

J.F. So can you start out by telling me when and where you were born? ↙

R.S. ? I was born Varkliam - Latvian it's (?) Latvia - and the real pronunciation of the town is called Varklianos - I was born on the 31st, December, 1913 - that's the old Russian calendar - the new one is 12, January, 1914, but I found a postcard from my father to my elder sister written on the 1st January when he tells her that I was born, so we put down my birthday in book because there was those days no question of birth certificates - all our birthdays were written down in a book by my father.

J.F. So I should record it from January....

R.S. 12. January's my real birthday but because my passport it's 31st. December, but that is the old calendar - you know that Russia had - I'll take you back, right - my father was a teacher and was a socialist - he supported very much the nine ^{nought} five revolutionaries. (1905?)

My mother was born in a - in a country town, but when she was about fifteen she followed her two sisters to England - I'm not going to go into detail under what conditions she travelled - and when she came to England both of them were married, had families already, and their husbands had tailoring shops and she went to work in a tailoring shop in Leeds - that's where they stayed - (.....) conditions are really (.....) because they work from eight in the morning till nine o'clock at night with little wages, and she told me that she lived on black bread, herring and start (?) - that was her diet -

And she an other three girls from the same workshop - she left her sister and stayed with them - they had a room but they didn't have any oven, and they had a little primus on which they used to make for themselves something hot to drink - now that's my mother's background.

When she came from England - she came from England - she left England where her sisters had followed their husbands to South Africa - they went and joined the British Army in the fight against - in the Boer War, and that's - and so they - when they left for South Africa she then came back to Latvia to stay with her mother - the father had died - and that is how she met my father, who was a widower with two children, but he was a very intelligent and advanced man, and he saw in her something new from the - from the English world, so he started to take her out, and they enjoyed walks and that's how they got married.

① Then as I think I can tell you because (I was brought up on the story that when the 1905 revolution was on my father had to hide revolutionaries, and he first of all hid them in the synagogue, and then the blacks (?) hundred also followed the synagogue, so he took them out from the synagogue in the middle of the night and put them in the cellar under our house) -

All houses had cellars, and he put - (my mother was due to have a baby so she was already, you know, expecting one of my sisters, so he put a bed over the door that led into the cellar, and when the police, Black Hundreds (.....) came to look in our house for the revolutionaries my mother was in pain, pretending, crying that she's going to have a baby, so they looked around, they looked in the cupboards for the (Laugh) 1905 revolutionaries - looked for them everywhere but never thought of the cellar) -

R.S. and any case they couldn't find the door because the bed was over the cellar and the blankets were hanging over so they couldn't have seen the cellar - that is my upbringing, right.

I'm not going to speak more about my father and mother - both of them had a very good tremendous influence on me - I owe to them a lot - my father, who at a early age gave me to read socialist booklets, and my mother, who was a very practical woman, had given (?) me and helped me right through, to do underground work, when in the '20's there was some election campaign I was engaged in helping the workers and peasants government ticket - my mother's cousin was the mayor of town and she was there '14 - she heard that there's going to be raids, -

She quickly came to the house, grabbed up all our literature, put it in a - in a big sheet and took it as if she's taking laundry away to my aunt's place, and asked my sister and me she sent away to a dance (?) - that was my first time that mother should send me to a dance, but she thought that that was a good place -

So when they came up to our house there was absolutely nothing. - in fact we didn't do the work for the movement in the house - we had a - what you call it - upstairs....

J.F. Attic.

R.S. Attic, that was straw and so on - (that's where we worked) on, but she knew that we were working there and she cleared everything up, so when we came home at about ten, eleven o'clock everything was over - but it's these little things that mother did, and telling me about the 1905 revolution and telling me other things that had given me ideas of how to carry on with work.)

Now I - (after going through primary and secondary school the question was what was I going to do - I was interested in chemistry and also medicine, so I joined to take up Latin in our school) - we hadn't done Latin - (we had done other languages, German, Latvian, Russian, Jewish, Hebrew, but not Latin -

So three of us who were interested to do Latin - medicine - went to the Pope - now that is the Pope - the Pope - the Catholic, ja, who examined us in the Latvian language - he was a Lat - and I - he asked me what I intend to do when I told him I'm interested, so he invited me to come and learn Latin from him -

So three of us, one boy and another girl and myself, after we finished our school, to prepare ourselves for the gymnasium, which was a Latvian gymnasium (.....) - (we went to learn Latin at his place) - we started to teach Latin - to learn Latin - and then on one morning when we came there (they always - this was the custom) that you knee (- curtsy, you know, for the teacher) -

I mean this is not done perhaps in the English school, but it was done in the Latvian schools I think, (so I curtsied to him and then I noticed a very big cross the front of him, which tantamounted I'm curtsying to the cross, which is not done by Jewish girl) -

(I then spoke to him - I said : "When I curtsy to you could you please remove the cross" - and he told me he wouldn't, and then the other two and myself said well, if he can't, - if you are not prepared to remove the cross, then we cannot come to you beca - or we will not curtsy to you - no, you must curtsy) - well, you have to make

R.S.

.... - (so the morning we went on strike) and in the afternoon I mean we just didn't carry on with the lesson, you see - we didn't curtsy to him, and in the morning - in the afternoon at about two we were still there because we used - it was quite far out of town, about three miles, and we used to walk to it in - to the place in the morning and it was - there was a Catholic institute - you know, a theology institute in his big place -

So (in the afternoon he called for us) - (we came and he made an agreement that he would wear something over it, so we will not curtsy to him, so we agreed to come on these conditions and I - we went there, so I learned Latin to join the Latvian University, the (.....) - but I didn't stay -

(Then) there was another because there were - lots of fascists turned up, Nazis - (this is 19 - not 29 - '27 - and they were preparing to attack the Jewish town, the Jewish women and so on. - there was a river where young girls and boys) - Jewish boys (would go and swim, and we heard them making a plan that on Sunday morning when the Jewish girls and boys go to the river to swim that they will attack.

Now I had a cousin who was - you can call him a Bolshevik - we knew that he was the movement. - (he had organised a defence, a Jewish defence committee, so I went and I told him what I had heard, and I also went to our principal of our school and told him - we all know he was a communist) -

(So then I had to give evidence in court and we decided it would be - my mother thought it would be very bad if I go to the Latvian (?) you know - only three Jews, and I one of them that appeared in court to give evidence, so we decided I'll go to Riga,....

J.F.

Where's that?

R.S.

Riga is the ^{Latvian} capital, right - (when I was very young my father died) - when I was twelve years old - and my mother had to look after us - those days there were no pensions for teachers, and when the teachers came together in our house to consider what help they can give to our family my mother told them that she doesn't want any charity from them, that she has ten fingers and she will open a bakery, and the only thing she wants from them that for the first months or so that they should buy from her, of which they all agreed -

My mother was quite famous for her very great cleanliness, so her place became very popular, and we children helped - I was doing the books for my mother - she worked - what she spends and how much it comes in - that was my job - my other sister helped actually in kneading - she got a woman to help her to do the kneading, but there was always physical work to do, manual work to do in addition to keeping the books -

So after spending at home, after school till about the age of over 14 - we are going on for 15 - I (.....) to Riga - then I had (heard) my three sisters - my two sisters who were the step-sisters, both left wingers (?) and my other sister, my elder sister who was also working there -

(and) I was offered a home by my elder sister, but I wanted to be on my own because I already was in the movement at home - we joined very young. - at a very young age - (in fact my teacher, the principal of our school, after Father died he came to me and he says : Look, I know that you were always having discussions with your

R.S. father - any time you want to discuss, you want to know something, come to me - so he carried on giving me socialist books, but I also happened to be what they call a pola (?) Zionist - a Zionist - and at one stage when I was already out of school the Zionist organisation wanted me to defend the Balfour Declaration, so I took the Balfour Declaration, I read it - I was due - this debate was to be held on the Sunday, so on Saturday - Friday and Saturday I was reading it thoroughly through, and by Saturday afternoon I literally threw the Balfour Declaration, as I was reading it, chucked it away, I explained to my mother that I'm not for the Balfour Declaration, it's all bluff - there cannot be a home, security for the Jewish people, with the Balfour Declaration. The only security the Jewish people can have is in a common socialist society. -

So on Sunday morning I went to tell the Zionist organisation that I'm not prepared to defend the Balfour Declaration, to speak for it. - was a great excitement - how can I do it? - (I said: "Look, if you force me to speak I'll speak against it, because I'm not going to tell people things that I don't believe in. - (so they) agreed and they asked me not to attend the meeting at all. - not to speak against it. -

I went to (.....) to my friend, my teacher, who was a great friend of my father - they always used to go out for walks - told him what happened, and he agreed that I can go back to them and tell them that I will go to the meeting and undertake not to speak, which I did on his advice -

But after that meeting (.....) called me and invited me to join some secret group where we would carry on learning about Karl Marx, and I was studying the first time Leninism by Stalin. - I didn't know that it was Leninism by Stalin because they never gave us the names of books - we were getting only like this one page - and then you read it, you discuss it, you give it back, you get another book -

It's only when I came to South Africa and I attended this other (?) class and I participated in this other class and....

J.F. In what class?

R.S. In South Africa in a starter (?) class - study group.

J.F. Oh, study class.

R.S. With Johnny Gomes - you must have heard about him - when Johnny said to me : You know so much about it - that I could carry on being one of tutors, and he gave me the books to prepare myself for the next class, and then I realised that what I was studying in the past was this book - I mean that is how we did - I also while I was in Riga studied also historical materialism - the (.....) materialism -

Now this was by a Soviet woman who was working in the Soviet Trade Mission, and she was another one who had a great - made a great impact on me - she looked after our young peoples morals - In Latvia summer time, particularly in June month, you hear great singing chorus national songs, where all girls dress themselves in special Latvian clothes, beads, and go away in the countryside to entertain the peasants, then she - we went -

Young people were taken to this place to - in a way of mixing with peasant girls and so on - so she looked after us, that we

R.S. should not be interfered with by the boys, because we were all sleeping in a barn - and had really in a way explained to me the facts of life much more than I learned from anybody else - gave me books on medicine to read, and polit - well, she was my political educator, so much so that we had to deliver lectures as part of the training -

There was a peoples university in Riga, so I - now what was the name of the leader of the Iranian people - I've forgotten his name now - we had - Iran -

J.F. Khomeni ?

R.S. No, no, no, a long time ago, who was afterwards killed by them - I'll find that - anyhow so she asked me to prepare a talk, because there was great interference by the British with Iran to take away their own (?) possessions from them, and she gave me books, advised me where to get books, and I prepared myself to give a lecture on this - I've forgotten his name - Mossadek - that was - I'm glad that I remembered his name because I - he made a great impact on me as a honest man, and it was so clear to me

the dishonesty, the corruption, the badness of the British and the Americans to try to undermine and to destroy him -

So this was all part of my upbringing. - (in Riga I went to a technical school in day time till about three o'clock in the afternoon and in the evening several evenings a week I attended a college for pedagogy, because now I had moved away from medicine - my view was to be a worker but also teacher. - → see p. 10 -

In the technical college we received a stipend there - stipend - very little money, but it enabled me to pay for the room with that cousin - we had a room together - and my mother used to send to me rusks and eggs and cottage cheese and jam, and even eggs, so I had a good diet from that point of view, and in addition to money we used to get tickets for lunch which was a -

We used to go in a communal restaurant - all of us would go there for lunchtime from half past twelve to one or half past one, and in the morning we used to get a cup of cocoa in school too - so at my sister was very concerned that I should get more better food, so she would insist that I should come up to her place to have the dinner, but it interfered with my style of life, and I couldn't tell her, although I knew that when she was young she had the similar style of life, but I couldn't tell her -

And once when my sister, younger sis - elder sister found out she was terribly upset and thought that, you know, the world is coming to an end because I'll be arrested.

Now it is actually these incidents, my education - (I had a friend who still lives in Moscow, Liev Stokol (?) - she's now Liev (...)) and whenever I go to Moscow I meet her - she was arrested one night, and when her mother was told that she was arrested her mother went to my mother because we were very close friends -

We were such close friends. - not only did we work in the same unit - study group - in general unit - (but also) we used to, two nights a week - (one night she would stay with me and one night I would stay with her, such closeness there was. - but we would read together -

So when my mother heard that I was - that (Leah) (?) was arrested

R.S. she quickly telephoned to my brother, who was in South Africa, that I - that (he must send papers for me to) - to leave Latvia. Now my mother had always, as they say in German, a drang, a desire to live in a English-speaking country, but my father would not move - her -

The rest of her family went to Africa, to America, but she remained because Father would not move out of Latvia, but when my father died - I mentioned to you she opened a bakery but she was all the time saving up money to get out of Latvia to go to South Africa or to America -

Those days you couldn't go to America - America was closed - but you could still go to South Africa, so she sent away my brother, my eldest brother to South Africa first, she sent another dau - (.....) to South Africa, and now she had succeeded under this to send me -

She phoned me up and asked me to come to (.....) - I turned up - she told me the plan she has for me and I said : I want to think it over because I had already a boyfriend from school - he was studying engineering, and I said I want to discuss it with him and I'll give her the reply - but she said : You can't go to South Africa unless you have a (.....) with you -

That means a - a certificate of good behaviour - so she says : Before you go back to Riga let's fix that up - so her cousin was the mayor of (.....) - she took me to him and he gave me a letter to the chief of the police, who happened to be - his father and my father were great friends, so he knew me as a little girl - he would come to our house and play with me and so on -

So when I came to him with my mother and showed the letter from my - from mother's cousin he had raised objections from me going - why should I go and this and the other thing - well, I told him that I going to join my brother whom he knew well, and he gave me the Xoposuar nubugenus (?) - that paper of good behaviour, which was really that you are clear politically - and I went with that to Riga and I discussed it with the comrades - not only with my boyfriend but with my comrades, (and it was agreed you can go to a capitalist country.) -

The movement did not encourage people going to the Soviet Union because they say the Soviet - the people struggled for their own freedom and we Latvians have to struggle for our freedom, and we must remain good neighbours, you see - so that is how I left Latvia to go to South Africa.

My brother wrote to me flourishing letters about his free Communist Party, this and the other thing - (the trade union is so free-(?) not like in Latvia.) However I came to South Africa on the 6th November, 1929 when I was 15 years old, going on for 16 - my 16th birthday I had in South Africa.

And the very next few days I was introduced to people on - well, who were communists, who were supporters of the Communist Party. - I was very disappointed that nothing was there for the 7th November - (the 7th November was a Thursday - I arrived on the Wednesday the 6th but they were going to celebrate the Communist Party and all -

They were going to celebrate it on the Sunday) - that's when they held - we are going to have a public meeting and so on - so on the Sunday I - I had two minds actually - I wanted to go back

R.S. and I travelled on a German boat to Vienna, and the German comrades had assured me if I'm not happy in South Africa they will collect money for me and take me back to Germany and from Germany I can go back to Latvia if I'm not happy.

I went and I told them they were - they came - they were going on to Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and - what was it called - Maputo was called Laurencio Marques - so I told them that I'm not happy and I agreed that when they come back I will tell them what my plans are -

But on the Friday they had left - the boat had left already - I went to do shopping for my sister and - by the way, I've forgotten to tell you - (because of my cousins I had learned English - it was by an American person, so my English was not the way of English speaking people,) it was American, (but nevertheless I could get on) -

So when I was buying the vegetables I saw workers coming out from the factory - there was a laundry, a furniture factory around the corner - a little further on was a clothing factory - I asked them whether they are - whether they have a union, and if they are members of the union - all of them - (one of them say they have a union, but they are not members of the union - the others say they have no union) - and I walked off with the idea that is virgin soil!

here in South Africa this

J.F. That is what?

R.S. Virgin soil, right - (so by Friday night I stopped crying) - (Wednesday night I cried, Thursday night - I mean Thursday night I cried but Friday night I never cried - I was reading the newspapers, you know, to acquaint myself with the situation, and other material I was given to read, so I had lots of stuff to read -

Saturday I had a confrontation with my sisters and brothers landlady - (she was a German woman) - (and in the morning when my brother and sister had gone to work she was shouting and calling her servant "nigger", and the servant was crying) - she called her thief and nigger and so on - and I went down to speak to this woman - I spoke German fluently, so I spoke with her in German - and told her that if she's dissatisfied, if she's dishonest, speak to her decently but don't call her and make her cry) -

She then demanded that we should leave the (Laugh) - (the flat - we were staying upstairs - or I should have no right to get into the yard, and not interfere with her servant) - (so we remained staying on, but it was to me the first sample of racism, and I objected to it) - now on.....

END OF SIDE ONE.

R.S.

On Sunday, I think it was the 11th. November - let us see - 6th. was Wednesday, 7th. Thursday, 8th. Friday, 9th. Saturday - the 10th. November (I went to this meeting at the foot of Adler Street - Johnny Gomes, Brown - these are all the comrades - spoke on the 7th. November the meaning of 7th. November, and they also - (there was a strike of textile workers in America) - that story I can't remember - I - I actually have a note about them - (and they described that,) about the workers strike (and called for a collection in solidarity) with the -

(So me, being a young white girl and very blonde, with white hair - they asked me to sell the South African Worker, which was the Communist party organ, and also to go around collecting money for these strikers.

(I took it all in, you know,) about the strikers and so on - (so now I - after the meeting I walked with Johnny Gomes and said to him : "Look, I've only come here on Wednesday, I have learned sewing so I can look for a job.) - (I also had hoped that there would be here a college where you can teach people to sew, because I've taken pedagogy - so he told me that he doesn't think that there is a school like this here - (and I want to do work for the movement.) -

(And he said to me : "Look, there is the ICU - which I had read all about it - (the remnants of the ICU is still in Cape Town - he will take me to) Shuba - (Comrade Shuba, who was the general secretary of the Cape Town Stevedoring Workers Union, and he's making an attempt to organise other workers.)

Johnny Gomes himself was a tailor, and he was working for a tailor, so he couldn't see me during the week, but on Saturday he fetched me and took me to Shuba's place, (and I begun to help Shuba, first of all because I knew English, to write out his membership cards in a book - the membership book - to write down to record the amounts of money they are giving - just doing clerical work, so -

(He started to organise the laundry workers - the same factory who said they have no union - so he involved me in this meetings) - when he had meetings on a Sunday morning he wouldn't let me work on the books - he would want me - he wanted me and he insisted that I sit and I listen in, and if I have anything to say I would say it to them - (so that was my really introduction to practical trade union work.)

Now I completely felt at ease with them, with Johnny Gomes, with Brown, with James La Guma, who was there - Shuba - (there were two other big leaders of the A.N.C., Tonjeni and Ndobe,) who were regarded as the lions of the Cape - Ndobe was a - a Basotho but Tonjeni was a Xhosa, and they were a team to organise the workers in the A.N.C., who at that time had Professor Tyler was the president or the general secretary of the Cape A.N.C., and he was a reactionary person and they were struggling against him -

(So I got involved with those people, and I was introduced to the discussion on the native republic, the black republic) - (now that is something of great honour to the Communist Party of South Africa, because it was the first and only organisation)

R.S. that put forward majority rule - the first organisation, I should say, on the African Continent, that had put forward the idea of a one vote for every person irrespective of race and colour) - and there was raging the debate about it - whites in the Communist Party they hadn't approved of it left the party) - well, that's another story - you will have heard it all from Brian when he discusses about his father - have you got that story?

J.F. I'd like to get it from your point of view if you want to talk about it.

R.S. Yes - well, I was completely in agreement with this slogan of black republic because that was to me a sensible thing, democracy - I couldn't visualise anything else) - (so when I had the discussions with Johnny Gomes and the others, then they saw that I was one of them) - I've forgotten to mention, Eddie Roux turned up to Cape Town in end of November or beginning of December I met him - I got a job and was working in Adler Street for a firm called Bregin (?) and on the 16th. December, 1929 a demonstration was going through Adler Street coming up from Plein Street, led by Eddie Roux and other Africans.) -

(3) I quickly go to my - to the manager desk and I say): (May I take an hour off - my lunch hour - or I'll work it off later on?) - (and she said yes,) and she didn't verse me why and what for, and I just quickly went and joined the demonstration, so there were only two whites, Eddie and myself) -

I'm saying this because there were white communists in the Cape Town Communist Party but they didn't join the demonstration, and it was only Eddie, and that's the time when they burned the effigy of Pirow - I think in - that Eddie Roux describes that incident.

(However, when I came back from the demonstration an hour later - I looked at my watch so that I shouldn't be -) I was allowed to work, but somehow or another forelady (?) - the manageress was told by somebody what I was doing - I couldn't tell you - but on Friday (I was called into the office and told that I can't work there any more because I participated in this demonstration) -

I didn't know my rights about a weeks notice (so I lost my job) on the Friday after the 16th. December - I think the 16th. December was on a Tuesday, I can't remember - and I didn't get a job right away until the 6th. January, (but I got a better job, a nicer job, bit more money.

J.F. What kind of work were you doing?

R.S. Well, I was doing dressmaking,) but really not making dresses but the place I worked for was Threw (?) Bros,, the leading ladies showroom for clothes, so people would come and try on frocks and you had to have an alteration, but it was very good clothes - all their clothes came either from Paris or Vienna.

Now I was trained - my - the head teacher - not only the head teacher but the principal of our technical college where I learned sewing, painting, and we had - this was an essential three subjects - was an Austrian (?) woman, Maria von Maritza, so the Austrian work and the finest was up my street, you see, and I

R.S. knew how to work it. I think at this stage I should also tell you a incident with Marie von Maritza - you will then fit (fill) it in afterwards -

When I was at college, at (this technical college) with Maria von Maritza, we decided to celebrate the 7th. November - this is the 7th. November, 1928 - when I say we I meant the schools - the secondary schools, the university and so on - we used to meet at some place in this peoples university -

Well, (we took a decision to celebrate the 7th. November, and we asked many of our schoolgirls, you know, they attended and (undertook to strike tomorrow, (but when the 7th. November took place I was the only one from our school that kept the promise and struck,) and I went to other schools - this was the arrangement, that other schools will - pupils - you know, students will come to us to urge our girls to come out and we will go to others -

Well, in the evening we all had to meet to get - give reports what happened in our schools - but although our girls didn't participate in the strike, in the demonstration, they nevertheless came to this meeting, and (then they told me that I was the only one that didn't come to school and that I'm likely to be expelled *and I was called in to see the principal.*)

So all schools - all the students appealed to them that should I be expelled they would go out on strike. I turned up to school the next morning, hang up - hung up my coat - you know, it's winter remember - when I'm called in to come to see Maria von Maritza - (so I went to her and she wanted to know why) did I - (was I absent yesterday, so I told her yesterday was the 7th. November) - (I regard it as a great historical date) - and I made a speech about the 7th. November, and that that is (why I demonstrated in solidarity with the Soviet people) -

(She) looked at me, and then started to tell me that she was, once upon a time, when she was young, a socialist, but she doesn't approve of Bolshevism, she doesn't approve of the Soviet Union, this and other thing) - I said to her: Well, I'm young today) - I don't know what I'm going to be like when I'll be your age, but at the present time I'm admiring the Soviet Union, and this is my belief and this is why I stayed away) -

(She got up and she said) because I'm so honest, (she was intending to expel me, but because I'm so honest she's going to take me into the classroom, and she literally led me like a little girl - she was a very well, you know, big woman - tall and well-built - a real personality - she led me into this classroom (and she told the scholars, (my class that she's not) - because she had told them that she was going to remove - that she's not expelling me because I'm very honest, and she can quite understand,) and she repeated to them what she told me and what I said and so on -

So I remained in school, and that really turned me into a leader in the school - not only to my class but to the higher class and the lower class - and it actually gave me myself that always to be straightforward) - the only one I wouldn't tell the entire truth would be to the police - but otherwise when you discuss with people things be honest. - and, as I say, it really turned me in really overnight, because I was from the province, (the other girls were mainly from Riga, and they didn't) - what

R.S.

.... shall I say - (accept easily the leadership of people from the province, but by that fact they did accept.) - (now subsequent to that we had grievances in the school and we organised a strike and I was one of leaders of the strike in the school) - it was simply again for more money to be paid, because you see, we used to turn out very expensive clothes and the school (.....) found ones that are poor - they got profits out of our work -

Even counting the stipend of fifteen roubles a month they gave us, they made profit because the very rich from Riga would have - women would have their clothes made there because - not because of our name but because of Marie von Maritza, who had come from Austria with a big diplomas, and she had a wonderful showroom of her clothes, and she would - she thought - she taught us to cut and to design - that's why we had to take up painting -

We had a special artist teaching us paints that we should get an appreciation of colours and so on - (so I just gave you that incident which had made a impact on my life.)

Now I'm back again to South Africa - (I become great friends with Shuba) - and then I think about in summer - I came in November - about winter time, April or so, (so I'm six months when he says to me): Look, you speak all right the English, you come and speak to the dockers in the morning - because he it was a problem -

You see, the quay (?) workers - that's the harbour workers - they were not organised - they were organised in another union called NURIS, National Union Railway and Harbour Serengs, but at times these harbour workers would come - would bribe the foreman, the serengs - I don't know whether you know the term serengs - it's like a foreman in one of the stevedoring companies -

So they would bribe the serengs - bring him a chicken, bring him eggs, and get a job - the stevedoring workers - these are - stevedoring are those that work on the boat and at the boat, helping to hand over the goods - they quay workers, the harbour workers are those that bring the goods along on the harbour, so there are two -

And the stevedoring workers were - that was the famous strike of the Stevedoring Workers in '19 (?) the formation - soon after the formation of the ICU, and they had by that time eight shillings per day while the Rail and Harbours were being paid only four shillings a day - you understand -

Therefore the Rail and Harbour Workers were going out of their way to get a job of the stevedoring, and the stevedoring workers were out against competition because they wanted to protect their jobs.

(Now this) is (1929 unemployment) has (hit also South Africa, and we used to go out to the docks with him in the morning, five o'clock in the morning I would meet him, and) - or six - I would be speaking and from there I would go to work to my place, and I often used to come smudged with the soot from the trains, black, and I would go in and just wash my hands and my face and go to work.

Now I then also helped to organise unemployed councils) - (that is subsequently when J.B. Marks comes also to Cape Town to help to organise the unemployed) - and I want to tell a story about J.B. - I went round - now of course in Cape Town - you've been there - Versco (?) is a big place, Goodwood is a big place, you know

R.S. but those days it was just sand dunes - (.....) and all these places - and when J.B. came to Cape Town to help us organising unemployed councils I walked in the sand with him - in later years, even in 1971 he teased me the way I used to walk - one foot in the sand one foot out - and we organised the unemployed councils, and then we decided.....

J.F. Unemployed?

R.S. Councils - unemploy - councils of unemployed - unemployed councils - then we decided that JB Marks should go and address the (.....) workers - that is - there was a big (.....) work plant - it's railway works in Saltriver (?) - the first time that they had an African to speak to them, to white workers. - they belonged to the AEU - to the Amalgamated Engineering Union - they belonged to the boilermakers, to the iron welders - to the big craft unions -

There were also African workers and Coloured workers as underlings (?) - you know, just to help to pass on things, but all the work was done by the whites. - and the railway administration had announced a (.....) so we decided we'll go and we'll talk to them, so when I took my lunch hour to go with J.B. Marks to this meeting, that it was agreed that I was going to chair the meeting but he was going to be the speaker. -

I got onto a box - you know, that's all we had as our platform, and addressed the meeting and told them about J.B. Marks and that J.B. Marks will speak. - now the name Marks sounds very - could be white, could be English, it could be Coloured. - but when J.B. Marks got onto the platform, and I don't think that he started to speak for a few minutes when they started to throw tomatoes at him, and you know, like this and prevent - this is the white workers - and prevent him from speaking. -

I jumped onto this box to defend him and I felt they wouldn't throw tomatoes at a white woman, and appealed to the workers to listen to him that they mustn't have - put their white faces - their white - that is they're protected - because by that time there was the civilised labour policy introduced by the government - you've heard about the civilised labour policy -

So I spoke to them but they were not - they broke up our meeting - but we agreed that we are going to come again to them, even that we speak to little groups of people, but we must break through - and when I read now about Terreblanche, the AWB groups, I think - I can't help thinking of that period too, because you have to remember that nazis - nazism was already raising its head in Germany, and racist ideology was also coming to the fore in South Africa. -

It was to the fore, the civilised labour policy, right - so this is that period. (Now from the unemployed councils I helped the tram and bus workers union. - tram and bus workers - they were having a strike for higher wages) - I helped them - and then it was agreed by the Communist Party that I should give up work - this is in 1932, December, 1932 - that I should give up work and do full time for the movement, work, but there was no money. -

So there was a Zulu woman in Cape Town who was living with a white man by the name of Mr Beit (?) and she used to come to the foot of Adderly Street meetings, and had earlier invited Johnny

R.S. Gomes and me to come and have tea with her - she lived in a very nice big house in Landsdowne, Cape Town - now she invited me to come and stay with her - she had a son by this white man, and he was by that time I think a student studying law or something - I'd never met him - but she had ideas of me becoming her daughter in law because I'm non racialist, and so on -

3 So she invited me to come and stay at her place, and I stayed at her place, but they were elderly people, they didn't eat much, and I really lost a tremendous amount of weight - my money that I got from the place where I worked, my holiday leave - accumulated holiday leave - even my wages - I handed over to the movement to - for organising meetings and leaflets - and I was left even without any money to travel from Landsdowne to Cape Town -

So I don't want to mention the names of comrades because they are still in South Africa in Cape Town, and my own sister - they would help me by getting me tickets so that I could - money for bus tickets so that I shouldn't have to walk - to walk much -

My sister used to bring sandwiches to her work from my mother's place - because I wasn't working, wasn't earning, I had left home and I went to stay with Frances White - I mean she didn't call herself White but she lived with this Mr. White - her first name was Frances - and so my sister used to -

Then I used to meet her - she would give me her - part of her sandwiches - she would make up more sandwiches so that I could also eat, and that's the way I existed.

I think at this stage I should tell you what conditions were in Cape Town for factory workers, because by that time, with Shuba, I begun to help in organising factory - and James La Guma - the tobacco workers, clothing workers and the laundry workers - the workers used to - the women workers and men they would sit on the pavements outside and eat their sandwiches - there were no cloakrooms -

The women workers never got confinement allowance, although the Factories Act of 1918 had laid down provisions - regulations for confinement allowance - I think I should mention the fact that South Africa had in a way advanced industrial legislation, like the Factories Act which was only subsequently amended in 1941 -

But it had the Factories Act, it had the Industrial Conciliation (?) Act, it had the Wage Act - this is post 1920 Labour Government - Labour - Nationalist Labour, the bad (?) government -

4 But the conditions of the workers was too horrible for words - low wages everywhere, - in the shops - no confinement allowance - and I started to organise these workers - I runned - I would walk about with the Factories Act and the Wage Act and the Industrial Conciliation Act - this was my armoury - and to sit down with the workers when they eat their lunch and explain to them. -

I had also got into work at a tobacco factory, because that was a factory which had employed few Coloureds and whites, and Cde. James La Guma who was trying to organise the tobacco workers said that this fortress he can't get through, so I went to work at the tobacco factory, CTC (?) and I worked there for under

R.S. a week when they discovered who I am - that was a special reason to go and work there because that factory introduced the Beadow System - have you heard of the Beadow System - this is B e a - it's a French name - a French industrialist who introduced the conveying belt system -

And as a result of the conveying belt system that this CTC (?) factory introduced - this was the first factory to introduce it - a number of workers were put off because the machinery had this place, the workers - so it was very important - we'd heard about it but we have never seen it in action, so I applied for a job there, and I got the job, but five days later they discovered that - that I'm out to organise - because I was talking to the workers - I was explaining to them the Beadow System.....

END OF SIDE TWO.

R.S. so I was thrown out from that factory - the conditions there - they also had no cloakroom although they were whites - although the regulations had laid down, you know, a place where the workers could eat, that they can hang up their clothes and so on - and now I pointed all this out -

So we went along organising - we had a strike in 1931 - I didn't mention it - of garment workers - all the issues was always against unemployment, against the dismissals of workers - in all in the Cape Town factories you had a mixed group of workers - whites and Coloureds working together - (there wasn't this nonsense that became afterwards when the Nationalist Party came into power in 1948) -

It was also incidentally during that 1931 strike that I met Moses Kotane, so I knew Moses from 1931, and I was asked to help - he was - he was leaving to study in Moscow - and I was asked to see that he gets away, that he - you know, to notify the communists that he did get away - so that day I didn't go on the picket line that morning.

I want to make it quite clear - with all the African workers - leaders like Shuba, La Guma, Gomes, Brown, Moses Kotane - I'd met Kadalie - I never felt out - I never felt that I was white and they were black - I was completely at ease with them and (.....) but they were at ease with me - there was not mention of them having any sexual desires on me - I never felt it -

They treated me not as a woman - they treated me as a comrade, and the same was with me - so I really developed in this atmosphere of complete unanimity - and Coloured workers, by the fact that I went round selling the paper in the mor - (on Sundays) - mixing with all these people - had accepted me as one - (well.)

Now in 1933 as a result of the tram and bus strike I involved in a case in which Bob Stewart, the general secretary of on tram and bus workers union had - (the government arrested me under the Industrial Conciliation Act for inciting to strike) - Dougie

R.S.

.... Wolton and myself - I don't know whether you came across Dougie Wolton's name - you did - right - so Dougie and I were both arrested - Dougie was going to defend - to take the political defence, while Julius Lewin, who was a friend of mine, and who was when he was studying law and I was having many differences of opinion with him, because he was a Fabian, I'd say - he say : One day you'll ask me to defend you - and I said : Never, never - nevertheless when I was arrested and I was put in in a cell with prostitutes - with street girls - who couldn't understand that I'm in for something different to they, and they were using abusive language to me and also embracing me, and I was so afraid that they may have syphilis or whatnot, you know -

I then cried out for Julius to come - I mean I called on him to come and see me - he came in the morning to see me - I was arrested in the afternoon - and I say to him - he says : What can I do for you - I said : Take me out of this place - there're about - because of unemployment there were lots of white street girls, and Coloured street girls it's a port town - the seamen are there -

So he quickly got me out to a cell to myself away from them - and afterwards when we were discussing our case he said that without any fee to defend me - now he defended me on the grounds that I was so young - that I wasn't twenty years old, I'm being misled by this older man, Dougie Wolton, which insulted me very much - I wasn't twenty - I was nineteen years old - this is 1933, and -

But I never forgave him for it really because I felt so small - in fact during the break I asked him to withdraw from the - you know, that he shouldn't - but by that time he had done the thing and Dougie said I should leave it alone - so I got two months hard labour suspended - I've forgotten for how - so many years -

But they gave a whole set of conditions which amounted to that I mustn't address meetings, and I mustn't be involved again, you see, (in inciting to strike) - (you know, under the Riotous Assemblies (?) Act, under the IC Act - (Industrial Conciliation Act) - and in a way to curb my activities) - that was (for two years) - that's right - two months - (so if I do it then I'll go in for two months hard labour) -

But Dougie didn't get his sentence suspended and he went in to prison - after prison he left for England and never returned back to South Africa - so this is my own (?) you know, experience -

But I start organising - after this prison sen - (after this case I look for a job) and I get a job - as I said that they curbed my activities - I used to go to meetings, (but I had lots of contacts and I start in the quiet organising) - (Solly Sachs comes to Cape Town and he organises - arranges to organise the South African Garment Workers Union with Eli Weinberg) -

I work, but all the time I'm busy helping in organising workers - once again I go in to work in a factory, in a clothing factory, I.L. Beck (?) which has a majority of white women and a number of Malay women - the Malay women were members of the South African Garment Workers Union, but the whites hadn't joined -

As part of the civilised labour policy the government would give relief in tariffs (?) to factories that were employing whites

R.S. as a bribe - now so I joined to work in that I.L. Beck factory, and again I start on Monday to work there, worked Tuesday, Wednesday - now this is - I'm learning now - I've never worked in a factory - in a sewing factory - the machinery - but I'm very quick, and the manageress of the - shows me the various machines, how to work, and I pick it up - I mean even the treading of the machine and the double stitching of machine and so on I take it in, and she's very pleased with me -

And the first Monday night and Tuesday night I think the job is (Laugh) is with me because she's - she sends me to another department, she promotes me and so on - now I can't remember whether it was Wednesday or Thursday I'm called again in the office by one of the sons ^{who} said: Look, we know all about you, - you've come here to organise the workers - here is your pay for a whole week and get out right now -

They wouldn't let me into the factory to collect even my handbag - I - the handbag was taken out to me - and that was my second, you know, factory job. (I go to other factories, not to join there but during lunch hour, and on several occasions I was literally picked up by the scruff of my neck and carried out from the cloakroom, because the bosses had identified me - well, some of the workers have given me away - I'm having (.....) that happened at Fraser's - mobil (?) this factory where I was taken out like a chicken (Laugh) -

(Now) But it was all part in the - in the game of organising - and it was the first time that I organise a union - now I was the commercial employees union - I help there - (I work in the shop) - and I organise the shop assistants -

There was a wage determination for them but a very bad one - and you were questioning about working with liberals - yes, I worked with liberal women, progressive women - with Miriam Walsh who was a councillor in Cape Town City Council - Nellie Spilhaus (?) who was the first woman in the provincial council - all to help and assist in bringing about improvements for the shop assistants -

That was up their street because the shop assistants were not all whites but mainly whites - there were non whites working in the shops - they were doing manual work - they were the warehousemen - that's the packers and so on - but the girls behind the counters - you know the cashiers (?) and so on, they were all whites - and after I'd organised and I'm - the shop assistants commercial employees union, it was called, I worked with a job doing it in my spare time, and I got for them the first time confinement allowance -

And the present editor of the Cape Times has written a book about the shop assistants - I don't know whether you have seen it - yes, some years ago he wrote a book in which he refers to my outstanding work - to my work - because I organised them and I got for them a - (you know that we used to work) Christmas - before Christmas Day and before New Years Day and before Easter Day, till eleven o'clock at night - (Fridays till nine p.m.) - (and) - and with Nellie - with Miriam Walsh assistance, with Nellie Spilhaus, with the National Council of Women - I went and addressed them -

They - we all - they helped me with a big petition - and the women - and I got Katie (.....) to come too, subsequently

R.S. who took over my union that you - I'll tell you about - we succeeded in reducing the working hours, - now at this stage that when I'm have - got so many benefits for them - I walk in the street with Cde. Shuba, who I mentioned to you earlier, and two of the shop stewards from Fletcher and Cartwright, which is a big store, (two Afrikaans girls, Geysler - that was her surname - and the other one was van Wyk - I agreed them - they are shop stewards in the shop, you see, and they went and lodged a complaint with the Cape Federation of Labour Unions that I was walking with a kaffir and insulted them by greeting them, so they were organised a big campaign that I must be removed as the secretary of the Commercial Employees Union -

But that was all done by the reactionary leaders of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions - so I'm summoned to a meeting - a members meeting to explain myself, and there was going to be new elections is put down on the agenda for a secretaryship, and I - there is this attack on me, and they expect that I would resign, but I didn't resign - I made my speech and I said that I am to help - (I'll help any worker irrespective of their colour or race or religion, to improve their wages and conditions of work -

And Shuba who is a member - a leading member of the Cape Federation of Labour Unions had baptised me in trade union work - I said: What you have - the benefits you have obtained as a result of my work, is due to the fact that Cde. Shuba had trained me - and elections take place and I get elected - re-elected to the - although one of the trade union federation leaders went round and told the people not to vote for me - this is what the girls in my own shop told me - but I get elected with flying colours -

And this matter is discussed by our comrades, and it's all agreed that I'm in a way wasting my time on these white girls - that I should devote all my energies in organising the Coloured and African workers....

J.F. (Why was that decided?

R.S. Well, because the base for our work are the black people - that is as it was, and as it is still today, you see - but I wouldn't give up to the Cape Federation of Labour Unions people, or anybody until I find somebody like me to take over the union, and the person that took over from me was Katie Silbert (?) Katy (.....) - I'm sure you must have heard about her in Johannesburg - if not you should make enquiries about her - because the story of trade union organisation - the organisation of union workers - would not be complete without Katie's presence also -

Her maiden name was Katie Silbert - she was married to Morris Kagan (?) - so it's Katie Kagan - and there is actually a nursery school in her name in Johannesburg - they did make it, I think - so you can question about Katie Kagan -

So Katie Kagan comes to Cape Town, and I've always had problems of not having typing assistants, and Katie comes and helps me - she was in - there was a Jewish Workers Club in Johannesburg where she was work - she was involved in that organisation -

So she comes to Cape Town and I become friends with her - she comes to my office, she does the typing, and I then prepare her

R.S. because I used to take her along to meetings - we had a union dance to organise to celebrate the - the victory of the shorter hours - Katie comes there - I help her that she should stand at the door - any case she was much better dressed - she had a evening frock and I didn't have - I wasn't interested in frocks so I came in a navy suit, silk Morton (?) suit with a white Hungarian blouse, but she was dressed in a black frock with a rose on her shoulder and so on, and she was much more presentable as a shop assistant leader than (Laugh) than I was, and anyhow I handed over the position - I recommended her for the position - she became -

I think that if you have a chance read - get (.....) book on the shop assistants - any of your friends could go to the NUDW and get a copy of the book for you -

So from there - I'm still at work, you see - now something else happens - it's 1935 - the Italian - Mussolini attacks Abyssinia - we organise a very big meeting in defence of the Abyssinian people against Mussolini's fascism, and we are succeeding in stopping (.....) contact with the Stevedorers, although Shuba is dead - there is another secretary by the name of Henry October, with whom again I worked very closely together - to get the dockers to refuse to take - to load meat for the Italian soldiers - South African meat -

And we had one of the biggest meetings Cape Town had ever seen - I lead a demonstration to the Italian Ambassador's place to lobby a - in - in - what was that street - Queen Victoria Street, on the corner, and the police arrest me, but I'm let off - it's just a small, you know, contravention of some council regulations - but the meeting was a tremendous one -

I may show you pictures when I see you, of that meeting, because that's really the history of Cape Town - and in this way, you see, people get to know you as a leader - Cissy Gool comes on the scene - now you must please pay attention to Cissy Gool because she was a great leader of our women -

I think at this stage I should introduce you about Cissy Gool, too - soon after I came to South Africa the women in South Af - South African women were struggling for franchise rights - the womens - you know, they introduced the act in 1931 (.....) have introduced the women - gave the women the right to vote - was it in 1931 or 1930 - check whether it's 1930 or '31 - with in a way to minimise the African vote, and he did not give the Coloured women and the African women the right to vote -

And Cissy Gool and her mother, Nellie Abdurahman and there were other Coloured women like Mrs. Roman - there was a African woman by the name of Millie Roussou, although it's looks like Coloured (?) or you know, white name, she was an African woman from the ICU - and another girl by the name of - woman by the name of Goodman but also Coloured - who were in the forefront organising demonstrations to the right - the right of vote for all women, not only this -

Now there is a very important woman leader by the name of Ruth Alexander - she was the wife of Maurice Alexander who was a member of parliament - now she left him and got married to an Englishman who was a professor of science at the Cape Town University, either (?) Ferguson (?) or something like it - have you looked at the Guardian?

J.F. Not - no, just about it.

R.S. No, well, there is a - a write-up when she died - when Ruth died - Mrs. Alexander died - if you will remind me I will look it up, then I'll give you her name and - she was a great friend of Olive Shreiner, and a socialist at heart -

So soon as I came I met her on the issue of womens rights, and although I was working she told me about this mass meeting in the afternoon, because it was mainly teachers who were invited - they didn't think of workers - but I get off and I go to this big meeting in the church hall, and that gives me another opportunity of meeting the leading women -

This is how I met Miriam Walshe and the others - and I become friends with Cissy Gool, and during the 1931 strike she and her mother helps to give us a hall for - where the strikers can meet - and I generally become very great friends with her -

Her place was a place where everybody of - from the intellectuals, academics - she herself was still studying at university - her sister was a doctor, her husband a doctor - so that was the place where people used to gravitate -

In fact Mrs. Naidoo - Solagina (?) Naidoo from India - one of the first women leaders in the Indian Congress - when she comes to Cape Town she's also staying there with Cissy Gool - Cissy invites me to the party for her, and I go to the meeting where Solagina Naidoo is addressing a meeting at the City Hall -

My chronological incidents that I gave you are not in order but you'll have to organise it - that was in 1931 - and I go to the meeting and she makes a speech about womens rights and where women have got the right to vote and mentions all countries, but she doesn't mention the fact that in the first country in the world where women got the right to vote was the Soviet Union, so when she finished speaking I raised - I was at the back of the hall - I raised my hand that I want to speak -

Other people had raised their hands, and finally I think I'm about the fifth speaker, and I'm called to the platform to address the meeting, and I say that I appreciate all that what she had told and it's a great deal we have learned from her tonight, particularly about the struggle of the Indian women, but I was surprised that she had not brought out the fact that the first country where women got the right to vote, and which made an impact on other countries, was in the Soviet Union, and I talked a great deal about the women in the Soviet Union -

By that time I had read the book by Fanina (.....) - F a n i n a H a l l e - she was an Austrian, communist most likely, who had written two books - one was a book on women in European Soviet Union, and the other one on the Asiatic - now that was a terrific book because it described the big struggle Soviet, you know, communists had done in the Asiatic part to develop, to educate and to bring light to the women of Asiatic Russia -

You - I don't have to tell you - you know the story that many communist women and young communist men were killed in the process - so anyhow I speak at that and she - Solagina Naidoo

R.S. thanked me for drawing her attention to it and she apologised very much - now that is another thing, you see, that establishes - helps me to establish as a personality among the women leaders because they were all sitting in the front and they - as I was coming down from the platform they pushed themselves together and made a seat for me, so I'm able to meet with the National Council of Women, I'm able to meet with the progressive women in this way, and I have my roots in the working class -

Let me see - where are we - now - I mentioned about the black (?) - the oppression (?) period, I mentioned about conditions, so now about the Food and Canning Workers Union - before I came to organise the Food and Canning Workers Union I organised many other workers -

I must tell you about the Railway and Harbour Workers Union - in 1935, I think it was, the Nationalist Party, the Spoorbond - the Nationalist Party succeeds to organise Spoorbond - that is a bond of the railway workers to detach the white railwaymen who got into the railways as a result of the civilised labour policy and the Nationalist labour backed government into a union of their own and away from NURHS -

NURHS was a multiracial union of English workers, Coloured, African and Afrikaaners - they board (?) themselves in - they infiltrated in the NURHS union, the Spoorbond leaders - Kloppers, I think, was his name - if you've read Serfontein's book, and also our own book, Class and Colour also refers to it - so suddenly we read that NURHS took a - passed a resolution to expel the Coloured and African members and that they are - many of the - and has broken up their unions so becomes - others have gone into Spoorbond, others have joined the Railway and Harbours Employees Union, others the Artists and Sculpture (?) Union and so on, and the Coloureds and the Africans are left out - are thrown out -

They belonged to the union from 1904, I think, or so - now you can understand the great hurt, the great insult - and Henry October, who took over the work from Shuba, because Shuba died from tuberculosis - Johnny Gomes and I meet to see what we can do about organising the Coloured workers in a union of the Coloured and the African workers - and I had kept up contact all the time with the rail - with the Saltriver works and many - and with the railway and harbour workers -

So there was a man by the name of Merrington (?) among the Railway and Harbour Employees Union working on the docks - a white man - you can say (see) a Englishman - and there was Bill Ferry (?) working in the Saltriver railway works, also English background - he was born in South Africa - South African worker - but his parents were from England -

So I had been having meetings with them always - they were coming to Friends of the Soviet Union to other meetings - so we have a meeting and we discuss ways and means of organising a new union, and the five of us club together - we each pay two and sixpence to buy paper, to buy a stencil, to make leaflets and to pay for a hall, and we get the same hall where the ICU was formed - in that same place - and we issue a leaflet this size - a little leaflet saying : Look, for so many years you belonged to the NURHS union - now racism, fascism and so on has deprived you of membership - form a union of your own.....

R.S. and true enough in March 19 - 1st. April, 1936 we work all these months, because in the meantime there is a strike at I.L. Beck factory - now we go around and talk to all the workers including to the Saltriver works and to dockers, collecting funds to help the I.L. Beck (Isleberg) strikers, and by the 1st. April we have a base in the Saltriver works and on the docks with people whom we have been meeting in small groups who assured us that they are ready for a union meeting for a union organisation -

And we called the first meeting in that hall, as I tell you - it is packed - people are outside on the street - it's on the first floor - so much so that we speak with a open window to - to get the people in the hall and to get the people outside - and we formed the non European Railway and Harbour Workers Union -

We elect their own secretary that they elect by the name of Billy Driver, Coloured man, ex-teacher - and their own officials, and they are helped established in the Cape Town Stevedoring Workers Union -

As I mentioned to you earlier the Cape Town Stevedoring Workers were always out to help to organise the railway and harbours - so that is the first big union, and there is a lot written up and I've got - I'll give you a picture of our first conference which was held in August, 1936, with their leaders - I mean if it is a historical book, yours - that, you know, will give it....

J.F. Authenticity?

R.S. Ja - now from there whilst I'm busy with the organise the milling workers Tiger Oats the workers come now to meet me - to see me in the office, you see....

J.F. The office of?

R.S. Of the Cape Town Stevedoring Workers Union, the South African Government Workers Union - I sort of sit there - by that time - oh, yes, I'd forgotten - I'd lost my job - there is a conference against fascism in Johannesburg in December, 1935 - the shop assistants, although I wasn't really any more secretary - they elected me to attend the conference -

I get permission to attend the conference, but the manager, Mr. Kirsh, I don't think realises what this conference is about - but whilst we were having the conference there's lots of write - up about it, and there is big attack on Nazism and fascism and so on -

So when I come back there is unemployment still, depression, and they say that they must cut down on staff - now I heard one is a principle with all the other firms (?) that the last come the first go so I - they put in two last comes and I was the second one - after me there was another one - so two of us were put off, and I couldn't complain much because that is what we want - we told the other companies as part of the dealings against unemployment, against the depression -

So then I'm out of a job (in 1936) - (that's when I help to organise the dockers and I start organising the Oatmeal workers - God, when I think of the conditions that the men were working in the Tiger Oats factory, which is now most likely part of Premier, I really, you know I - I -

I'm sensitive at times) - not at times, but I am - (and when the workers used to tell me their conditions and the way the)

R.S.

.... (foreman treated them I used to burst out in tears) - (so I organised the Tiger Oats workers - I still have a presentation from them - from them I organised the chemical workers) - now the chemical workers were - consisted of all the chemical factories, Peterson (?) and so on and Lennox (?) and they were lots of men, but lots of women - young women - (and some of the women, because of the low wages, were at night on the street, so I had the problem on my hands of organising these women workers, and they were not, I should say, first class union material, (these street girls, because they depended more from what they got from the sailor than what they got from the factory) -

4
And I had to become a moralist, talk to them against they style of life, and I will go to their homes and talk to them, but when I used to talk like this to them at their homes I always got the support of their fathers - their parents) -

(And when I organised these women workers I got women) - I should say one of the first women - Shuba did it and I did it - to get women on the committees (- not just to organise them as members but they must be in the leadership) -

(And that was another problem - again I had to go to their parents to get them - and to their husbands if they were married) - there was a woman (.....) - she had three children, but she was a good woman, good material, and helped to organise the workers in Peterson's factory, Marie Adrianse, and - but - she wanted to be on the committee but what will her husband say, you know and so on - and I had to go (and plead with her husband, and persuade him to allow her to be on the committee) -

I should tell you something what happened - the chemical union also organised Nugget Shoe Polish factory - now there were white women in that factory, and a few Coloured women who were what we call "playwhite" - you've heard that expression - no....

J.F.

Ja, I just.....

R.S.

Coloureds who act as whites and pretend they are white - we call them - we used to call them playwhite - so - now a new manager comes to Nugget factory by the name of Marks and he's a bright guy - I think he came from the London School of Economics - I think so, I'm not certain - but he makes a speech which is published in the Cape Times, where so-called liberal (?) - so I make an effort to meet him and to get into his factory to organise the workers -

I've been always standing outside with leaflets talking to them - I get the chairman of our union - I tell them we have a chairman, Cookson is his name, who was Coloured but he was looking very much white, so I say I'll come with our chairman, with Mr. Cookson, to come and discuss with you ways and means of getting your workers to join the union, because all my pleading with them with leaflets, pleading them to come to the office - I couldn't get them to come to the union office -

So we - we - we - the committee decided I should make this effort of making - so he agrees that we can come and have a meeting lunch hour - I get arrange that Cookson should come off a quarter of an hour earlier from work, that we should both go to the factory, which was in Cape Town not very far from the union office -

R.S. when I come into the cloakroom - now there is a big mirror here - when I come in the factory through this door into the cloakroom, through this door, Cookson and myself come in, what do you think I see in the mirror - on here they had a big poster : "Miss Alexander, we do not need you - mind your own business" (Laugh) - a big - the poster, you see, with : "We are very lucky to work for Nugget Shoe Polish Company, and we don't need you"

You can imagine the shock one has - I - I drew Cookson't attention to this - because, you see, we came in and we didn't see what is here, but it was all the reflection in the mirror - big mirror - so I nevertheless get up and say : Yes, I see your message, but I'm not accepting this message - you have done this - it's not your writing, it's not your words, and you'll be sorry one day because you are allowing somebody to speak for you -

And I tell them what our union has done, how we won higher wages and better conditions of work, about confinement allowance - that was a big battle I had, to get confinement allowance for women - I speak to them - there is no applause - this was the first time that I should be speaking to workers in a factory, or outside a factory, and not get applause, but if I didn't get unanimous applause but I got some applause in the past, but this one frozen -

I asked them to put questions to me - they don't put questions - I ask Cookson - I wasn't going to give out - the whole lunch hour (Laugh) I kept them there - I ask Cookson to speak - Cookson makes a speech, and we get away with nothing - I don't know whether they are organised - I didn't succeed - that was a failure in my life -

4 But it was - I told Marks one day - I said : This was your work - it wasn't their work - I told this to the workers too - so I had my disappointments - I - I derive great pleasure of organising because I always succeeded in improving wages and conditions of work, and I became part of the workers families. -

When I organised the Food and Canning workers I slept in their homes in the countryside, accepted by their parents as a friend, but Nugget Shoe Factory remains in my mind where workers were accepted to be misled - I never went back again to them because soon afterwards I handed over the Chemical Workers Union to Johnny Gomes -

I organised the Tin Workers Union and there I'm - there is also anecdote (?) how to organise - I organise the Tin Workers Union and the Sweet Workers - workers were organising one another, helping - the Sweet Workers whom I'd organised - actually Eli (.....) was their secretary - he had left - I took it over - they helped - they brought tin workers to me to organise the tin workers, and the tin workers brought the food and canning workers, and that is, you know, how it was -

Now the tin workers was a big factory, Mathams (?) which is, as you know, a big multi-national company still today, and so I organise by having little tea parties in sweet workers homes and others - Rose Peterson, Katie Peterson - we used to come - I would bring a packet of biscuits, somebody would bring tea, another one would bring a half a bottle of milk and we'd have tea and we'd sit around -

So by the time metal workers workers were ready to organise they

R.S. were all ready, and they came to a meeting, Mathams - we organise them - I submit a demand to notify the Department of Labour that we've organised a union, submitted demands to the bosses, got a wage board investigation going in the metal industry, and O'Brien (?) -

The company sent out a Englishman, a graduate from the London School of Economics, Mr. O'Brien - that's the company Mathams from England - and he became the new manager - he introduced like welfare officers and so on - so when we had a meeting with the bosses, we brought them to the table to negotiate, which wasn't easy those days, and I helped (?) with the workers -

O'Brien got up and made a speech that our union came a big surprise to him - suddenly all of a sudden from nowhere comes out that the workers are organising a union - why didn't Miss Alexander come and tell him that I want to organise them - so my reply was that if I would have come to tell them that I want to organise them, and I told him about the Nugget people, because that was a bitter lesson to me by having spoken to Marks, you remember - and I said : Not again -

But, you see, the Mathams workers were a different calibre of worker to the workers in Nugget polish - Nugget factory - so we got tremendous improvements, and in H. Jones & Co., which is the food factory in Paarl, one of the oldest food factories in South Africa from Australia - H. Jones & Co. - they had a tin plate department where they used to make their own cans for canning, so by getting these higher wages for Mathams I went over to bring about higher wages at H. Jones & Co., Paarl, and Mr. Gant, the director, was very rude to me -

First of all he kept on chasing the flies all on me, didn't offer me a seat - I wasn't on my own - I was there with other - with somebody from Cape Town - (I never went) - go to employers on my own - that was another thing that I had instituted, that never go and speak to the bosses on your own - you must be with somebody - with one of the workers or a worker from another factory.....

4
J.F. Why?

R.S. Why, because you can't trust the bosses, and why should I - they can turn around and say this thing and another thing - and any case workers have to learn to negotiate with their bosses - so for all these reasons - when I couldn't get a worker beginning I still must come in with Cde. Bill Andrews - Bill Andrews used to accompany me -

So I started to organise H. Jones & Co. - now he, Gant, say to me that he will agree to certain conditions that I'm demanding for the tin plate on condition that I undertake not to organise the gem (?) and the canning people, and in the presence of two workers from H. Jones & Co. whom I took with me, and one from Cape Town, I said : No, I give no undertaking not to organise any group of workers - I will assist and help to organise every worker, any group of workers who need to be - who need my help and my assistance -

He had an argument - he told me that I mustn't tell him that these workers from his factory had come to me to help them organise, which they did through the sweet workers - and I said : Yes, who - I said : You think that I'm going to tell you who came to see me - you will only dismiss them -

R.S. so for some time we had a real battle at H. Jones & Co., and I lodged a complaint with the secretary for labour, I.B. Walker, that they are not carrying out the agreement, because I'd made this - this agreement meant for the Cape Province - so Walker sent me a telegram telling me that he had author - he had instructed the company -

Now it was during the war, you see, 19 - 1940 - and the food industry was very important to the war effort - so I.B. Walker had ordered H. Jones & Co. to meet me, because I had made the big point when I was talking to I.B. Walker and to Madden, the minister for labour, that this is a food industry - you are - that they are maybe told that their factory isn't organised.....

There is lots to be told about the Food and Canning workers - can we leave it at that - Bill Andrews -

J.F. Sorry, I'm just wondering the two people.....

R.S. Shuba, yes, I've mentioned to you - but Bill Andrews, because he was really my teacher and - right - now?

J.F. I wanted to just follow up on a couple of points - going back to Latvia - I'm just interested in how you went (from Latvia to South Africa), and (the issue of race didn't worry you?)

R.S. No, not at all.

J.F. Why do you think that was? → to p. 37

R.S. I think (?) no - (because I'm a Jewess, and anti-Semitism was ripe in Latvia, right - (and in all Tsarist Russia, (...)) particularly (Jewish people, workers couldn't go to universities - they could - there was a kind of apartheid, - they couldn't work in factories) -

So when I came to South Africa and I heard about this racialism, about the fact that only certain jobs are offered to Coloured workers, right - (and to African workers) - and that they live in certain areas - what is difference between a location and - and a ghetto -

This thing became very clear to me that this is racialism - whether it's anti-Semitism or racialism - and this was to me very clear - is that satisfactory to you?

J.F. Ja - and had you heard - you knew all about apartheid before you went.....?

R.S. I read - I read a lot about the ICU books in Riga in Russian language - there was at that time the red (?) international of trade unions, (...)) and they brought out a paper - a magazine - so (I read) about the ICU - and of course as soon as I came, by talking to Johnny Gomes and others, I'd learned more about and got to know about the white "civilised labour policy" - (so that all fitted in with the anti-Semitism that was present in Tsarist Russia and in Poland and even in Latvia, and (particularly) the ghettos.) → to p. 4

J.F. But why was it that more Jewish people didn't carry that - you have other people who went into Zionism - why didn't you find - is it important to you that you're Jewish ethnically - did you feel that this was actually a consuming interest of yours, and why didn't you get into a Zionist.....

R.S. Oh, no, because I had done away with the Balfour Declaration - you remember that - (so I was no more Zionist - in fact a incident happened) - when I was at school the University of Jerusalem was opened and the school was invited to send a speaker to celebrate it, and I was chosen to be the speaker) - my father was dead already then -

I can't remember when the University of Jerusalem was started - but when I went to address the meeting on behalf of the school - I mean there was a big party, you know - a celebration by the Zionists and all the teachers and so were invited - (and I said that I'm - I've come to congratulate and to celebrate the opening of the university, and for some reason I made a remark - I didn't even know where Timbuktu is but that name must have been known to me - and I said I'm celebrating the formation - the establishment of the university in Israel the same as I would be celebrating the opening of a university in Timbuktu, because a university everywhere is a candle to light the road for progress) - and the Zionists didn't like it (Laugh) but I said it) -

I remember the word, you know, because after somebody asked me where Timbuktu is, and I said somewhere in Africa, and I must have looked it in the map and the name just struck me, you see - I don't know whether it was on the map but I remember that I used Timbuktu, the name -

And long afterwards people would, you know, remember that I'd said that I don't - if it had been opened the university in Timbuktu I would have been as happy as I am with the university in Israel -

So I was completely free.

J.F. And when you came to South Africa did you ever try to preserve your Jewishness?.....

R.S. No, not a bit, no - also I was lucky - I told you that my father was a socialist, and in our home, in the Jewish home, my grandfather was a rabbi - nevertheless lot of what you can call Christians Latvians and Russians and Poles would come to our house, so that it was this open house atmosphere - not religious but people, humans, and I never felt - I honestly, on my word of honour, - I never felt odd working among African, Coloured people, or, you know, working with them together - we were one) -

I never felt when I was with Cde. Moses Kotane that he's African and I'm white, and he never felt that I'm white - he used to say to me): "With you - he says - I feel one." →

J.F. And the first people you got in contact with when you came to South Africa, there was a bit of your family but...

R.S. Well, they are - I completely left them - I mean I stayed at home with the family until I, you know, left them, but I completely - they - they knew that I am what I am - later in years when my mother was on her dying bed she called my elder brother and elder sister and say to them : Look - and the movement was illegal, I was banned already, and I used to use her flat for meeting people and so on -

And she say to them : Look - and this is - she called the three of us - she says : I helped Ray in many ways - I'm asking you to help her because you are not going to change her, but what I'm asking is to help her - and I got help in this way from the

R.S. family - so they didn't expect me - (I remember when the first holiday I had in Lat - in the South African (Cape Town - my mother took me to to introduce me to her relatives) - we had relatives in Cape Town, (.....) and (.....) - other relatives - (and my cousin was saying to me that I'll never be able to marry, you know (Laugh).) - (I was still going on for seventeen years and he's telling me) because (there won't be a Jewish boy - I'm already known that I walk about with Coloureds and blacks and no) - no - no (Jewish boy will marry me.) -

Now I had a boyfriend who was by that time in prison in Latvia, and that's another story, but (I just looked at him - to me this was completely) I mean (nonsense that he was speaking to me.) -

2

My mother would be concerned about the fact that it will affect her other daughters' marriages and so on, but again (I wasn't going to alter my style-life.)

J.F. And when you - was Johnny Gomes the first person you worked with politically?

R.S. Yes, and Shuba about the same time, and then he introduced me - he took me to James La Guma's house when Alex La Guma was a little boy (Laugh)

J.F. And coming and meeting those people in South Africa, that was....

R.S. Well, they accepted me, I accepted them - we were - well, we used to go for picnics together - we had a social life.

J.F. Well, (why is it do you think? - I'm sure there would have been other girls from Latvia who would have looked at their black faces and their different appearances and felt this was strange....) *accepted the white South African racism*

R.S. (There was one girl) - (she lived in Paarl, and she came to me one day - that is story how I organised Paarl is also different - but she came to me one day and she say to me; You know, Ray, I don't know why - she says : I have your ideas, but I couldn't do what you are doing - (and I said to her) - Pearly was her name - Pearly, I say, (what is your problem? -

(Now her problem was that she couldn't accept black^{as} equal, and when (I say to her): But that tantamounts to the same as people in Tsarist Russia and in Poland wouldn't accept Jews as the same - what is the difference? - (you see, I was a) - a tremendous reader) - I read lots of books, novels, (and I knew the sufferings and the pains the Jewish people went through in Tsarist Russia - all the Jewish writers, the old writers - it's no use me mentioning names to you because they're - you know, they're not just (.....) and (.....) but others who had described the torment of a Jewish boy who wants to become a doctor and goes - and the family sends him to college, to university, and he plays as if he is a Russian, and he falls in love with a girl who thinks he's a Russian, and happened to be a Jewish girl -

She doesn't disclose to him, he doesn't disclose to her, and how one of them commits suicide because the family - she - goes to - says that she loves him but she tells him - and she tells the family that he's a Russian and the family says : You can't marry him - so she commits suicide - and the pain that goes through

This story is not - is not - it's just not one but many that has happened - (so this question of racialism and colour, you know, colour consciousness, was not with me, you see) - (I was so)....

* there is an earlier version of this transcript - can you go back - 50 both are wrong and consistent?

R.S. (totally against it).....

END OF SIDE TWO.

J.F. maybe (when you first met them or when you got to meet them) ^(blacks) did you discuss this issue of colour? or was....

R.S. No, I didn't - I didn't - (only later on it's when we had a discussion of) - of the black republic, you see, and they wondered because I was the only Jewish girl, Jewish person in the Cape Town movement who was speaking for the black republic. - I'm not talking about Molly Wolton and Dougie Wolton who subsequently come - but being I mean from the ordinary -

(And then I say to them): "But this is ordinary democracy, one man one vote. - we can't tolerate this white autocracy here" - (so they accepted me like this) - I got up on the platform, I spoke - I was very lucky that I had learned English before I came to South Africa, and that I did because of my cousins - I want to correspond with them.

→ to p. 30

J.F. Well, when you first arrived and you met Johnny Gomes and all those people, Shuba, you just never discussed the issue.....

R.S. No....

J.F. did they ever say.....

R.S.

R.S. No, no, no.....

J.F. Did they ever ask you?

R.S. No, they took me home through the avenue from ^{Adler} Adler Street - foot of Ad - have you been to Cape Town? - well, where you will see the pier - you know, the (.....) - and I don't know whether Garlick's is still in existence - there was a big store, stevedoring - and we would be speaking - the van Riebeeck statue - have you seen that - now just near the van Riebeeck statue we would have our meetings, so you know that that is a long way from - to come - I was living right near at the top of the avenue, and we would walk from there right through Adler Street through the avenue, and they would see me off home.....

J.F. And when you first arrived.....

R.S. So it wasn't acceptable to my family, you can understand - or I would bring a comrade to come and stay at our place - a black person.

J.F. It wasn't but?

R.S. Well, it wasn't - the family didn't like it, but I had a right because I paid towards the rent, I paid to the upkeep of the house.

And were there other whites in the movement.....

- R.S. Yes, there were whites, not - besides me only my sister, Dora, who is in England, but there were white men, and we established the Ikaba Iaba Sebenzi.
- J.F. What's that?
- R.S. That was labour defence - and they wanted the money we collect should go to Lithuanian (?) political prisoners, Latvian or Polish, and I said : No, we have political prisoners in South Africa, and if we haven't got them today we'll have them tomorrow - and my line was carried, and the Ikaba Iaba Sebenzi was established subsequently in Johannesburg too - have you come across that name?
- J.F. No, I don't think so.
- R.S. You will look in our book and Eddie Roux, Time Longer Than Rope, will speak about it, and other historians.
- J.F. But was - did you particularly seek out the whites at all or did you just.....
- R.S. No, I didn't seek out - I seeked out the white women, as I mentioned to you, for getting help, you see - I became - I was friendly, very friendly with Eddie Roux, and he speak to me in English and I - because we had political discussions - and I would speak to him in German - he wanted to learn - I mean to improve his German language - so at times when we had really hot debates, you see, then we would go off like this -
- But I didn't seek out any whites - at one time at a meeting I was sitting there was the wife of one of our comrades came to the meeting - she was from England, and she was sitting and she was ^{saying} "I can't stand the smell, I can't stand the smell" - and she made me so sick that I got up and I said I would like - Joyce was her name - that she should leave this meeting because she was interrupting me -
- I didn't insult the comrades that she was saying she can't stand the smell, but could I tolerate a person like this - all different people have different smells - perhaps the Africans didn't like the smell of the white man.
- J.F. And was it when the - when the native republic issue came up, the black republic?
- R.S. Yes, to me I had no problems.
- J.F. But was that the first time that you discussed non-racialism in a structural way?
- R.S. Yes, ja.
- J.F. And....
- R.S. Because, you know, they - some - I think James La Guma, or I think J.R. Brown - (one of the comrades had) questioned how is it that, you know, I should give them the reasons why I am supporting the black republic, right - so I put down the reason as democracy - democratic rights - Africa is a black - (South Africa is a black mans country, and therefore it should be a black republic) - of course then it was developed - (workers and peasants, government and so on) - but when I came in '29 the issue was a black)....

- R.S. (3) republic, and I had no problems about it.) → back dop. 9
- J.F. *comp. from p. 9* And do you think that it's important to isolate non racialism - I'm asking a lot of questions - I want to write a book about it - do you think it's something that's natural and incidental or do you think it's integral ideologically and should be isolated and discussed?
- R.S. It should be discussed, and it should be - I think that because of my clear knowledge of Marxism that I had derived (?) you know, and the fact that I had learned about the existence in the Soviet Union, where there is no racialism, where all peoples irrespective of races, their constitution and so on, so that gave me support - something to lean on, - (a system where people will not be in a country where there was anti-Semitism.) -
- (2) You see how important the Soviet Union became to me, - (when I chucked off the Balfour Declaration and I said that is no solution to the Jewish problem) - (I declared that the solution to the Jewish problem is socialist countries.)
- J.F. (And even now) currently (do you think it's important to discuss non racialism?)
- R.S. (Yes, I think people should be educated, - I think particularly at this stage white people should realise that they living on the black - on the African Continent, - they will live in a country where the majority are black people and they should adjust themselves to this, - to the existence and to play a part to be bridge builders, - I think that is a suitable - (to build for a new society, for a new South African democratic society irrespective of race.
- J.F. And then what about the whole debate within the CPSA over the - Wolton and his views and the way it became a controversy with the purging of SP meeting (?)
- R.S. Ja - well, that we went through - that was very tormented, you know, years that we had - we were worried about it and so on, and we had to overcome it, but it was a general - what shall I say - overflow from the general world movement - expulsions took place in other parts of the world, so it also permeated South Africa.
- J.F. Could you just sum it up in your own view briefly, because some people have read Roux and other people have read other accounts - what happened and why?
- R.S. Well, I - I'm saying quite clearly that there were individuals in the movement who well, shall we say were ultra-left or - I'm having in mind the fellow like Bach - you've come across him - not Molly, no, and not Dougie - Bach, and I don't know who else there was - we didn't have them in Cape Town - who were - what do you call people who are, you know, examining and like Trotskyists - have you heard the term Trotskyist - they -

They are looking for points, and had found points in people that were not there - I mean you know, accusing Bunting of so many things which he wasn't doing it, or the fact that he was a - a rich man - he had given up the shares he had in the sugar or in the - what was it - some plantations in Natal - but they used the fact that he comes from another upbringing, from another background, against him to - with a view to destroy him - or to minimise his role that he was playing - so I didn't approve

R.S. of it, so much so that when I went in 1935, December, in Johannesburg and there were - no, 16th. December, Dingaan's Day is always where we have meetings, and all the African comrades had gone to the All African Convention in Bloemfontein - have you come across that -

So they were there and there were no people to conduct a meeting for Dingaan's Day, and I went to Burt (?) to Eddie and Percy Bunting and say : Let's get somebody to interpret me, or to interpret us and let's have a meeting on the 16th. December, and I - Eddie says : You think the comrades will approve of you asking Percy Bunting - and I said : I don't care - if what is to us important the Dingaan's Day -

And I went to Percy Bunting - he was at a conference in fact - I called him out - and Eddie and the three of us went and addressed the meeting, and we had a African comrade who was taking the chair and interpreting us and so on - and we spoke to - outside the railway station in Johannesburg, down Kerk Street -

I don't know what the place is like now, but at that time there was a railway line and we - so I had never had any ill feeling to Percy Bunting - in other words I wasn't impressed by the expulsions or the reasons for the expulsions - it was hurting me, but I wasn't strong enough or had any to oppose, because it was done in Johannesburg, I was in Cape Town.

J.F. *from p. 24* One last point - how did you communicate - or (did the issue of non racialism or race affect how you dealt with the workers? in terms of did you take into account when you went to a factory, mainly African workers or Coloured women or whatever, the fact that you were a white woman?

R.S. *(24)* No, I didn't feel - I felt I had a message to give to them - the message to organise, to fight for higher wages and better conditions of work, to fight for a better state of affairs, and it didn't matter to me who it was, I would always say, : (Do you want an interpreter? - and if they would say yes, - *then I help them*) Elect your interpreter.)

J.F. And how did the workers respond?

R.S. They - I - I had no problems - they responded to me everywhere I went - as I tell you, the only place I didn't get applause was in Nugget Shoe Factory.

J.F. Sure, but - they responded positively but did you ever get any feedback from them - did they ever say to you : Gee, how did you happen to come to be here with us....

R.S. Oh, well, my dear - look, when I start to go out in the countryside to organise they would always make a prayer before I started the meeting, as soon as I came in - I'm on the platform, they would make a prayer thanking God for bringing me safely to them - before I left they would make another prayer thanking - asking God deliver me properly home - and that is how they accepted me - (honestly I didn't have any problems) - they -

They would make speeches about me, you know, saying what a wonderful thing that I had come to them.

J.F. I'm not thinking about problems as much as just their perhaps being interested or intrigued that - because I've had that myself

J.F. where some Africans have said to me : We're actually quite interested in non-racialism and we'd love to know what motivates such and such white people - that kind of thing.....

R.S. Yes...

J.F. I'm just wondering if they ever wanted to ^(ask you about your motivations) ask you a bit - did any of them ask you about Russia or Latvia.....

R.S. Yes, look, when I was standing for elections in 1954, I was addressing a meeting in Simonstown, and one man gets up - actually he was a special branch man, an African - but there were two special branch people so whether they prepared the questions for him I don't know - but he wants to know why do I, a white woman, stand for elections for Africans, and why do I want the Africans to be raised to become voters and so on -

4
Now to the first question I reply that I would be much happier, which I put in my manifesto, if an African could stand for these elections - (the fact that an African is not standing is not my doing - it's the government's policy - and it's because I'm fighting against the government's policy, and because I want my children - I have three children - to grow up in a free democratic South Africa, that there shouldn't be hatred between black and white.) - (this is why I'm working for a free and democratic South Africa.) -

Now that is plain and simple, and everybody could understand - and to the next meeting actually in the same place I took my children to the meeting - I took Mary from school, Tanya from the nursery (Laugh) school - Johan was still, you know - and I brought them, (and there they saw these three white children with white hair, and these are my children.) -

I told them
And I really had no problems - the Africans accepted me as I am - as I was - (I was honest) - (I didn't tell them lies about myself - why I came to organise) - (I used to tell them about the profits the bosses make, the way the bosses live and the way they live) - like for example, H. Jones & Co., who lived in a very big house - the car would come for him, the chauffeur driven car, to take him to lunch, and I used to describe to the workers how he eats off my tablecloth with napkins, with silver cutlery, and his food is prepared while they - where do they eat -

What is their home in comparison to the home of the workers - (and I brought out the exploitation and the unequal society.) - (at all my meetings I always made a point of that.)

J.F. Can you tell me what you said about being a somebody and being.....

R.S. Yes, I used to tell this to the workers : Look, the - when I'm out - I mentioned this to you - when Fischer - Mr. Fischer of Wellington came to the wage board and complained to the wage board that in the past he would walk in the street of Wellington in the road, and everybody would life up his head and say : More, baas - which means good morning, baas - you see, every white man is a baas -

But now since I came on the scene and organised the workers nobody says More baas to him - I didn't know that they did it - but at meetings (I used to take the message of the power of organisation, the power of unity, and I would say to the workers,)

R.S. : Today you are treated in the way you are treated - and I told their conditions were horrible - wages were low - they were the foremen, which I haven't mentioned to you - many foremen would force they girl - the girls to sleep with them - and I didn't hide it - I exposed it - and I said : "You will become a body - (somebody to be) - to be acknowledged, to be accepted - you know, to (respected, if you will be organised." -

And this went not only for the workers in a factory, but this went for the whole body of the labour movement - James La Guma as far back as 1928 before I came - or 1927 - told the African workers, the black workers, the white workers will respect you when - when the Trade Union Congress, that's the white - would not accept the ICU to affiliate to them - you know that part -

And incidentally in your paper you - you're putting forward SACTU at a much earlier stage - it was a trade union congress - it was the South African Trades and Labour Council - then La Guma say : They don't accept you now because you aren't fully organised - you become organised, united, strong, then the white workers will have to respect you - and this is what's going to happen in South Africa today -

COSATU will in the long run be respected by white workers, by white trade unions - they must come to terms with COSATU because they are going to be a power to be reckoned with - so what happens in a factory is the same reflection on the general trade union and labour movement in society as a whole -

Today the whites more and more are realising something that they hadn't realised ten years ago, or fifteen years ago, that African rule - I mean the fact that remark made by Pi^K Botha - you may be having a black - yes - it's something...

J.F. That he would say it?

R.S. That he should say this....

J.F. But then the.....

R.S. Ja, all right, he was clobbered, but there are others who are thinking like him, isn't it so - right - and why - because of the organisation of the black people - and when you questioned me earlier why did the comrades say give up the whites and - that was the same issue.

J.F. I guess I just didn't want anyone reading it to misinterpret.....

R.S. No, no, no, I'm not questioning you - your question was right.

J.F. But even now maybe you should just amplify a bit because there are people who are looking at - Ike van der Watt of the boilermakers - looking at a few of the whites who've joined and I'm just wondering that didn't indicate that you didn't think it was important - it was obviously most important.....

R.S. No, it's very important, my dear - it's very important that the cleavages amongst the whites should be widened that they should break away from the reactionary regime and join hands with the black man - very important - it's important for white workers not to join with Terreblanche but to join and work together with COSATU.

J.F. I'm just wondering now - now for example, you have the UDF and JODAC - people who are saying it's important to work with whites - even then did you think it was important for Katie Silbert to take over and work with those white.....

R.S. Yes, of course, it is - Dulcie Hartwell is now the general secretary of the NUDW - and I can tell you that in 1973 when I was in Geneva on behalf of SACTU and I criticised the Trades and Labour Council, Dulcie Hartwell got up at that conference in September, 1973 - conference was held in Durban - and she said that we must look into ourselves - the fact that Ray Alexander who had built so much in the country to organise workers with such a trade union and is - is finding fault with us - we must look into - there is something wrong with us -

And in 1979 she supported the Fattis & Monis strike - she's still from the old school of Solly Sachs - as you know, she was a garment worker herself.

J.F. You didn't mention about your children - when did they and your husband - when did that come in - when did you get married?

R.S. Well, when I got married to him and then I had problems because I had several miscarriages and - but (I wanted to have children of my own - not to adopt or - or not to have children, because I felt very strong as a woman that I must be able to speak to the women) when I speak to them (about their problems of having children or (bringing up children, or their troubles they're going through, that I must speak from my own experience and not just from books) -

And I used to go into the workers home in Namaqualand and see how the children are being overrun by flies, and I would come the next time to come back with a net for the children - I got the union to buy yards and yards of nets, because you see, with fish factories there is a lot of flies and the same applies - and I would come with nets (to protect the workers' children) -

(I loved children, - I loved I - (if I would have had my way I would have had a half a dozen, I really mean it - but I didn't manage - I only managed to have three. - and I explained this, when Jack used to say to me oh, he doesn't worry whether we have children or not, I would say : Well, you may not but I do - I want to have children of our own - and I couldn't have had the children, and (I couldn't have done what I have done and what I've achieved in organising without the total support and co-operation of Jack, because) as I say, (he is an emancipated man,) and I find -

(And my job wasn't a easy one because I wasn't staying in Cape Town - I was always organising - as soon as I've finished nursing at night, the midnight feed, I would go off to organise in the country and come back the next morning) - I would leave, (if I fed Mary six o'clock or half past six in the evening, I would go off with a car to go and address a meeting in Paarl or in Wellington or in Worcester, and come back the next morning, and Jack took the responsibility of the children,) so he helped me in so many ways -

It wasn't easy - it was hard labour, hard work for me, because I did work very hard for them as well - they might not think so - and also the emotional stress on me when I went away and all of a sudden I hear the child is ill and I am far away, and sometimes I went to a place where I couldn't even communicate with them -

R.S.

.... you can imagine the stress - you are a mother so you know what it means - (and I went through great worry - I would nights not sleep because I didn't know how the children are - whenever possible I would take the children with) - I took Mary out to Port Elizabeth when she was I think, about four - no - how old was she - say five years old - when I struggled - I had to re-establish the union there - I took her with so that Jack should have less -

I took her with to Robertson - wherever I could I would take her with - Tanya I took with to Port Elizabeth and East London - I - when I went to a conference in 1953 to Trades and Labour Council - we were fighting against the native labour settlements of (.....) - I took Tanya with so that there should be less, you know, burden for Jack, but whether I took Tanya with me, or I took Mary with me, all the time I thought of the others children -

But I wanted to have children and I am very - we are very happy that we have our children and they are a success because they are good human beings, and they want to see a type of South Africa that we would like to see, so what better - what more can we wish -

And despite the harassment of police in our house, and they were - I mean, Johan was not even ten years old when Jack was arrested in 1960, and he saw it, and I was in hiding, and for nights the little boy couldn't sleep because he didn't know - Mary and Tanya couldn't sleep - (they didn't know where I was when Jack was released from prison, and Jack came to me where I was in hiding - he said): Look, the children are very restless, Johan isn't sleeping, is it possible for you to come back home?

And we arranged that I should meet Johan, to satisfy him that I'm alive in the forest, and when Johan saw me he ran so much at me that he threw - I fell over (Laugh) in the forest because he got so excited, (and then subsequently) they were - so I came home under disguise as a Malay woman, dressed.

J.F.

Really?

R.S.

Ja - well, it - you know Malay women are white and they wear - and I had a purple coloured - this colour shawl around me, (and I stayed in the house and I was in the kitchen only), so when - even when comrades came I didn't go into the lounge, didn't go into the dining room - I would be out -

(And it wasn't simple because the neighbours didn't approve of our style of life and they - one woman say to her one day I have no right to have children, and I said) (.....) (I didn't have to ask you for my rights) (Laugh) - but these were things I mean, you are believed this by (the African children live in the township surrounded by friends) (?) - (we were living in a street with the rich - I mean if) the house of - in (our house was raided and there is headlines, house in Oranjezicht) is (raided, you see) - that's a (Laugh) - (so our children had to go through this) - so it wasn't simple) -

And then the whole thing that when we had to - (when we decided to leave South Africa, I don't know how many pounds I lost when we took the decision) - I mean in vague (?) (because I was so suffering, suffering that I'm leaving people, and also that I was leaving the children behind, because we felt we couldn't

R.S. (S) just uproot them and take them to a place where we don't, you know, (know how we are going to fit in) when we went to Zambia.

J.F. But you took Johan?

R.S. No, they - afterwards I'll tell you - we didn't take Johan to Zambia - the government came out with a act which is still in existence that males from the age of 15 or 16 to 65 can be recruited in the army - you know, that act, defence act was amended - and Johan was - although he was young he was strongly anti war - he was interest very much in science - he was a reader - and he had problems with his schoolteacher -

When we were in Zambia he wrote to us a letter (Laugh) - could we take his schoolmaster to court - not schoolmaster - ja, the class teacher to court, an Afrikaaner, Smit, because he calls him Bolshy, and he calls him Kaffirboetie - that's what Johan had gone through - and we have a letter from him - I'm still keeping that letter that he thinks we should take him to court for making these remarks, you see - it wasn't easy for him -

But when this act came out and we heard about it we took a decision to take him out - simply because of this, you know.....

END OF INTERVIEW.