

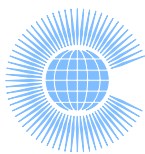
Ruth First Papers project

Interview with Brian Bunting part 1

An interview conducted by **Don Pinnock** in 1993. Part of a series carried out at Grahamstown University and held at the UWC/Robben Island Mayibuye Archive.

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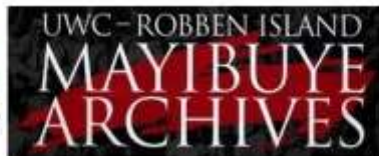


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DP: I suppose what I really wanted to ask you about is when you got involved in **Guardian** so that I know ... were you a journalist before?

BB: Yes, I was a journalist on the **Rand Daily Mail** and the **Sunday Times** in Johannesburg. I was taken on as a sub-editor. You know how things work, you work on the **Mail** during the week and the **Sunday Times** on a Saturday. I was there for about eighteen months before I joined the army, and I suppose the **Mail** job was my first real job, because I had been previously working as a judge's clerk under Judge Millin, Sarah Gertrude's husband. I had quite a bit of contact with the two of them. I found him a fairly pleasant personality and I found her unbearable. I don't know if you have any knowledge of either of them.

DP: Not in those terms, no.

BB: No. He was very tolerant because at that stage the war was on. I was taken on in the period before the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union. I was having fancy war arguments with him and he was very tolerant, considering what he was and his attitude towards Nazis and Verwoerd and all that mob, and his experience of that case in which Verwoerd was involved. Anyway, that was a comparatively short-lived job and I went from that to the **Mail**, which was really my first real job, which lasted for about eighteen months. And then came the war, and after the war I worked for a time for the Springbok Legion, I was editing **Fighting Talk** at that period before ...

DP: Did you join the Springbok Legion before the war?

BB: Ja.

DP: Up north, or in Europe?

BB: In South Africa, before I left, and I ... well, I was a member of the Springbok Legion apparatus before I went up north, and afterwards I worked full-time for the Legion until in '46 I was asked to go down and work full-time on the **Guardian**. That's when I started at the **Guardian**, and I worked there under ... Eddie was editor for some while, until 1948.

DP: That was in Cape Town?

BB: Yes. Yes, I had to move from Jo'burg to Cape Town to take the job on. I didn't work on the **Guardian** before going to Cape Town. **DP:** The Springbok Legion, just for a moment: **Fighting Talk** started off as a ... it had a lot of cartoons, I remember. I've never seen a full run of that, although I have the later ... what was it like when you left? I mean its constituency was soldiers.

BB: I can't remember very much about it, you know. I don't think I've got any copies of it from that time. It was more or less a house journal, you know. Can't really tell you very much about it.

DP: Was that a full-time job?

BB: Well, it was a full-time job in the sense that one worked not only on the paper but

in the Legion itself. I mean, it kept me occupied and busy, partly working on the paper and partly doing the normal run of organising and agitating. It was a very busy period after the war, soldiers coming back and so on, and it was a period in which the Legion had a great deal of influence. I don't know whether you remember the occasion when the Legion organised the campaign to get the Nationalist conference driven out of Johannesburg, '45, I think it was, the latter part of '45. They organised a huge mob which besieged the town hall, and they got them driven out. Eventually the police said well, you've got to close down the conference and get out, because we can't guarantee your safety! And that was the mood of the ex-soldiers at the time; they were very militant and very angry, and there was a lot of political work going on amongst them.

DP: What was the Legion's connection to the Party?

BB: It had Party people working in it, but otherwise no connection at all. It was an independant organisation, it had all sorts of people in it, amongst the leadership.

DP: Because Joe was a member of the Legion, Carneson ...

BB: Joe, Carneson ... well, all Party members who were in the army were members of the Legion, played a greater or lesser part in it. But there were all sorts of other people as well, ex-Nats and United Party people. I think it had a big influence on thinking during that period, and the mood of the soldiers, the opinions of the soldiers changed during the war. That's reflected in the opinion polls that were conducted. I don't know if you remember the pamphlet called "What the Soldier Thinks", which was conducted

by the Army Education Service, showing how soldiers' attitudes on the position of africans in society and so on changed during the war. They took up a much more progressive stance, particularly amongst the Afrikaners, because taken away from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nationalist Party into the army, exposed to the ideas of army education under Marquard and so on, and some other people, Bernard Northcote, Vernig, John O'Meara, I don't know if you've come across him at all. I was an information officer too! But it was mainly the anti-Nazi current that was spread during the war and generated automatically by the war which influenced the soldiers, and they moved considerably to the Left.

DP: But I suppose when they got reintegrated into society it started to fizzle out. Torch Commando seemed to be a big Anglo attempt to ...

BB: Ja, well, the Torch Commando foundered on the race question. That was always a problem.

DP: But **Fighting Talk** itself, I mean who took over from you? It seems to have continued through. In fact the Springbok Legion - I have a letter which says - I don't know, you might have signed it - saying, to the bank, which I found in Jo'burg, saying all assets of the Springbok Legion must now be considered the assets of the Congress of Democrats.

BB: Oh, couldn't have been signed by me. I don't know who signed it, but ...

DP: **Fighting Talk** continued, I mean, how did that transition happen, do you know?

BB: I don't know. I think it just sort of was taken over. I don't think there was any sort of legalistic transfer, but the people who battled around in the Legion were probably the same people who battled around in the Congress of Democrats, and they had the paper and all the connections and they just carried on, changed its character a little bit, that's all. Well, it became a different sort of thing, especially under Ruth. It developed into a different style of –

DP: Cultural, political magazine?

BB: Ja, and generally much more interesting and influential, intellectually.

DP: How important was it as a magazine? I mean, it's hard to answer a question like that, but –

BB: You mean, when I was running it? When it was part of the –

DP: No, later.

BB: Oh, afterwards, I think it was very important.

DP: Who read it? I mean, the Left read it, but ...

BB: Yes, well, the Left read it, but not only the Left, other people read it, it was - you know, it had quite a wide circle of people writing for it, it had articles from all sorts of

people, not only Left people, but cultural figures. It's hard to say really, who read it, if you ask in those terms. I haven't got any figures or details, but it was spoken about, it was referred to and discussed, and the articles were debated by different sorts of people.

DP: There're some very good articles in it.

BB: Yes, there are some very good articles. I would say that it was read in universities, for example; I should say that press people probably knew about it; intelligentsia, I think most of them were aware of it.

DP: It's interesting that often when Ruth was asked to write about who she was, she would almost always say "editor, **Fighting Talk**", rather than "Johannesburg editor of **New Age**".

BB: Ja, well, I think that's understandable. From the point of view of her creativity, she probably found it a much better avenue than **New Age**, because she could fashion that paper as she wanted to, she could shape it and design it and get articles for it - well, it was her baby, you know. I think she felt much more concerned about it than for **New Age** which was a much bigger, more amorphous thing from that point of view.

DP: You went down to Cape Town in 46?

BB: '46.

DP: Were you not caught up in the trial of the strike?

BB: Yes, I was. I was brought back almost immediately and charged with all the others. But I was released fairly early, because the crucial meeting of the Johannesburg District Committee of the Communist Party at which the so-called decision was taken to launch the strike - or where the strike was debated, the one which the prosecution relied on for pinning down all the members of the District Committee - I was absent from that meeting. So that was the only thing that tied me in with the strike. They had no evidence against me, and by negotiation between our lawyers and their lawyers, I was released.

DP: When you got down to Cape Town what was the paper like? Was it running well, how come you took over? Had Betty given up? What actually happened?

BB: Well, I didn't take over. When I went down it was to work on the paper. I don't know, she needed some assistance, or maybe she was thinking about getting on in life, I don't know what her motives were, but the feeling was that somebody was needed down there to help with the work of the paper, and it was put to me that I should go down, so I went down.

DP: What was its political profile like at that point?

BB: Well, it was very much Party-orientated. I mean, you know about the history of the paper, I don't have to tell you anything about that. It started off largely as a trade union-orientated paper, there was very little about the Congress Movement or the

Communist Party in the early days, but it changed with Munich and the articles of "Vigilator".

DP: "Vigilator?" Who was "Vigilator"?

BB: He was the Professor of Classics at the University of Cape Town. Baldring, Professor Baldring - well, I don't know if he was professor then, he was probably a lecturer at that stage. He became professor, and his articles on Munich were very influential in South Africa, giving people an understanding of what was going on with the process of peace under the Nazis, how Czechoslovakia had been portrayed and so on and so forth. They had a big influence on people, because this was the only source of information about what was happening from the Left point of view. And as things turned out, of course the Left perspective was proved to be correct, and during the war too, he wrote these articles regularly, and they were very influential, they attracted a lot of attention to the paper, because of course everybody was concerned about the war and international affairs, much more than they are now, because the war was running and the newspapers were full of it.

DP: Was Betty a member of the Party?

BB: Betty was a member of the Party; she was a member of the Central Committee of the Party; and George was a member of the Central Committee too, her husband. He was a - well, you know about him, he was a leading surgeon in Cape Town. The two of them were very prominent figures in Cape Town society, generally. Betty was a good editor, she was an interesting, lively personality and she got people together and

provoked co-operation from all sorts of characters in Cape Town.

DP: It was a weekly, wasn't it?

BB: It was always a weekly, yes. Things changed - I mean, during the war the paper was very influential, especially influencing the blacks to support the war. Not necessarily to join up, but to support the war effort, because the opposition to the war was very strong amongst the blacks and there was a considerable section of blacks who regarded Japan as a natural ally because they were blacks too. Moses Kotane as you know wrote this pamphlet: "Japan - Friend or Foe?" and Yusuf Dadoo had to campaign quietly amongst blacks in Natal and the Transvaal on this issue, and the **Guardian** was the only paper that was given an increased allocation of paper by the Government to spread its message at this time.

DP: I'm sure the Government desperately wanted it to spread that particular message!

BB: Well, it was important to them, because ... I mean, it makes you realise what the potential is right now, and why questions of attitude are so important, because although the Government has got certain strengths, if it felt the need for black support during the war, what does it feel now, when it's struggling to survive, really. The desparateness with which it's dealing with its enemies is due to the fact that it can't get any measure of support from the black community, at any level.

DP: That's why it's bought **City Press**.

BB: Ja, and there are all sorts of other things.

DP: You wrote as a journalist for **Guardian** when you arrived in Cape Town. Were you writing articles and news?

BB: Ja.

DP: And how long did you overlap with Betty?

BB: Well, she left in '48, and I think she tended to leave things more and more in my hands. She came into the office less and was generally sort of easing out, as I say, I don't know whether for political reasons, I didn't get the impression at the beginning that it was for political reasons, maybe that had something to do with it, but she was also getting on, she wanted to relax a bit, and so on and so forth, and she wanted to transfer the chores of editing more and more onto me.

DP: What happened to Betty?

BB: Well, she was involved in that sedition case, after the Johannesburg miners' strike case folded up the Central Committee of the Party was arrested on a charge of sedition - Betty, Jack Simons and all sorts of characters, and I think that shook both her and George, they then both realised communism wasn't just a game, it was quite serious in South Africa, and they became anti-Soviets. Well, it wasn't overnight, but the process started, I think, with the ending of the war, the beginning of the Cold War - it's difficult to say precisely at what stage exactly they decided the game wasn't worth

the candle. But they both dropped out and they both turned hostile to the socialist cause - to the Communist Party cause, put it that way, and to the Soviet Union, and they disappeared from the scene. Eventually they came over here, and first she died, and then he died.

DP: I wonder what's happened to their papers, if they kept records and things?

BB: One has the feeling they got rid of everything that might have incriminated them, just like they got rid of their files of **New Age**, they probably got rid of everything else. And he certainly was quite vicious about it, regarded everything that he'd done to be a waste of time, and a betrayal, and so on and so forth.

DP: So you ended up really with the paper in your hands.

BB: Ja. Well, it wasn't me as an individual, because during the war the paper had come to - I mean it started off as a sort of trade union-orientated journal, a liberal journal, didn't have any specific political colour that you could identify as being either this or that, but it gradually came to reflect the view of the Communist Party, and it supported Communist Party policies all along the line. It was never a Communist Party paper, it was always an independent paper, legally; it had a board of directors who at one stage included Molteno, who was certainly no communist - he eventually got out because he wasn't happy about the way things were going - and other characters who were on the board of directors, I can't remember who they all were, they became more and more of a figurehead; but it retained its legal independence, and that was the reason why when the Party was banned, the **Guardian** wasn't banned because it

didn't belong to the Party. It just stopped propagating what they defined as communism and carried on. It carried on for another thirteen years, as you know. But because it had come to be more and more of a Party mouthpiece in the sense that the Party used it or regarded it as being a vehicle for the conveying of its views to the people of South Africa, it wasn't run by Betty or by me, we were simply instruments, if you like, of a movement.

DP: What was the relationship between the paper and the Central Committee, or would it not form - I mean ...

BB: Well, it was there in the sense that the Central Committee would perhaps discuss from time to time what it would like to see in the paper; later on for instance when I was elected to the Central Committee whatever would be discussed and debated would be reflected in the columns of the paper, but that's about it, I don't think the Central Committee was ever in a position where it had to issue instructions to the journal or anything or like that, it just was the natural process by which what was printed in the paper reflected the views of the Party.

DP: What was the structure of the paper? I mean, the correspondence, the printers, the - I mean, who was the paper at that point, in the 1940's, or when you –

BB: How do you mean, who was the paper?

DP: Well, do you remember who the correspondents were in Johannesburg, how the copy actually got to you - the technical things?

BB: Well, I mean, they changed from time to time. It was first of all printed by Stewart's Printing Press. Then we transferred to Len Lee-Warden, I'm not quite sure how all that happened. You can find out from him exactly what –

DP: He says Stewart got too expensive, he started putting up his prices.

BB: Ja ... and eventually he committed suicide, of course, and I think the people who took over from him weren't over-sympathetic, something like that, I can't remember the details. We were printed by different people at different times, at one stage we were printed by the **Suidestem**, which was a marvellous period because we could get printed on the rotary press in two hours, you could go to press on a Wednesday morning, the paper would be in the street on Wednesday afternoon, it was a luxury ...

DP: **Suidestem** sounds like an Afrikaans group.

BB: Yes, it was the United Party opposition Afrikaans paper.

DP: When was that?

BB: That was in - die **Volkspers**, I think it was called - that was in the late 'forties, sometime in the late 'forties. We printed for quite a while on the **Suidestem** press. For them it was just a bit of extra money, while their press was doing nothing they'd put us on and run it for a couple of hours and there it was. During the war circulation had gone up considerably.

DP: What was that, 20 000?

BB: No, it was about 45 000 towards the end of the war, and in the 1943 elections it was 55 000.

DP: Was that its highest point?

BB: That was its highest point, yes, and after the war it was 45 000 fairly steadily for a while, and then it began to drift down as the Cold War set in, as Government hostility to the paper and to the Left increased and so on and so forth. Advertisers also started to get frightened, during the war a lot of advertising had been unloaded onto the **Guardian** because it was a way of avoiding income tax, and all sorts of people advertised in our pages. I mean, the Soviet Union was respectable, Mrs Smuts was sitting on medical aid committees for Russia and so on, and there was nothing to prevent people from advertising, there was no comeback, there was no penalty for doing so, and a lot of this advertising started dropping off as well in the post-war period. (pause) News used to come through, for instance, from Johannesburg. Ruth would wrap up a parcel of stuff on the Monday morning, or to reach Cape Town by Monday morning - this was when the production process was a bit more delayed, when we were working with Len and he was using an ordinary flatbed. I still can't get used to going into a printing press and not having that smell of ink around.

DP: All on computer!

BB: A different story, I'm not computerised yet! But her parcel of stuff would - I mean, this is a picture of the early period, I can't remember all the details of the early period, they changed from time to time depending on precisely the time-scale of production. Her parcel and other peoples' parcels would come by air-freight on the Monday morning, and would then be processed and sent down to the printer. The later stuff would be sent by cable.

DP: That would then be set up on a hot metal lino-type?

BB: Definitely lino-type.

DP: When was Ruth appointed up there?

BB: Well, Ruth was first working for the Johannesburg City Council as a social worker, and I think she fretted at that and wanted to get into something else, and she started on the paper either late '46 or '47, somewhere round there, soon as you start seeing her name in the paper, I'm not quite sure when it was, but round about that period.

DP: And why was she appointed? Was she good? Or had she - I mean, who taught her to write?

BB: Well, the paper taught more or less everybody to write. We had all sorts of people who learned their trade and became very good journalists on the paper. Another one in Cape Town who is someone you may not have come across is Noni Barnett.

DP: I've talked to her.

BB: Oh, you have talked to her? Well, when she came on, she was taken on as a typist by Betty and she just learned on the job because some story had to be written up at some stage and she was thrown out, go and get a story - she knew nothing about it! She learned photography and she learned writing and she became a good reporter and a good photographer; you know, just learned on the job without any formal training at all. The same thing applied with Ruth; she was bright and alert and she was one of us, and when the job was vacant - this was after John O'Meara, who I mentioned to you, he had been a Party member and a very prominent figure in the army, in the Springbok Legion, but when he came back he was just completely deflated because - I don't know, in his first speech to the Party members when he came back, he said that people mustn't expect too much from the ex-soldiers because they had been used to a certain sort of lifestyle, which he as an officer was thinking about, I suppose, and getting back into civvy street was rather more tough, and he started off working in the **Guardian** office, but couldn't take it and he disappeared.

DP: So Ruth took over from him?

DP: I think Ruth took over from him, I don't think there was anyone else in between. But, you know, details like this I'm not altogether clear about, so you'd better check up on that, but that was more or less the progression. Well, she learnt the trade of writing on the job, nobody taught her, she just picked it up. Of course from time to time we'd have debates about what she was writing and so on and so forth, but for the most part it was entirely self-taught.

DP: So what was the cycle of the paper? Copy had to be in by –

BB: Well, when it was produced by Len, copy had to be in by Monday ... one would start sending copy down the previous week, articles that were done in advance, the more, the stuff that wouldn't date, that wasn't so urgent, readers' letters and book reviews and odds and ends like that, that was sent down the week before on the Thursday and the Friday. Then the stuff that was sent in, it came in from Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth and Durban on the Monday, it all came in by the Monday planes from the various centres, and that was edited in Cape Town and sent to the printer.

DP: Did you edit it?

BB: Ja.

DP: How did you lay it out?

BB: Well, one had layout sheets, and laid it out ...

DP: Double sheets, and you'd give them to Len. And you wrote the headlines?

BB: Ja. Every page was laid out in rough and on Wednesday morning I would go down to Len's printing shop and then the page would be made up and I would fill all the holes as we went along with various types of filler and so on.

DP: He had a lot of praise for you - he said that you could cast off stories very accurately, which pleased him as a printer.

BB: Ja, well, one learns that, by and large; there were problems from time to time but on the whole it went pretty smoothly.

DP: Who were your correspondents?

BB: Well, there was Ruth in Johannesburg - I mean, they varied from time to time, but there was MP Naicker in Durban, Govan in Port Elizabeth, Noni in Cape Town ...

DP: And then Rowley Arenstein's wife was writing for you.

BB: Jacquie, for a while, yes. A difficult customer.

DP: Jacquie?

BB: You know her, eh?

DP: I don't, but I've met Rowley, he's -

BB: Well, he's a difficult customer too! (laughs). And I've no doubt he's found all the Marxist theses in the world to justify working for Buthelezi! (laughs).

DP: Yes, he does! (laughs)

BB: Yes, interesting fellow, nice chap, but politically up the street, always has been. He was a Big Brother item in the later stages of the war (pause). We had odd people doing odd sorts of jobs for the paper like sports columnists and so on, Tennyson Makiwane at one stage was sports reporter for the paper and then he did other reporting too, at various stages, but for all practical purposes Ruth was the only full-time worker in Johannesburg on the editorial side.

DP: So one can assume in the early 'fifties - taking a rough date - that all the stories from Johannesburg would be hers?

BB: Not necessarily all of them. Most of them would be hers, but some could be written by others, I mean some stories were written up specifically by different people with different connections if there was a story on a specific point. Generally speaking they were hers, but you can't always assume that that's so, you know, you just have to look at the style of writing. Ruth had a style very much like herself; it was sharp and very accurate and very precise. No padding - she was a very disciplined sort of writer.

DP: How did you distribute the paper?

BB: Well, we had our own circulation apparatus because nobody else would touch us, which was largely based on the Movement, contacts within the various branches of the ANC; we had a fellow in Johannesburg, a guy called Ivan Schermbrucker, I don't know if you knew him at all -

DP: I didn't know him, but I know of him.

BB: Well, he handled the distribution there, and in Cape Town we had John Morley, I don't know if you ever came across him, he died a few years ago. They would take the paper round to various shopkeepers who would handle it, but mainly it was Movement people who would - one or two full-time sellers in Cape Town, they had full-time sellers in Durban and Johannesburg too.

DP: Street sellers?

BB: Street sellers, they had sellers in the townships, people who would run around selling, but by and large it was entirely our own apparatus, because there was no other way of getting it out. It was quite extensive, because, you know, we would handle, say, 45 000 papers through these people. They were really a remarkable collection of people, these street sellers. I knew the Cape Town ones very well, and -

DP: Where were they drawn from? Movement people?

BB: They were Movement people, yes. Mostly Party people. Some of them were just ANC people, but the two in Cape Town were Party people, the two I'm thinking of particularly, who were our full-time sellers.

DP: Who were those?

BB: Joe Motluela, who just recently died in Lesotho, Jack Masiyane, I don't know what's happened to him, last I heard of him he was also in Lesotho, he'd gone bad in some way and ended up in jail, and I don't know what happened to him after he got out. In jail for non-political stuff.

DP: It's hard for those guys in the nearby states, I think.

BB: Oh, they all had a very tough time. But these two, they were a team, and they were known all over the Western Cape. Absolutely fearless, they would go anywhere, weren't afraid of the police, landed up in jail often enough on trivial charges ...

DP: What sort of charges - distributing on a -

BB: Oh, doing things against various by-laws, that sort of stuff, obstructing the police, you know, anything would do, but they just kept going and they were quite remarkable. Most of the sellers had to face problems of this kind, because they were always being hounded and persecuted, pressured in various ways.

DP: And how did you finance **Guardian**? Christmas clubs?

BB: Christmas clubs, donations, we went around - I mean, part of it was financed by advertising, of course, during the good period, then when the advertising dropped off we had to make good with donations of various kinds. For instance, we'd go around in Natal and year after year I would go down and spend three or four weeks, sometimes my wife went with me, sometimes other people, Ruth once went with me, and we ran

around getting donations from the Indian merchant community. It was sometimes quite a job persuading them that the paper was something that was working in their long-term interests, but by and large they were very supportive, because we had people like Dadoo and Naicker pushing our cause, and other people, Ismael Meer, don't know if you've come across him -

DP: Oh, I've chatted to him quite a lot.

BB: - and JN Singh, people like that, they used to go around with us too, we collected a lot of money from Natal. And certain sections of the European business community as well. In Cape Town this is what Fred Carneson, my wife used to go around regularly to business people, particularly Jewish business people, who in spite of Israel and everything else, Zionism, still remain the most progressive section of the white population. Johannesburg: of course Margaret Street collected a lot of money from the business community in Johannesburg. I would stress that we never got a penny from the Soviet Union by way of subsidy or anything else.

DP: I'm sure the Government would like to suggest that -

BB: They would like to suggest, they would like to find evidence, but we never got a cent; we got five thousand pounds once from China - I don't know where it came from or why, out of the blue, but that's all. And when you think of the costs of running a paper, it's quite considerable.

DP: What was it? Can you remember what a monthly bill would look like? Because

you had a lot of staff ...

BB: We didn't have such a lot of staff, you know, when you think about it, when you think of what staff people need now today to run papers. In Cape Town on the editorial side there was Noni and myself, and there were half-timers like Lionel Forman and Albie Sachs from time to time ... Port Elizabeth was only Govan, in Durban only MP Naicker. They had sort of office people, I think MP had one person working in the office on the distribution side, and in Johannesburg - I mean we had an office staff of - on the administrative side - of perhaps three people, four people.

DP: Now these were all salaried people?

BB: All salaried people, ja.

DP: Can you remember what they got paid? That's really getting into detail, I'm sorry ... I mean, not much, or ... a living wage ...

BB: Um ... well, it was a sort of living wage, I don't think it was much. If you're asking me an exact figure now ... ask Fred Carneson, he'd remember possibly, I can't remember.

DP: Is he still around?

BB: Oh yes, he's in London. I suppose that towards the end I was getting something like seventy pounds a month, something of that sort, I can't remember exactly. I can't

remember what Ruth would have been getting, Jo'burg salaries on the whole tended to be higher. I'm very hazy about those details. Ask Fred, he'd be able to tell you, because he had to do the paying out!

DP: So he was the paymaster?

BB: Well, he was the manager of the office.

DP: It's odd that the paper was in Cape Town - I suppose it was for the same reason -

BB: Well, the Central Committee was in Cape Town. And it was started in Cape Town, not by the Party, but by Betty and George and Baldring and a few others. I don't quite know why they were the ones to start it, but ... I don't know what it would have been if the Party hadn't got into the act, you know, during the war. I don't know how it would have grown or what it would have represented. But that's all presumption. But for the reason that the Central Committee was in Cape Town, I suppose that explains quite a lot about the development of the paper, because the connections between the two were very considerable.

DP: Now when the Party disbanded in '50, what effects did that have on the paper?

BB: Well, in material terms, none, because we had a separate existence and a separate life, and we weren't tied up with the Party administratively or any other way, we just carried on. Politically, of course, we had to change quite considerably, because we had to avoid the propagation of Marxism-Leninism etcetera as defined in the Act -

DP: It must have been very tricky to sit and pick through that dreadful act as a newspaperman.

BB: Ja - it was tricky, one had to watch out all the time. It became more difficult as one law was added to another, but we had Sam Kahn just next door, I went round to him quite often with doubtful stories and got advice. And by and large our attitude was, well, there's a hell of a lot you can still say. Same as the attitude on libel - there's no need to use bad language to convey what you think about somebody, you can always say whatever you want to within the limits of the law. Because the **Guardian** had once fallen foul of libel. The miners' strike, the mine case where the Chamber of Mines sued us because we had printed the evidence of the African Mineworkers' Union before the Wage Commission, and we hadn't said anything ourselves which was printed where they could see it, but it was held to be libellous and we had to pay a hell of a lot of money in libel damages, quite apart from the cost of the case, and you know, one just can't -

DP: The paper lost?

BB: Oh yes, we lost, and one can't afford that sort of cost. There was a special fund at that time to defray the costs of the action, but my feeling throughout the period I was responsible was it's just not worthwhile taking a chance with this sort of thing. And we didn't on the political side either, except on certain things like - for instance, I remember Joe Slovo telling me, he came into work, I think it was in '58, on the bus, and he saw a **Guardian** poster with the slogan on it in huge type: "Strike on May 31!"

which was in defiance of all the laws at the time, but I'd put it in quotes and a statement underneath, an appeal from whatever it was that issued the appeal; I sort of thought well, if it comes to a court case I'll get away with it on the grounds that I didn't say it, it was somebody else who said it! But nothing ever happened ... I took a lot of chances like that, but on the question of what was communism and so on, there was a lot you could say.

DP: Were you surprised that the paper managed to continue after 1950?

BB: No, I wasn't really surprised. Maybe I was more optimistic in those days, but one always felt that somehow the Government was on very weak ground with this sort of thing; I remember my reaction during the Treason Trial in '56 when my wife was snatched away and sent to the Fort and so on, I never had the slightest doubt that that case would founder, because when it comes to dealing with political concepts like that, and arguing that the Freedom Charter is treasonable, one just feels that, you know, there's no possibility of getting away with a charge like that in any sort of court, even if the courts are as biased as the South African courts. I feel we had considerable scope, and even when the run stopped in 1963 we could have carried on publishing if we'd been able to find a printer, but Len Lee-Warden at that stage - he'd been working with me for a long time and he respected and trusted my judgement on all sorts of editorial matters and he wasn't worried, but when we were sort of swept aside by the personal prohibitions which were served on us at that time, we could only have carried on with completely new people, and he wasn't - you know, he didn't have any knowledge of them, we didn't have any alternatives for that matter, because everybody who could have come forward from our ranks at that stage was incapacitated. And it

meant starting with completely new people from scratch, they could have carried on, legally, but politically it would have been a different story. He didn't want to take a chance and we couldn't find anybody else who was willing to take on the work. So in a way -

DP: That's not surprising, given the (indistinct) journalists!

BB: That's right, well, we couldn't find a way round that at all. We had hoped for or thought about possibilities of carrying on production outside the country, that was one of the reasons why ultimately I went out, to see what the possibilities were for instance of doing something through Lesotho. But just at that stage all Communist Party personnel were being declared prohibited immigrants in Lesotho - Basotholand, as it then was - was it still Basotholand? What was the year of independence? Anyway, it was impossible, and that's why it ended up mute. But our title is possibly still valid, although of course we'd have the - the law does say that if you don't print for a month then your title lapses, that's right, because we printed **Spark** for a long time, when they passed that clause into law we started publishing **Spark** monthly, we had a whole issue of **Spark** running, I don't know if you've seen them -

DP: I've seen **Spark**.

BB: But before it superceded **Guardian**, it was running for about fifteen months before that, producing dummy issues, I mean they were published and circulated and sent round to the libraries, although the circulation was about ten, just so we could have the legal basis for carrying on with the paper if we had to. And the whole run of the **Spark**

was possible because that foundation had been laid, otherwise legally it couldn't have been done, you can't just start a paper now and ...

DP: The last edition of **Spark** says "We shall return" !

BB: Well, we still hope so!

DP: I mean, as a paper. It would be nice if it did. What kind of were the benchmarks of the state's assault against the newspaper, I mean I got your list from the **Rise of the South African Reich**, that chronology of the state's laws. Would that be a fairly good representation of what was being thrown at the newspaper and other organisations at the time?

BB: Well, I'm not quite clear what you're on about.

DP: Well, the state obviously didn't like **New Age**, it was harassing you all the time. Now what were the main points of that harassment, I mean, how did that reflect on you daily, apart from libel, apart from the Communism Act ... **(end of side one)**