tvingades lämna landet inte på grund av sitt författarskap utan för sitt aktiva deltagande i motståndskampen.

— I den galna värld som apartheid utgör, så uppfattar inte den vita regimen den revolutionära poesin eller den samhällskritiska romanen som ett hot, eftersom en stor del av den svarta befolkningen är analfabeter. Det är först när författaren eller kulturarbetaren i handling manifesterar sitt motstånd, exempelvis genom att delta i en massrörelse, som apartheidregimen tar fram sina repressiva verktyg, fängelse och bannlysning, förklarar Hilda Bernstein.

Hon deltog på söndagen i den internationella författarorganisationen PEN-klubbens seminari-



Bild: BENGT MAGNUZON

— Det är inte för vad författare skriver som apartheidregimen fängslar och bannlyser dem. Det är för vad författare gör vid sidan av sitt skrivande som de förföljs, säger Hilda Bernstein, fängslad och bannlyst i Sydafrika, nu i exil i England.

um om fängslade och förföljda författare.

Hilda Bernstein är en av dem som varit både fängslad och bannlyst.

Sedan mitten av 1960-talet lever hon i England (hon är själv engelskfödd) med sin sydafri-

kanske man. Hon är medlem av ANC och har nyligen kommit ut med sin senaste bok, Döden kan

inte hindra oss, på svenska. Den handlar om sabotagerörelsen på 60-talet, den väpnade kampens första staplande steg i Sydafrika, och hur en man brottas med sin vita identitet.

— Även om det litterära verket inte direkt uppfattas som ett hot av apartheidregimen, så gör dock det skrivna ordet det, fortsätter Hilda Bernstein och beskriver vad som hände den svarte arbetaren

ren som på sin lunchmugg ristat in Befria Nelson Mandela och Ge oss vårt land tillbaka. Han fick nära två års fängelse för sitt första försök att utnyttja en rätt han inte hade, yttrandefriheten.

Vita och svarta kulturarbetare i Sydafrika har fram till helt nyligen inte samarbetat i större sammanhang. Men för en månad sedan hölls en konferens med över 200 deltagare, där litteraturens

och andra konstarters viktiga roll i kampen mot apartheid erkändes.

— Det är ett betydelsefullt steg i den revolutionära situation som landet befinner sig i, konstaterar Hilda Bernstein. På mötet fastslogs att det finns en dominerande kultur i landet, apartheid, och ett flertal dominerade kulturer. Kampen handlar om att genom sin dominerade kultur göra motstånd mot staten och apartheid. Alla kulturyttringar är lika viktiga i det motståndet.

Författare fängslas

Det är inte bara i Sydafrika som det fria ordet begränsas genom att författare förföljs, fängslas eller förvisas, böcker förbjuds eller bränns.

Internationella PEN-klubbens kommitté för fängslade författare har namn på drygt 300 fängslade kolleger runt om i världen.

Siffran har sjunkit något sedan Sovjetunionen under senare tid släppt ett antal författare fria. Taiwan och Sydkorea väntas också inom kort ge amnesti åt sina fängslade författare.

— För tillfället är pressen hård på Turkiet att frige ett 60-tal journalister och författare, säger Thomas von Vegesack, svensk ordförande för PEN-klubbens kommitté för fängslade författare. Om Turkiet skall släppas in i den västeuropeiska gemenskapen måste regimen visa att landet kan leva upp till konventionen om de mänskliga rättigheterna.

KERSTI RAIEND



Bild: BENGT KJELLIN

Wole Soyinka blev sist i raden av eminenta gäster på årets bomässa. Sedan han fick Nobelpriset i litteratur förra året har han haft en jäktig tid.

Det ställs större krav på Wole Soyinka i dag

— Visst har livet blivit lite annorlunda efter Nobelpriset, men i grunden är jag samma person som tidigare, säger förra årets Nobelpristagare i litteratur, den nigerianske författaren Wole Soyinka, som gästade Göteborg i går.

— Livstempot har blivit högre och det ställs större krav på mig, säger Wole Soyinka. Men min livsstil har inte förändrats särskilt mycket. Fortfarande un-

dervisar jag större delen av min tid.

Wole Soyinka är professor i litteraturhistoria och undervisar regelbundet på universitet världen över. Intresset för litteratur har följt honom ända sedan barndomen i den nigerianska staden Abeokuta, som han för övrigt skildrat i sin kanske mest berömda bok, Aké.

Men när Akés efterföljare kommer vill han inte avslöja.

— Egentligen är jag mer teatermänniska än romanförfattare,

säger han. I teaterdramatik kan man förmedla intryck och känslor mycket mer direkt än på en boksida. Därför är jag också intresserad av att uttrycka mig i andra medier.

Hemma i Nigeria är Soyinka betydligt mer berömd för sina satiriska och kritiska pjäser som gisslar Afrikas förtryckare än för sina romaner. Han har också satt upp en del av sina pjäser utomlands.

EVA THORPENBERG-PAULSSON

CITY AND

Hereford

THURSDAY, JULY 10 1986



Your own LOCAL paper!

THIS WEEK

Lecturers' ballot: 2

Elgar statue plan: 4



● Hilda Bernstein — fighting apartheid from her Herefordshire village. Page 6.

£50,000 for laser: 26

HHA needs £3½m: 96

PLUS . . .

- Comment 6
- Letters 7
- Business 12
- Village news 14
- WI Forum 22
- Leisure 29
- TV Guide 34
- Property 35
- Farming 62
- Family notices 64
- Obituary 65
- Sunday services 66
- Motoring 68
- Classifieds 76
- Stars 90
- Sport 92
- Crossword 96

NEWSDESK:
Hereford 274413

ADVERTISING:
Hereford 269601

STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

BY TERI HEIMAN

Still fighting for freedom in S. Africa

FOR most people Nelson Mandela represents a symbol of the drive for freedom in South Africa. But for local artist and writer Hilda Bernstein, Mr Mandela was much more. He was a friend united in the struggle against apartheid.

Last Saturday, a five-week-long anti-apartheid campaign spotlighting the plight of Mr Mandela kicked off in London with a huge concert at Wembley.

Hilda, aged 73, designed a special 70th birthday card at her Dorstone home for the man she has not seen for nearly 25 years.

The last time she saw him was when her husband Lionel was tried in Pretoria alongside Mr Mandela and seven other men in the Rivonia sabotage trial. Lionel was the only man freed, but was rearrested before he could leave the courtroom.

Left children

Hilda had also been imprisoned on a number of minor charges and was detained for five months during the 1960 state of emergency.

Shortly after the 1964 trial in which Mr Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment, Hilda and Lionel fled South Africa.

"After the trial we were both likely to be imprisoned," she says. "We could not work and we were banned."

They left their four children behind and crossed into Botswana illegally, walking all night to reach safety. Once into Zambia, the African National Congress came to their aid.

Apartheid books

They were reunited with their children in London, where they lived for 18 years before moving to Dorstone three and a half years ago.

Hilda has written four books on apartheid, is still a member of the ANC and tries to keep up with



Hilda Bernstein, of Dorstone, for whom the end of apartheid in South Africa is a life cause, and (left) how The Cape Argus broke the news of the result of 1964 trial which sent Nelson Mandela to prison for life.

South African news by attending worldwide conferences on apartheid, though she can never return to the place she called home for 30 years.

Founder member

She moved to South Africa from Britain as a teenager, worked as a journalist and soon became involved with the anti-apartheid movement. She was one of the founding members of the Federation of South African Women, a multi-racial organisation in Johannesburg.

She met Mr Mandela when he first joined the militant wing of the ANC Youth League.

"I remember Nelson when he first started in a solicitor's office. He was a shy and inhibited young man who could not associate with whites easily," Hilda recalls. "We became friends through the ANC and I still met with him when he

went underground."

Hilda and Lionel also attended his marriage ceremony to Winnie.

Although Mr Mandela has been imprisoned for nearly 26 years, he embodies the aims and desires of the present generation of opponents of apartheid who have never seen him, never heard him speak, Hilda says.

"He is a symbol of what they want. It is the idea of freedom and honour. Nelson has a bold presence and a way of influencing people," she says.

Remember others

But she feels it is essential to remember the other prisoners of apartheid.

Walter Sisulu was imprisoned on the same day as Mr Mandela. Though he is much more politically acute, he is not so well remembered because he is not as charismatic.

Above all, Hilda remains hopeful that one day apartheid will end.

"You have to believe that it's possible to make the world just and free or you might as well lock yourself away inside your house," she says. "I do believe the people will participate in their own future. Just how much later and to what extent, I do not know."

Drawing attention

In an effort to focus attention on the demand for Mr Mandela's release from prison 25 marchers will walk from Glasgow to London, attending 200 public meetings on the 590-mile route over the next month.

Hilda will join them when they arrive in Hyde Park for the final event on July 17. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, among others, will address the crowd.

More than one million people are expected to attend, all with the plea "Free Nelson Mandela".



The Star

70c PWV (80c OUTSIDE THE PWV) incl

FRIDAY MAY 1 1992

FINAL

SUNDAY



Win a great holiday break

TRENDS



Hilda comes home after 27 years

▶ PAGE 7

Tonight!

Weekend TV highlights

▶ PAGE 12

INSIDE

11 injured...



01.07.04

SOUTH AFRICA

Hilda Bernstein:
the price my
children paid to
end apartheid

10

SCREEN

- Shrek 2: too clever by half
- The man who made movie posters an art form
- Booze in the movies

INSIDE



THE TIMES

THURSDAY



HOW TO HAVE ANGELIC CHILDREN

THE NANNY WHO TRANSFORMS THE BEHAVIOUR OF EVEN THE NAUGHTIEST CHILD **PAGES 4-5**

INTERVIEW

IN JAIL, I COULDN'T BEAR TO THINK OF MY CHILDREN

HILDA BERNSTEIN WAS FORCED TO ABANDON HER FAMILY TO FIGHT APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA. TODAY, AGED 89, SHE HAS NO REGRETS, SHE TELLS ANNE SEBBA

"I THINK I am brave. Yes, I do. I'm prepared to accept that now," says Hilda Bernstein, the veteran anti-apartheid campaigner, reflecting on the time her husband faced the death penalty three years after her own prison detention. "I'm not boasting that I'm extraordinary in any way. I think you can't ever plan how you will react. But I know now that I am able to cope from very difficult situations."

Hilda serenely imparts this self-knowledge while sipping coffee in her Cape Town flat, which overlooks the Atlantic and its swirling 30ft (9m) rollers. Six months ago she returned to South Africa after 40 years of exile in Britain. She is 89, widowed and recovering from a hip operation, so has plenty of time to reflect on the past and ask herself if the struggle was worth it. She is living in a privileged white enclave.

But Hilda Bernstein was not concerned just for her own and her husband's survival: she had four children to think about. When she and Rusty were arrested for the first time in 1946, charged with sedition during a miners' strike, their eldest daughter, Toni, was only two. From then on, the family lived under the shadow of the authorities.

During the 1950s Hilda's activities were increasingly restricted until she was prohibited from publishing her writing. Then, in 1960, came the Sharpeville shootings, and a state of emergency was declared. At 3am, Hilda and Rusty were seized from their home and taken to prison. Toni, by then 16, was left in charge of Patrick, 12, Frances, nine and Keith, four.

"This was the worst time for me. Not because the prison conditions were so bad — disgusting food, chipped plates and mattresses without sheets — but I really suffered from being without my children for three months. I couldn't bear even to think of them," says Hilda.

"My children were desperately important to me. I had wanted them. They were not adopted, and I felt responsible for them although it seemed that politics had taken over. What saved my life then was poetry. I wrote it, and I couldn't bear even to think of them," says Hilda. "My children were desperately important to me. I had wanted them. They were not adopted, and I felt responsible for them although it seemed that politics had taken over. What saved my life then was poetry. I wrote it, and I couldn't bear even to think of them," says Hilda.

Another comfort was keeping a prison diary. Slowly, she gets up to find it for me now, a book full of pages of minute, pencilled writing, which includes a dramatic account of an eight-day hunger strike. She concealed the diary by cutting a hole in the underarm of her overcoat lining and making sure she always wore the coat.

Only Toni came to visit her when she was in prison; the younger children were not allowed to see her. After her release Rusty, afraid of a repetition of the 1960 emergency when both of them were arrested, urged Hilda to be more cautious. She periodically threw out banned literature, but she knew from the regular raids on their house that another arrest was likely. As long as she remained in South Africa she was too deeply involved in politics to stop her activities. Although she dreaded the thought of the children being alone, prison was a risk she knew she must face. When pressed by others to "congratulate the children," Hilda replied: "I do. In the long run the most important thing as far as the children are concerned is what sort of country they will have to live in."

Three years after Hilda's time in detention, Rusty was arrested at Lilliesleaf Farm, Rivonia, on July 11, 1961. He had driven there, with some forerunning, for a secret meeting. He was

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ GOMBERG



ANDRÉ GOMBERG

Above, Hilda Bernstein today, and, right and far right, Hilda with her children Toni, Patrick, Frances and Keith and her husband Rusty, pictured in 1964



already under 12-hour house arrest and restricted to Johannesburg. The police, acting on a tip-off, were waiting.

Hilda's account of the year leading up to the Rivonia trial and the family's eventual exile — *The World That Was Ours* — has just been reissued. Some of the most moving passages concern her fights with authority to visit Rusty in jail in Pretoria, 40 miles (65km) away. She invented family matters that had to be discussed, much as whether Toni should learn French or Latin. When she was finally allowed to visit Rusty she felt her heart "twist with the longing to touch".

Hilda makes light of the courage it took to see her through this time. Once Rusty was in

Toni insists that she was not damaged by the demands made on her. But Hilda admits: "I think she had to shoulder too much responsibility for a young person. We didn't understand about child psychology. We tried to protect the younger ones by not telling them, but I understand now that they picked up things we weren't aware of."

When the judge pronounced Rusty not guilty, Toni remembers the confusion in court. The furore drowned out the judge's announcement that as her mother rushed forward to try to touch his arm, her father was immediately arrested and taken back to the cells. Two days later Rusty was released on bail. Yet both he and Hilda knew it was only a matter of days before the secret police would come for them both. Friends persuaded them that exile was preferable to jail. Even so, Hilda, convinced that she would never again see the country she loved so passionately, did not flee until the last moment. "I felt I was saying goodbye to all that the house represented, a wonderful and fruitful part of our lives."

It was only when secret police arrived at her front door that she left, escaping through the back of the house, leaving the washing machine whirring on its rinse cycle and the soap steaming away in the pressure cooker. She went into hiding. It would have been too dangerous to go to public to Botswana with her children, but she managed to meet them under cover in a park. It was almost unbearable. Keith laughed at his mother's disguise — a big hat, high heels and heavy make-up. Then he asked: "How long before you send for us?" It was an unanswerable question. When the brief meeting was over, Toni walked away with her arm around Keith. That image gave Hilda nightmares for years.

Forces, who was 11 at the time, finds that memory almost as difficult. "It's a scene I can recall very vividly even today and it's still very

emotional. These were enormously traumatic events for children. I think we were all wounded, but not in a life-defying way. We were all proud as well."

Patrick, who now lives with his wife and child in France, is the Bernstein child most affected by the years of fear and danger. He had, once, aged 15, been to visit his father in jail. He was close to tears the whole time. When his parents fled to England, he was at boarding school in Swaziland and was not able to say goodbye. Keith and Frances joined their parents there as soon as they could, but Patrick remained at school and came to live in England much later. "Now I know I should have made him come to us sooner," says Hilda.

Toni, by then married and studying at university, joined the family with her husband.

HOW WILL SHE CELEBRATE FREEDOM DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA? "BY BEING ALIVE," SHE SAYS SIMPLY

In exile in London, Hilda was struck by depression. "I had a breakdown of sorts and suffered a real loss of identity. I got out of it because we had dependent children who needed us to put our lives together." And it was in England that Hilda took up art seriously, acquiring an international reputation for her etchings.

Despite the cost to her and her family, she has no regrets. "I never had indomitable certainty about things. But I acted the way I did and took those choices for good reasons so there is no point dwelling on it. Once you start on a path and come to an obstacle you don't turn back, you somehow get round it." Born in London in 1915 to poor Russian immigrants of Jewish origin, Hilda inherited

ANDRÉ GOMBERG



from her father a fierce sense of social justice. "He taught my sisters and I never to define ourselves according to race or religion but as members of the human race. I am an atheist."

Her father returned to the Soviet Union in 1925 to offer his services to it. She never saw him again. Hilda left school aged 16 with ambitions to be an artist, but she could not afford to study, so she moved with her mother to South Africa in 1932. Shocked by the policies of Mussolini and Hitler, she joined the Labour League of Youth and then the Communist Party. In 1941 she married Rusty, a fellow communist. In 1943, while he was away at war, Hilda was elected to the Johannesburg City Council — the first Communist Party member elected to public office in South Africa by a whites-only vote.

The job gave Hilda access to the appalling poverty in black communities, and she made lifelong friends among them. "Whites encouraged poverty every day through their maids. Most chose not to see further," says Hilda. "She finds it a painful irony to be living in an all-white 'over-stuffed' apartment block where many residents appear not to know who she is. This bothers her, but she accepts it as a tribute to the smooth way change has been effected."

These are heady days in South Africa as the nation celebrates ten years of democracy. The day after we meet is Freedom Day, and I ask Hilda how she will celebrate.

"By being alive," she replies. "It was worth all the sacrifices? That's for others to say. But maybe this little group of whites did make a difference, however small. I feel proud we were among those who helped to influence the inevitable change, which has come much sooner and more calmly than I ever felt possible."

The World That Was Ours by Hilda Bernstein is available from Persephone Books (020-7242-9292), price £10

THE TIMES TRAVEL DIRECT

Tallinn

Price includes

- Return flights from London Gatwick
- Three nights' accommodation at the four-star Grand Hotel, with breakfast
- Airport transfers
- City tour
- Services of tour manager

Tallinn is the medieval capital of Estonia, located on the Baltic coast just 30 miles from Helsinki. Full of historic charm, it has an exciting city atmosphere with a growing number of bars, clubs, restaurants and hotels. The old town is a picturesque mix of church spires and red-tiled roofs connected by narrow cobbled streets.

Three nights from just **£299**

Dates and price per person

Sept 19, 26, Oct 10, 21 & Nov 7 from £299

Prices are based on two people sharing a twin room. Single supplements available from £25.00. Offer is subject to availability.

Vilnius

Price includes

- Return flights from London Gatwick to Vilnius
- Three nights' at the three-star City Park or four-star Artis Hotel, with breakfast
- Transfers in Vilnius
- Guided walking tour
- Services of tour manager

Vilnius, the historic capital of Lithuania, is a wonderful destination for a short break and boasts Eastern Europe's largest old town. A UNESCO World Heritage site, the charming and beautiful old town extends over 255 hectares and contains more than 1,000 protected monuments. There are many fine restaurants, bars, cafes and hotels.

Three nights from just **£299**

Dates and price per person

Sept 3, 10, 17, Oct 8 & 23 from £299

Prices are based on two people sharing a twin room. Single supplements available from £24.00. Offer is subject to availability.

Collection Number: A3299

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

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

©2015

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 part of the *Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers*, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.