

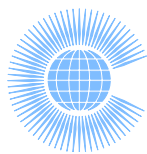
Ruth First Papers project

## Interview with Brian Bunting part 2

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.

Republished in 2012 by the Ruth First Papers Project

[www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk](http://www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk)

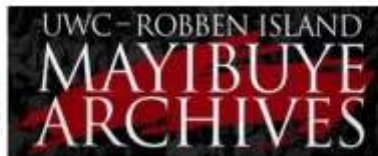


Institute of  
Commonwealth Studies

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY • UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE



UNIVERSIDADE  
EDUARDO MONDLANE  
CENTRO DE  
ESTUDOS  
AFRICANOS

**BB:** Ja, well, you know the whole atmosphere we functioned in was one of persecution and repression. We never had any favourable treatment from the state, not when Smuts was in power either, because the offensive was against the Left both before and after 1948. This whole business of the trials one after the other like the sedition case, and accompanying that were all the threats coming from the Nationalist Party and the Opposition that they would "deal with the communists" etcetera, and as soon as they got in to power, Swart appointed his commission, his investigation of inquiry into the communist danger, which produced a report very quickly and that led to the introduction of the Suppression of Communism - well, the Unlawful Organisations Bill it was first, and then the Suppression of Communism Bill. And from that time onwards I think the pressure was on from the security police, everything that we did was of course monitored, everything that we said, people were arrested, the sellers were arrested from time to time. The Press Commission, they tried to get me involved in that, we had to fight a sort of rearguard action against that.

**DP:** They tried to get you to make a statement to them?

**BB:** Ja, to the Press Commission, and I refused to make a statement to them. There was some question of prosecution at that stage but it never developed, I think they were more interested at that stage in getting at the English press and their foreign correspondents, and they weren't - but still, they did ... I had an argument at that stage that they were violating my constitutional rights in some way by demanding that I give evidence before a closed commission, I think it was, before a closed session. And I think in terms of the law I was demanding the right to appear in a local court, something of that sort, I can't remember.

**DP:** I've seen letters about that in the *New Age* collection -

**BB:** Ja. Well, it's all there.

**DP:** - from Carneson; from Kahn as well.

**BB:** Well, he appeared for me before the Commission. And I can't remember all the details of it, but then there were the bannings, of course; I mean that's one of the reasons why I wasn't in the Treason Trial, because I was banned at that time and unable to go to meetings.

**DP:** But you could still continue to act as a journalist.

**BB:** Ja. We changed around the personnel from time to time, I would sort of not be quoted as editor, but Lionel Forman would function and Fred Carneson at different times, especially during the period that I was in Parliament, of course, it was impossible to give the same attention, and Fred was editor for some time. But one always sort of functioned with the knowledge that these people were breathing down your necks, they would be raiding our home regularly for one thing or another, you know. There were these waves of raids, like for instance before the Treason Trial arrests after the Congress of the People. And during the preparations for strikes of various kinds they would come around raiding. I mean even my kids developed an attitude towards this sort of thing; I remember one occasion when I was at the door answering the police my daughter, who was about nine at that stage, rushed into my room, took the stuff I was working on, ran into her room and stuffed it under the mattress! Nobody asked her to do it, she just did it! We tried, on the contrary, to keep them from any knowledge or involvement of this kind of thing; they just sort of did it automatically. But that's the sort of atmosphere you're surrounded by all the time, I think now it's not very different, I think you're much worse now in South Africa, the atmosphere is much more vicious now, the sorts of things they have been doing to people.

**DP:** They blow up newspapers!

**BB:** They blow up newspapers, and the torture business, you know, since '63.

**DP:** Why did the ANC never have a national paper in the same way as it because they considered *New Age* to reflect their philosophies, or –

**BB:** Well, I think that has something to do with it. The reason is also because - I mean, it did have a paper earlier on, but ... you know the ANC was a very different organisation in the 'thirties and 'forties from what it is now.

**DP:** A lot of regional groupings, more than a central -

**BB:** And it never really did very much. I mean, it did have an annual conference and the occasional meeting, but if you think of the periods before 1950, the organisation that did the running around and the day-to-day agitation was the Party, it wasn't the ANC. And the Indian Congresses, to some extent. We had the meetings, we ran around with the paper, I mean, every Party member used to have a pitch which he had to function on during the weekends, selling the paper, or whatever; we ran around with pamphlets, we held the meetings on the Parade and so on and so forth. And the task of mobilising, propagandising, organising the people was a Party task, much more than an ANC task. I think that was one reason why the ANC didn't have a paper, it wasn't able to really carry one. The only thing that to some extent could be looked at that the ANC people were working on was that Natal paper - what was it now - that independent African paper?

**DP:** *Isikundla?*

**BB:** *Isikundla.* But there's no question about it, the ANC people did regard the *Guardian/New Age* as their paper, especially after 1950. You've also got to look at the political scene, where all our Party people were no longer able to function under the banner of the Party, they carried their methods into the ANC and transformed the ANC together with the Youth League into what it was at the end of the 'fifties. I mean the 'fifties was really a period of tremendous upsurge in the ANC due to that combined influx of elements from (a), the Party, and (b), the Youth League, which turned it into what it became. But they had the Party paper there, the *Guardian* there - well, let's call it a Party paper for this purpose - which they accepted, because it was so tied up with the ANC apparatus already, from the point of view of news-gathering and news circulation. For instance, the trend was already for ANC people to come to us and tell the story. This is how Ruth got on to all those things about the labourers in the Eastern Transvaal. And this simply continued. To have started a paper of their own at that stage would have meant really doing something in competition with the *Guardian*, for no good reason. I mean, you may say there's another reason, that there should have been an ANC journal because the ANC nationalism couldn't fulfil itself without a paper - that's true, but the practicalities of the matter, considering the costs and the distribution problems and all the rest of it - it was simpler just to say whatever you had to say and do whatever you had to do through the *Guardian*. And they did that. And the ANC leaders would keep on exhorting their people to support the paper - Tambo, Lutuli and all the others, you can find their statements in the *New Age*.

**DP:** I was going to ask you about that; I mean in a sense the Party was very influential in the - for want of a better term, belief structures that were being embedded within the *New Age*, and the ANC came from a nationalist tradition. At a certain stage those - I just wondered how that - what effect that had, I mean - but I suppose the question is too big, because I'm asking about the present relationship between the Party and the ANC in asking that question. Were there debates and discussions about that in the 'fifties, were the ANC using the *New Age* quite like that, or ...

**BB:** Well, I don't think there was ever any problem, really, because the - by and large, I think the *New Age* job was appreciated by the people in the ANC. I'm sure there were some people who were probably unhappy about it, probably the same sorts of people who have eventually expressed themselves through - let's say, the Gang of Eight and others. But we never felt anything of this kind on the paper, we didn't feel that people were complaining or frustrated or felt that they'd been cheated out of something because we were there. There were of course other journals floating round, like *Torch* and the Liberal Party paper *Contact*, but as far as African

nationalism is concerned they were irrelevant anyway. The *Torch* was largely coloured-orientated –

**DP:** Unity Movement.

**BB:** - ja, and you know, largely staffed by coloured intellectuals, some African intellectuals and the Cape African Teachers' Association, but as far as the African National Congress was concerned, it didn't really figure.

**DP:** So you didn't get any kinds of grumbles from the ANC side in the kind of positions you took in the paper.

**BB:** Yes, we did, but that was grumbles with the Party more than with the paper. For instance, grumbles over the boycott in the late 'forties, where the ANC had a policy of boycotting all the institutions of the Government, and Sam Kahn or Fred Carneson or myself were standing for election, that sort of thing. The ANC's attitude towards these things was pretty ambiguous, because although they carried boycott resolutions at their conferences, the ANC people were standing for Vigilance organisations and other outfits for Advisory Board, you know, in Advisory Board elections. A fellow like Moses Kotane, for instance, was in quite a dilemma, because on the one hand he was a member of the executive of the ANC and on the other hand he was a member of the Central Committee of the Party, and what did he do about the boycott, it was a problem for him. I mean, those problems did exist and they were debated, but I don't think anyone ever failed - or refused to buy or read the *Guardian* or the *New Age* because of that.

**DP:** One gets the sense, reading the history of the period, that the Party was very important in reconstituting the ANC in a - a degree which must have been almost equal, if not more than the Youth League. To what extent was that true? If it was, what was the role of the newspapers in that process?

**BB:** Well, I wouldn't say it was more important than the Youth League. I think the contribution of the Youth League - I mean, you've got to take into account figures like Mandela and Tambo and all the others you know about. I think their contribution was very important, more particularly because it was - you know, the Youth League contribution was on the whole non-communist and could be said to be a genuine expression of African nationalism, and in some form it did take an anti-communist guise, because people like Tambo were supporting anti-communist resolutions at the ANC conferences and so on, I mean you know about all that. So that element is important, and I think after the dissolution of the Party these two strands came together and proved to be a very formidable combination, and the influence of our journals at that time was, I think, very important, very considerable, and remained so; I think the whole character of the ANC did change during that period and a lot of

the people in the ANC Youth League changed their orientation, ceased to be anti-communist, for example. Not only that, but I think that the whole sort of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist perspectives of the Left were absorbed through our media, as well as our politicians, by large sections of the liberation movement. And if you go to a conference of the ANC today, you'll see the extent to which Marxist analysis has been widely practised by members of the ANC, even those who don't consider themselves to be communists. As a way of thinking, as a way of analysing events and trends, I think the journals of the movement were very important. Like *New Age* as you say, it's got a certain character which even the present anti-government papers haven't got, because of its internationalism. I think the nearest to it has probably been *New Nation*, but then even only patchily. There's a certain something that I still find missing from all the alternative press – or perhaps you never, perhaps you can't get it; but even during the period when it was illegal to propagate communism, one still managed to put over a sort of perspective on international affairs.

**DP:** That for me is the two - there's two differences from *New Age*. One is that it has that international perspective, which I don't think the South African alternative or opposition press has ever equalled; and the other is that the paper was very much of an organiser, it seemed to - it was definitely - it appeared to be - it had a view, and focus, and it was trying to do something.

**BB:** Ja. Because it was tied up with the movement, it was part of the movement. It wasn't independent, in that sense. I mean all the alternative papers are independent. They're not – for instance, this business of the strike, as I said, we had a poster saying "strike on May 31st" because - well, we were all in it, we were all doing it, and we were mobilising people and trying to get support for it. I think the alternative press now tries to publish things with a view to possibly assisting things like strikes, but it doesn't have perhaps the same freedom to do so that we had. Maybe the laws have become more restrictive. It can't say "strike on June 16" in the same way. It can't focus attention in the same way, because it would render itself libel, I suppose, to action from the Government of the sort which they at that stage weren't going in for; not to the same extent, anyway.

**DP:** So the *New Age* would be a very important organiser for the ANC, as much as Congress –

**BB:** Ja, if anybody as I said wanted to do anything, that's where they would go. Because they wouldn't get support from the daily press. All sorts of things were taken up by us at the request of the ANC. The paper would regard itself, I mean we did regard ourselves as a platform for the whole liberation movement, not only for the Party.

**DP:** So it became a Congress Movement paper.

**BB:** Ja.

**DP:** It's extraordinary to read *New Age* and then read the other commercial press at the same time. It's a different world completely that they're reporting.

**BB:** Ja, well, you know, one of the consequences of the suppression of *New Age* was that other papers were brought into the frontline almost willy-nilly; they had to take up things which previously they'd ignored, because they felt, oh well, that's something for *New Age*, maybe. But the whole character of the press in South Africa's changed since those days, I mean you've got more and more black reporters, for example. In my day there were never black reporters on any of the bloody papers, *Rand Daily Mail* at that stage - and I remember we had a terrible battle getting a chap like HA Naidoo into the South African Society of Journalists, they just wouldn't have anybody, they didn't want blacks. I mean, that was the atmosphere at the time, well now today -

**DP:** They're desperately seeking them!

**BB:** Yes, for all sorts of reasons, not only political reasons, but of course for circulation reasons. One reason why the *Mail* eventually foundered was because it had - it became more and more involved in black politics, because it was in search of readers. And ultimately the advertisers kicked and the paper went down the drain. But let me put it this way, the *Mail* became much more of an outlet for African grievances than it ever had been before. And I think the disappearance of *Spark*, *New Age*, whatever, transferred the focus of attention to other elements in the press, and many of them started dealing with issues - to some extent, perhaps, they'd flirted with them before, but never in an organised and calculated way, and I think they did start to confront these issues much more after we'd disappeared than they had done before.

**DP:** The whole media spectrum in the 'sixties shifted - I mean, the centre became the Left.

**BB:** Ja. And I think the demise of the *New Age* had something to do with that. I mean, there were all sorts of other factors as well, but it contributed.

**DP:** Why - this is really not part of newspapers, but how come the Youth League and the Party were fairly - the Youth League were fairly antagonistic to the Party at one stage. What was it that brought them together?

**BB:** Well, I don't know that they were ever brought together in quite that way, but I think the thing that welded them was the campaign against the Suppression of Communism Act and the Defiance Campaign of '52. The disappearance of the Party publicly had quite a big influence on people in Congress who weren't communist. The feeling that there was a rival disappeared. People like Moses Kotane, JB Marks and all sorts of others were able to function in the Congress side by side with everybody else on a basis of complete equality. I think both sides learned to appreciate one another in a way which hadn't been possible before.

**DP:** And of course the Party workers within the ANC were such solid, good hard workers it seems.

**BB:** Ja.

**DP:** What was Ruth like as a person, you must have got to know her quite well?

**BB:** Oh, I knew her very well. She was a - very sharp mind, as I've indicated; very bright personality, very enquiring and investigative mind that she had. When she did a story, she wanted to know everything about it, every detail; she would take nothing for granted, she would take no chances. When you got a story from her you knew that everything was accurate and had been checked.

In all my period I can't remember her sending something which she hadn't investigated herself personally, so that she would, say, take over an opinion from somebody else and pass it as her own, or something of that kind. She was a very good journalist, quite apart from anything else, a very good seeker-out of facts; an inquisitive person in many ways, but not in a bad sense, not in the sense that she wanted to know things that she wasn't entitled to know about, but she wanted to know everything about what she was entitled to know about. And she didn't leave things, she followed them up, she chased people, she harried people and she was very persistent, she wouldn't take no for an answer from officials, for instance. She would get at them until she had got what she wanted out of them. She was a very uncompromising person; she knew what she wanted, and sometimes she was difficult to work with because she had her own view of things and she stuck to her point of view uncompromisingly. She was sometimes very critical of other people who she felt didn't rise to the same standard as she set herself. I don't know - what more can I say about her.

**DP:** Did she have any battles with head office?

**BB:** Lots of battles, yes, lots.

**DP:** Battles of wills?



**BB:** Battles over emphases, battles over the way in which stories were handled, emphases that were given to things that she'd sent down. I remember almost the first story that she sent down after I'd become editor was the report on the Bethel potato farms, the investigation that she went on with Michael Scott. She sent down that story on the Monday morning, and I already had more or less a rough idea of the way the paper was going to work out, and I thought, well, this ought to be a good story, I'll make that the splash not for this issue, but for the next one, because it would require completely altering the layout and all the rest of it. What she hadn't told me was that meanwhile the whole thing was going to be blown in the daily press in Johannesburg, and that caused a furious row between her and me, because in a way I'd let her down, although I hadn't known all the facts of the case. Because the story was eventually credited to the *Star*, or Michael Scott, or whoever -

**DP:** Ja, Scott released it in the *Mail* before hers came out.

**BB:** - ja, before us. And if I had sort of been in the picture beforehand, that issue would have been - that sort of thing caused a furious row between her and me. Although that was an accident. But there were other things from time to time, differences of approach between Johannesburg and Cape Town politically, and over odds and ends as you get in any movement.

**DP:** What were the differences? Did Jo'burg have a harder line, or a ...

**BB:** Well, Jo'burg was always more adventurous. It was much more the political centre of the country. Things were starting in Jo'burg more often than anywhere else, they would take initiatives - sometimes, I mean, it's one of the reasons why the centre functioned in Cape Town for so long, because Jo'burg tended to be very impetuous, to do things in haste and repent at leisure. And Cape Town always felt itself to be more solemn, more conservative, maybe, but more reliable in the long run. This sort of argument went on continually between Johannesburg and Cape Town.

**DP:** In the Party, or in the paper?

**BB:** From both. I mean, you know, the two couldn't be separated from that point of view, because the one reflected the other. The paper would never do anything contrary to the opinion of the Central Committee. I think sometimes Ruth chafed at that sort of constraint, and that's why she probably felt much happier with *Fighting Talk*, where she was completely free to do her own thing. Because *Fighting Talk* was not ever on the agenda of the central committee, although again, nothing would have been published in *Fighting Talk* which was contrary. But it was a much

broader platform. No, there were occasional frictions but there was nothing radical. I mean there were frictions with all the offices, with Port Elizabeth, with Durban - you know, when you're putting together a paper of this kind you have to balance one thing against another, one cent against another and so on and so forth, and of course the partisans in each centre felt that they were more important than anybody else -

**DP:** Trying to get the front page!

**BB:** - ja. I think anybody on any newspaper would have the same experience.

**DP:** Mm. Would she eventually give in to ... if you said that's got to go there and that's the way it goes?

**BB:** Well, it wasn't a question of giving in, I mean, I was there on the spot doing the deciding, that was my job, I mean, the arguments might continue, she would disagree with me about various things. I don't think there was ever anything radical in the sense that we had political disagreements over a matter of policy while we were working together on the paper - you know, minor differences of opinion about this or that. It wasn't as if she felt that we shouldn't propagate votes for all or something of that kind -

**DP:** Fundamental differences, ja.

**BB:** - nothing fundamental. But certainly she had her ideas about what should be done and how it should be done, and very often she would send down ideas about how she wanted her story laid out which I would not act on, and of course that would cause problems. I mean, very often I did, because her sense on the whole was very good. Most times she got what she wanted. But there were occasions when there were clashes, but they were minor. I wouldn't play them up at all.

**DP:** Do you think there was any minor or major or slight contradiction between her journalistic work and her Party work? One gets the sense with Ruth that she travelled her own road often, and I wondered if that ever got her into trouble politically. Such an independent woman, somehow.

**BB:** Yes, well I don't, I mean I wasn't aware of anything of this kind during the time - you know, it didn't reflect itself in anything connected with the paper. I wouldn't say so, no. Not that I can think of.

**DP:** Are any of the paper's journalists around in London?

**BB:** Well, it's not that we had so many! There's... Fred Carneson is here, Albie Sachs is here...

**DP:** Did Albie actually write for the paper?

**BB:** Yes.

**DP:** Do you know Fred Carneson's - how I can get hold of him?

**BB:** Yes, I can give you his telephone number.

**DP:** That's great. Albie I just feel I don't want to bother just right now; I'm not sure how he is, but -

**BB:** Well, he's good - I'm not sure how much he wants people to bother him, but I've seen him a couple of times since he came here, and his spirit is very good. But he's still being treated.

**DP:** Still in hospital?

**BB:** No, he's out of hospital, but he's still getting treatment. I think that the idea is that part of his recuperation should be as quiet as possible, but on the other hand he's been televised and over the radio and all the rest of it -

**DP:** I was going to leave him till December, as late as possible.

**BB:** Ja, that's probably wise. Fred's here; Noni's in Cape Town; Govan is in Port Elizabeth; MP Naicker's dead; Makiwane's dead; I don't know who else I can refer you to.

**DP:** And Amy, I don't know whether she ever wrote for the paper?

**BB:** No, she didn't - she may have done an odd piece here and there, but she wasn't one of our journalists. She did the filing. She would know everything about what was going on at that time because she was in the office all the time, in and out of the office all the time, she wasn't working full-time or anything. Who else can you think of?

**DP:** I can't, actually; Rowley won't let me talk to Jacquie...

**BB:** Really? Why? (laughs)

**DP:** He says he doesn't want her to be bothered by silly questions.

**BB:** Is she ... uh, in a state or something?

**DP:** I think - I think, I'm not sure, but I got the sense that she is logically quite fragile. I think also Natal's a difficult place to live in, especially if you operate in those avenues. (pause) For me - how's your time?

**BB:** No, it's alright so far.

**DP:** What I have to work out is how to cast the newspaper, how to actually fit it into the political continuum, how to fit the people into the paper; you know, it's the problem of writing. Do you have any ideas how - I mean, suggestions, just generally, how you think a book about Ruth and *New Age* and the political press of the period might be written - chronologically, or thematically, or ... I always have this trouble, I've written a couple of books, and it's always how to cast things.

**BB:** Well, you want a sort of slogan to cover the description of the paper. I mean, the way I looked at it was always that it was a Movement paper; it was there to serve the interests of the Movement, to express the wishes of the Movement. That's the only way I can think of it. Then you have to start defining the character of the Movement, and that of course people are still arguing about - what is it, a nationalist movement, a communist movement, a mixture of both? Whatever it is, I think that's the way I would look at it. Especially because at that time - and I think its character becomes clearer, because at that time the ANC had no outlet of its own, and everything was really channelled in this way largely through *New Age*, which would now be spread over *African Communist*, *Sechaba*, all sorts of things, *Mayibuye*, everything else that people are producing now. The ANC's got a hundred publications which at that stage they didn't do. But I think that's the only way in which the paper makes any sense.

**DP:** Of being part of - it seems to me so important -

**BB:** - part of the Movement; it belongs to the Movement. It's not something separate, not something independent.

**DP:** And even more than that; it tended to be so important in welding the - the welding process that went on in the 'fifties, so much of that, *New Age* seems to be so important in that, because it's the mouthpiece all the time. It's setting political agendas as much as reporting on what's happening.

**BB:** Well, if it's doing that, it's doing that as part of the Movement, because I think this is what we were all on about - what the Party was on about, what the ANC was on about. You know, it's not as if the paper took decisions about what should be done and how they should be done. It was sort of objective, it didn't really think of itself as an independent agent welding together the Communist Party and the ANC, because it was part of that process. And that's why it thought like that and did what it did do. It's not as if it came from outside to do those sorts of things. But by and large, I would agree with that, yes, that's what it was.

**DP:** Hindsight does suggest that it was an important strand in that process of welding -

**BB:** Yes, well, I think it couldn't have been done without the paper.

**DP:** Really, would you go as far as that?

**BB:** Ja, I would.

**DP:** Because it seemed to have been the voice that was speaking to both sides.

**BB:** Well, how else did you talk to the other side? I mean, you could get together meetings and so on and so forth, but you're dealing not with a few politicians at the top but with a mass movement. You have to get this around in the townships and everywhere. And I really do think that the development of the 'fifties, the mass upsurge, the Defiance Campaign - let's take the Defiance Campaign as an example, because during the Defiance Campaign our circulation went up by fifty percent. Well, these things happen, I mean, the circulation of the paper would go up and down with the politics, because we tried all sorts of gimmicks during the lean periods when political inactivity and repression combined to reduce our circulation. We tried things like beauty competitions, short stories, cartoons and all sorts of gimmicks which made absolutely no difference at all, because the daily press or any other press could - they did that sort of thing much better than we did! But with politics, nobody could do what we could do, and when the Defiance Campaign came, everybody wanted to read the *Guardian*. I think the whole Defiance Campaign could not have

happened without the paper, because that was where you got your news, that's where you knew what was going on, that's where the message was carried across.

**DP:** Even the recruiting of volunteers, appeals went through the paper.

**BB:** Yes. All sorts of things.

**DP:** That's fascinating, because the people in the paper are largely Party people. The news is in a sense being filtered through their perspective, or one feels that might have been where Marxism enters the consciousness on a broader level. The news is being filtered through a Marxist concept of how things were, and the ANC leadership is reading the news in that way.

**BB:** Also, of course, because the people in the paper - well, they may have been Party people, but they were also people in the congresses. Alright, whites could only be in the Congress of Democrats, but all the blacks who had any contact with the paper were in the ANC. It was like every Party member was in the ANC.

**DP:** The paper was also a political forum.

**BB:** Ja.

**DP:** It's a fascinating paper, we need one like that again, but times have changed!

**BB:** Well, on the other hand, one has been quite astonished by the proliferation of papers in the recent period. The alternative press has really multiplied, and it's doing a magnificent job in a way, doing all sorts of things which we couldn't do. Resources of staff, for example, which we never had, there are all sorts of people working on these papers and they're doing a wonderful job of research. There's information of a certain kind which you can get which was very difficult in our day, we didn't have all these connections. Didn't have so many academics and students and so on on the job.

**DP:** And they're using high-tech as well, laser printers ... Did I send you a paper on media?

**BB:** What was it called?

**DP:** The Political Press in the 1980's.

**BB:** No.

**DP:** I'll drop off a copy. It's an analysis of the left-wing papers in the 1980's.

**BB:** No, I'd like to see that.

**DP:** I thought I'd sent you - you know, something -

**BB:** - in the Communist Party in the early days with my father, and he was chairman of the Party in 1924 for example.

**DP:** Julius?

**BB:** Julius, yes. Tilly's still in South Africa.

**DP:** I've spoken to her.

**BB:** You've spoken to her. I wonder what she'll think of her portrayal in that film! Have you seen *A World Apart* yet?

**DP:** She's got a script. I haven't seen the film.

**BB:** Well, I don't know what script she's got. If she's got the first script, it's nothing like the film. It's been vastly improved.

**DP:** I believe she's not quite as fierce in the film as she actually was?

**BB:** Quite a tough character. But in the film she's quite different. In the film she's - in a way, made a bit of a joke of. Have you seen the film? You haven't - it's a good film. I don't know what script she's got, because Shawn showed me her first script too and I wasn't bowled over by it, but the film has turned into something different. I think the script's been altered; the director's obviously had a big hand in the thing. Other people have played a part - Jeremy Brickhill was the assistant director and he's made his impact felt. All round, they've combined to produce something different from the script. Much better than the first script.

**DP:** I'm looking forward to seeing it.

**BB:** No, it's a good film. Especially when you contrast it to *Cry Freedom*, which was a noisy thing -

**DP:** - a film about Donald Woods!

**BB:** That's right! I mean, there're some good things, I think it's had a good impact on the people who don't know anything about South Africa, but this is a much more - I mean, artistically, it's a much better film. It's about the development of a personality,

and the tensions of this developing personality, especially in relation to Ruth. It's well-handled and very moving.

**DP:** What was Tilly like? She's formidable now!



**BB:** Yes, she's got a very good intellect, a very good brain. Very formidable person. A very nice person, but also very difficult, very critical; sometimes rasping. When you've seen Tilly, you'll appreciate something about Ruth too, because Ruth's inherited a lot of that.

**DP:** Did you grow up in Jo'burg connected to the family?

**BB:** Yes.

**DP:** What was Ruth like as a kid?

**BB:** Well, you know, when you're a young boy you don't pay much attention to young girls. I remember going on picnics with her; we used to go out, our two families together and pitch tents at places like Swartkops - I don't know if you know Johannesburg at all - spend some time by the river there. But boys didn't play with girls in those days. I mean, I knew she was around, but I wouldn't have thought twice about her, about anything! And then of course, politically, she was a little younger than I was. We next came together, I suppose on the paper, in the Party.

**DP:** Ruth must have been a very hard act to follow for a daughter, I would have thought.

**BB:** Yes ... I think there was a lot of resentment between those two, as well. But Tilly's got her very appealing side, too. She's very bright, very well-read, she's got a very good mind. She was always very helpful. Both of them were very helpful. They never made a fuss about anything; they were always in the frontline, just behind the frontline. Tilly was never I think a Party member.

**DP:** She said she wasn't. I asked her that. She said she was on the fundraising committees.

**BB:** Yes. I don't quite know why. She wasn't that sort of person, you know. Some people get involved, some don't. But she was never - she was always supportive. Never made any problems, never objected to anything. Because they were taking a chance too, in the later days when raids were taking place and their house was being used.

**DP:** What was Julius like?

**BB:** Also very supportive.

**DP:** He was a soft man, wasn't he; a gentle sort of - that's the impression I get.

**BB:** Well, no businessman is ever soft. There's a side to Julius also that's quite ruthless. But as far as our things were concerned he was always very helpful, very supportive and never made any fuss. But in business, I think he was very sharp and - oh yes, you can't succeed in business unless you're tough and ruthless and you're prepared to grind the other fellow down into the dust. That's what business is all about.

**DP:** I don't think in all I've ever read about the purges in the 'thirties I've ever seen any reference to them. I mean, did they just weather that storm and carry on?

**BB:** Not really, no. They were around, I think, they had been - well, you know, I knew them throughout the 'thirties because we visited one another. I went to their home, they came to our home. But he was preoccupied with his business at that stage, and when I think of their home - they lived in a big double-storey house in Kensington. We lived in different places which were by comparison shacks, because he was doing well in business, and I think that took up his time. But politically he was unchanged. My father and his father used to be as I said together. But not politically. I never saw him in the political circles that I went to at that time, we used to go to - not in the late 'thirties, in the early period, in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties I used to go to meetings and I never saw Julius around.

**DP:** And do you think Ruth got her politics from her mother?

**BB:** Oh no, I think she got it from both. Her mother was not so much political as - well, she read everything, she knew all the books that were out and so on. A very voracious reader. I suppose she still is.

**DP:** She's got - her memory's going. She's got a huge memory drop now. She didn't remember who you were at one stage, and then remembered afterwards. That sort of memory.

**BB:** Shame. Ja, well, that means something's gone. Because she was very sharp.

**DP:** I saw her two years too late, actually. That's the feeling I got, really.

**BB:** And Ranie I suppose would not be of help at all?

**DP:** He won't talk to me. He's hostile and very wealthy.

**BB:** Ja, that's why!

**DP:** Tilly said to me "what's wrong with Ranie?" I said, oh well, he's alright, he's in Jo'burg. "No", she said, "what went wrong with him?"

**(end of side two)**