

J.F. .... solidarity tour speaking in Canada - they're sending me - and in the US in connection with this book of mine - you know that book?

R.S. Which one?

J.F. The 1976 to 1986 one, the one with the pictures you were reading in Harare on South Africa.

R.S. Ja, I've got it.

J.F. They're asking me to speak....

R.S. Who's asking you?

J.F. (.....) is sending me, and then there're several different trips for (.....) - there's a lot of work, the kind of thing you do, speaking to people, trying to mobilise them as a North America....

R.S. So your husband will deal with the two children?

J.F. We'll take them to their granny in the US and their grandfather for the first time in a year - the grandparents are happy, and my husband will come with me a bit and then go back.

R.S. So he will join you where?

J.F. He joins me in the States (.....) teaching.

R.S. Then it's vacation.

J.F. It's during school holidays....

R.S. So I will not see you in April there?

J.F. No, I'll be back only in late June, but it's a lot of different things - I'm also stopping in Holland.....

R.S. On my arrival in South Africa - when I arrived there are three men - I'm coming to Jack afterwards - who influenced me in my work in South Africa - the one was Johnny Gomes - did I....

J.F. We stopped in the '30s - in the late '30s - about 1938 we stopped.

R.S. Is that so - did I mention Bill Andrews?

J.F. Yes.

R.S. Yes - I didn't know that I did it.

J.F. You only didn't tell me when you met Jack and....

R.S. Well, Jack I met - when did I meet him - I met him in 1937 - he came from London - he must have told you this - and we got married in 1941 on the 6th. or the 7th. February, but it is Shuba and Johnny Gomes - Shuba and Johnny Gomes and Bill Andrews who had given me the introduction of work in South Africa - the degree (?) Johnny Gomes and Shuba - I must say this about - you see, me being Jewish I knew of the oppression that the Jewish people had in the ghetto - ghettos of - and also the fact that they were discriminated in Tsarist Russia from entering universities and from learning professions, trades, and therefore race discrimination and job reservation in South Africa was very close to me because it - (it is part of my upbringing.)

Starts here

from p. 25  
②

there was a kind of apartheid.



R.S. Although I - I was born late, and Tsarist Russia was finished, but I'd read enough about the - the Jewish literature to know what happened in Tsarist Russia as well as in Poland and so on, so I decided to work full time for the movement, which I think that I must have mentioned to you already, but I - it was strongly rooted in me, the desire to do away with race discrimination, and as one comrade said that to me) - Cde. Moses Kotane said to me one day when he was general secretary of the Communist Party - (we were discussing racism, and he said to me (he thinks there is) no - no trace of racism in me, white racism, because I) was not brought up - I wasn't born in South Africa.

My explanation to him was it's not only that, it is the race discrimination against the Jews in Tsarist Russia and Poland that had given me the feeling against, and I can't just see any difference in human beings - human beings are to me human beings. - (so I think that was a very important background that I have in me, and as you will have seen in our - in the booklet that Jack and I brought out, Job Reservation - have you seen that - if I give you a copy will you take care of it - because when the act of 1956 was introduced with section 70 introducing job reservation, extending job reservation from the mines to industries, commerce and so on, I felt it very strong, and literally it made me sick because I felt that a trade union movement - the labour movement is not fighting against this strongly enough, so I discussed it with Jack that I am very worried that people don't realise the great injury that is being done to the Coloured, to the African people by introducing this section in the IC Act of extending job reservation from the mines to all other spheres of work, and that is why we brought out the booklet called Job Reservations in the Trade Unions, which I'll give you, and I think this will be of importance to your book because right now as we are sitting here, you must have heard yesterday on the news that Anglo-American is considering action to demanding that doing away with job reservation on the mines.

Just now Jack and I have finished - I mean not now - end of (?) last year a booklet on job reservation, Colour Bar on the Mines for 100 Years, you see - that will be published before your book I hope will come up - we just had a letter from - about it (?) - so I think it is very important to emphasise the struggle - to me this became a life struggle against job reservation, and therefore when I organised the Food and Canning Workers, and the workers were well organised, I fought and won - I mean I led a fight in (?) the union that our Coloured girls or Africans should get jobs in the offices, because by that time - by 1950s - 1950 a new generation of workers came in who were not so illiterate as the first generation that I was organising in 1941.

J.F. So can you speak a bit about the '40s because we stopped in the fairly late '30s....

R.S. That is all right - you see, I'm now getting onto the organisation of the Food and Canning Workers Union, and this was all over the country, and perhaps it was also that there weren't white girls - you know, the companies were prepared to employ a non-European - well, we must say Coloured, not non-European - Coloured girls in the offices - and another thing which is also part of the struggle against job reservation was that we struggled our union that young men, Coloured men - there weren't many Africans - that Coloured men should get training in the engineering shops - in every canning factory there are - there'll be white engineers - they were whites in the labs - and we were demanding that they should also employ Coloured workers there.

R.S. In fact we were negotiating an agreement and the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the AEU, which was a white dominated union, people - craftsmen that had come out from England - the union was established in fact as a branch of the English union - they came to ask us that we should see that the engineers in our factories - in the factories who'll either (?) make an agreement should get the same rates of pay as the rates in their agreement, and we said : We don't want that - we will not introduce any base cuts (?) for your men, but we want your men to agree to train Coloured workers, to take them on as apprentices - and this, I should say, were the first apprentices in the - in the engineering shops was in Groot Drakenstein at the Rhodes (?) Fruit Farms.

Now the Food and Canning Workers Union meant that we had to - because of the industry, we concentrated first on the fruit and vegetables factories, then dried fruit, and then we launched out to the fish canning industry - in the little booklet, New Life, I may give you on loan too, where the story of our union is written up, you will see how I got to the idea of organising the fish canning workers, simple, by one day waiting to meet the secretary of the employers organisation to make an appointment - they had filing cabinets in the office, and I went up and I looked at the filing cabinets and outside, just like I have, was written Fish Canning Industry.

I thought well, if the fruit and (?) - if the canners council has the fish, I too - we too should have the fish - and the young lady there I asked her to open the filing cabinet - didn't hesitate and she show it to me and I quickly took down mentally the addresses of the various factories, and it was Import(.....) Namaqualand in Lambert's Bay (?) but that you will have in the book because by that time - the booklet was written in 1950 - the fish canning industry was already organised by us, and the first wage board investigation for the fish canning industry in South Africa was held as a result of our work, and the minister we - we asked that a member of our union or a representatives of our workers should be a member of the wage board.

There was at that time - the wage act had laid down that we can get an additional member, they said (?) - not a regular member but an additional member - we nominated a Indian comrade, H.A. Naidoo - the minister didn't accept that nomination - the minister of labour, Madley, and he then asked us to nominate another person, whereupon the union nominated me, so I was in fact the first woman additional member to the wage board in South Africa and I - that was a very great experience to me and to the workers, because as I went along investigating the conditions of the workers I went to factories which we hadn't organised, and I used the lunch hour and the time to meet the workers - I met with a great deal of opposition from the employers.

In one factory, Hondeklip Bay, the employer had given - because there are no cafes, no hotels, you see - we came from far away to do our whole day's job of investigating, so the bosses arranged to give us lunch but - I've forgotten his name, but he refused - he didn't want to give me lunch - that I should sit at the table with him - and I didn't know what was going wrong (on) because actually I went to the chairman of our wage board and I said : Look, don't worry about lunch for me because I want to spend the whole lunch hour with the workers - and now he already knew what the bosses didn't want me to have lunch - No, he says, I insist on you having lunch - so I said to him : Look, I'll - then you must please explain and apologise that I'm coming late because I'll first of all work with the - with the workers.

R.S. It's only when (?) I came there to the lunch because they told me - showed to me the room - it was where the bosses were living - they were living on the premises of the factory - I've forgotten the name of the - the boss - it would be in the minutes of our union - and I - I saw that he looked at me very strange, you see - now this actually was something now the first time that I should sit with the employers and have lunch, because my principle was always not to accept anything from the employers, so much so whenever we had consolation (?) board meetings and we had to have morning tea and afternoon tea, I insisted on behalf of the union that we will pay for morning tea, they'll pay for afternoon tea, so we are on equal no favours of tea - I never accepted tea in the boss's office.

When I went in with delegations and the bosses would offer us tea, I had said to the workers beforehand : Look, they may offer us tea, that we're not accepting tea - because I wanted to train the workers that we are not taking anything from the bosses as they dish out, you know, a favour from them.

But when he finished the lunch and we were going on, Dr. Botha came up to me and said : I - I have to tell you something, but not now - I'll tell you in the car - and he then told me the difficulties he had because one (?) of the members of the wage board threatened not to eat unless I'm invited for the lunch - a similar problem we had in Port Noleth, where the manager of the factory, a Mr. White, had - before already when I came first to organise in 1942, had refused - had threatened the hotel where he was having lunch, and where I was staying there was one hotel, that if I - that I must leave the hotel because otherwise he'll not come to eat there.

And on one day when I came late, the next day after I arrived in Port Noleth and I came for lunch, I was told I can't get lunch, I must pack and go, and I said : What do you mean about that - and they said no, I'm not allowed to stay here - now this was the only hotel and this is very serious because where else could I stay, and so I said to the manageress of the hotel, or the (?) housekeeper - I said : Let me see your owner - now the workers in the - in the hotel knew all about me, and as soon as I came they kept (?) lunch for me, because I told them at breakfast time that I'll be coming later, I was having a meeting, so the food was already on the table when (?) they saw me coming in and (.....) oh, he's sleeping - Mr. Snyman is his name, S n y m a n - that's an Afrikaans name.

So she said to me : He's sleeping - I said : Look, I must get my lunch, I'm not moving from the hotel, I must see him - so she then called him in because she was afraid that she'll lose the - White and his wife's dinners they - because they had no servant at the weekend they would come and eat there, you see - so Mr. Snyman came down and I said : I understand from your lady in charge that you want me out of this hotel - now you know that only a bad woman, a prostitute can be told to get out, and if you are suggesting that I'm one, I said, the hotel will then belong to me because I'm going to sue you for damages, and I say I mean it - I'll sue you for a great deal of damages because I'm a responsible person in organising the workers.

He says : You mean it - I say : I mean it definitely - so he said to me that he's going to see his - his other company directors the hotel - however, in the afternoon I went to the location - I've got photos here actually - and saw their conditions after my lunch, and in the evening I went to see the Catholic priest there, because this Catholic priest had before carried on correspondence about conditions, starvation in Namaqualand.

R.S. His letters appeared in the Guardian, which was a progressive weekly paper, and I had taken his name and I decided I'll come, I'll visit him - so when I came and I visit them he introduced me to the nuns, to the sisters - I received a wonderful welcome, they asked me to stay for supper and I said : No, I'm going to the hotel - because I wanted to challenge (?) - but I say : After supper I'll come back to you - when they said : Why do you want to go to hotel - I told them what I told you and they said : Look, you come and stay with us - I said : No, on principle I'm demanding to stay with them in the hotel - they were worried about my safety and advised me that when I get into the hotel I should lock the room and all that, but I told them - I said : Now you know the story, nobody else in Port Noleth knows about you, and I've told you now in the (.....) so if anything happens to me then you know the story.

Well, I stayed with them till ten o'clock all the lights get out, but there is - they had sort of their own little, you know, generator to generate electricity, so they told me this - they gave me a candle that I should have and a box of matches and I went - about half past nine I came to the room and I went - came to the room, I put on the candle, and actually I was so tired even from the previous day travelling and meetings from the morning, because I went out early morning to distribute a leaflet to the workers they should come to the meeting - and then I had a meeting, and in the afternoon working in the township, and seeing the poverty all affects one - and then at night with them - so I went to sleep.

The next morning we had meetings early morning, but the magistrate of Springbok, to - to whom I had a letter from our division inspector of labour - the story you will hear - he also gave me a letter of introduction to the man who is sort of acting as his representative in Port Noleth - I've forgotten what the position was called - when I arrived there on Friday - or on (?) Saturday I asked for him, he wasn't there, but on Sunday he turned up, and I had left a note in his residence that I'm here - actually the magistrate of - of Springbok had also communicated with him - so he came to see me just in the morning early and I told him about it, he says : You don't move, you don't budge.

I told him I'm going to the meetings and we arranged that he would come and have lunch with me at the hotel - this is where he was also eating - so well, I carried on, and of course I didn't leave the hotel - it was that very same time Robbey Leibbrandt - have you heard his name before - he had come to the Namaqua Coast - you know that he came with a little submarine - you've heard the story, yes....

J.F. No.

R.S. The Germans sent him back with the - with I think a submarine or something - I didn't know anything about it....

J.F. With money or sabotage materials....

R.S. I don't know - he came in in a little boat, so they - they received him and there was great excitement by the local nationalists who were fighting against the war - in the Second World War against Smuts - and because they knew that I was a communist they thought that I was against Smuts and so on, so one of them came to see me, and he was talking against the government.

R.S. But I was not falling for that because by that time the Soviet Union had already been attacked in the previous year, in '41 - this is '42, October - and we were all in support of the war pressing for a second front, so I - I refused to discuss anything with him - he wanted me to tell him what problems I have with the government and whether the government is helping the workers - now I had all the legislation with me, so much so that at the meeting of our workers in the morning we had the special branch turned up - I told them this is a meeting only for the workers, I showed to them the IC Act that I have a right to organise in the wages, and I got - because I told them I wouldn't have them in the hall when I'm organising the workers, and they left, but I had very unpleasantness from the nationals (?) themselves.

The woman in the post office, for example - I was sending through a telegram to Jack that I've arrived, and then I was going to be due (?) and I wanted to speak to him because - and she just didn't put through a call - Jack never got my communications, nor did the union get any communications - I wanted to tell the union that I established a branch in Port Noleth, because that would be news for our workers to encourage them, and also for the Guardian, but this woman at the post office just would not co-operate with me in any way whatsoever, and I had difficulty in getting a bus - to be on the bus to go back, because in a way the - the place was controlled, you know, by local nationalists who were against the government - you see, the set-up in a small place.

However, the organisation of the workers in Port Noleth took place despite any opposition, and when I was on the wage board in 1944 - or '43 when I went to Port Noleth with other members of the wage board, Mr. White again didn't want me to come into the factory, but the director, the managing director of the company, Andrew (.....) was also an additional member representing the employers - he was my opposite number and he - he insisted that I should be on the wage board there, you see, and so White resigned, Mr. White, and he landed up in Northern Rhodesia - I mean in - on the Copper Belt.

It is only afterwards when somebody came from Lusaka actually, Professor - what was it - Blackman (?) who told me about the incident, how he met him and he gave the reasons for leaving Namaqualand, because of that terrible woman, Ray Alexander in our - but we knew that he left, that he resigned - I'm giving these cases to give you a picture of the difficulties we had in organising the workers.

Sometimes people think this was easy, but I had all kinds of experiences - for example, once when I was organising the sweet workers - did I tell you about that - when the bosses - when I came with a leaflet to the workers, the bosses let out their vicious dog - did I give you, yes - and the dog ran after me and he got hold and he - I - I remained literally - my pants (.....) petticoat, because the dog pulled off my skirt and I pulled off a shoe - it was summer time - to chase the dog away, and so one grabbed - there are two dogs, vicious dogs, but I'm giving you the example.

In another factory, dried food factory in Pardon (?) Island, when I came to organise and I was speaking to the workers outside the factory, the boss came with a big stick, yes, to chase me with a big stick - that was at Pardon Island Dried Food Factory - P a a r d e n in Cape Town - Paarden Island.

R.S. And the other place where I wasn't - didn't want that I should have - that I should eat lunch with them, that was Hondeklip Bay - H o n d e - k l i p - but our union had got out to all different kinds of fishing hamlets, and therefore when I was banned from the union in 1953 - now there is - here I'll show you right away in the Guardian of 1953 what the response of the workers was against my banning order - I will give it to you right now from the Guardian so that you can give the date and have a few headlines about it.

Well, when I was banned from the union it was a very - but I was expecting this all others - the only reason why I stayed later than others was because the government didn't want to ban me at the same time as Solly Sachs - you've heard about Solly Sachs?

J.F. Why didn't they want to ban you at the same time?

R.S. Well, because they didn't want action by workers - people were striking for him - so I was only banned late, and they thought there'll be nobody to organise any protest against my banning orders, but the workers organised a protest - you will see this in this - so well, when I was banned this is my - my problem because I carried on working underground with the workers, but I don't want to do any harm with the people who worked with me.

Some comrades were banned because - like Bekky (.....) and Oscar Mpetha - they were banned, given banning orders, and the reason given is, by the government, that they had seen them in my company - that was the official letter - not only was I banned from the union, but a large number of our comrades were banned - Cde. Wenzel (?) in Worcester - a number of women and men in Paarl factories and in Port Elizabeth, food and canning workers - the government had - had in us a - a strong opposition, and of course the nationalists in the country areas were planning that I should be banned.

In - in fact a interesting thing happened - when the government gave me the first banning - not banning but letter that I'm a listed person - that letter never reached me....

J.F. What year was that?

R.S. A listed....

J.F. What year? *from p. 35*

R.S. That was 19 - 1950 after the Suppression of Communism Act was introduced, right away all communists who were known (?) (to them were - were going to be listed as communists, and we were given a letter, - did Jack not mention this to you, no - well, so we were all sent letters, but I didn't get a letter, so much so that in October when we established the medical benefit fund for our union, the - our union nominated me and employers said yes, they don't mind I should be the secretary of the medical benefit fund, but I'm a listed communist and I could say to them I'm not - they couldn't believe it.

What happened was the letter to me was sent to my address, residential address, and by some coincident in the same street the number was repeated, you know - our place was 30 Braadle (?) Road, Oranjezicht, and higher up on the street was also 13, so the letters were delivered there, so I never received them.

R.S. In fact I have a sister - she's dead now - and I didn't get from her a message when my son was born, when Johan was born, and I was very hurt about it, but actually later on we found there was a telegrams and a little parcel for me - these people had by - by also coincident, had gone on holiday so that their mail was accumulating there - so after this argument I had on the - at the board, consolation board, and I told them that I was not listed, these employers made representations to the government, and on the 30th. December, 1950, special branch together with the special branch from the post office came to see me, you know....

Elizabeth (?) and I were the only ones that received a special banning order - at the bottom of my banning order was put down Not to assist in any way whatsoever - (I've still got that banning order) - whatsoever any group of people to improve their wages and conditions of work - so (in addition of banning me from all unions - I think it was 44 or 45 organisations that I was banned, and not only the trade unions but including, for example, PTA, Parents Teachers Association).

Yes, when they turned up for some raid in our house in '5 - '55 it was, or '54, I can't remember - they raided the house, and in the letterbox was a letter from the PTA to me, and from the Cape Town Film Society - I was a foundation member of the Cape Town Film Society, and there were two - I mean a notice from the Cape Town Film Society to me that I should come to - for a film show, and another one from the PTA to a meeting - and then they claimed (?) that also put it on in the banning list, yes.

And it was very sad because my children were just beginning to go to school, Mary and Tanya, you see - they were in the A class - Tanya hadn't started but Mary did, (and I couldn't go to PTA meetings - when Mary was given an award for recognition of her in school with - when she finished secondary school, I couldn't go to it) and I - (but I did go - I dressed myself up with a hat and glasses and gloves and so on and I went, but I couldn't do - other mothers went up, you know, her friends' children, and greeted her and kissed her, and I was afraid to do it - in fact as soon as this was over I - I slipped out from the grounds, which hurt Mary very much.

I could only - I didn't want her to know that I can't go to these meetings - the less children know about it the better for them as well as for me, - (so I couldn't disclose it to her - it was only late - afterwards that I explained to her I was afraid that (.....) up because some of the parents may have been nat - members of the Nationalist Party and may have been the wife or the - or the daughter or the sister of a special branch man, and then they would say: You see, there was Ray - Mrs. Simons - or Ray (Alexander, as I was known) - so these are the type of hurts, you know, one had constantly to undergo.) → do p. 35

It was terrible - I can't tell you - I who was used to address meetings and always be with hundreds of workers during lunch hour, in the evening and so on, all of a sudden was cut off from life - so much so that when I - when we got a bit of a diff - a spate (?) I can say, or respite from - because one of our comrades, Johnson Ngwuvela, took the minister, Blackie Swart, to court for planning (?) the banning orders, in other words (?) because he did not sign the banning orders - it was put with a stamp.



R.S. So I was able to stand for elections in 1954, until they introduced a new act and the (.....) then referred it to the - as the Ray Alexander Act - they amended the Act, you know, which prevented any member of the Communist Party, any listed (?) communist to stand for parliament - but because this was not, you see, at that time, then I could stand for parliament, but subsequently to this, in 1961 there was - or 1960 there was a bus strike in Port Elizabeth and the strikers were demanding higher wages and better conditions of work - Cde. Govan Mbeki - that's Thabo's father - he came to Cape Town and we discussed the case, the workers' case, because the company where the workers were employed, they - the parent company was in Cape Town - so we discussed this.

Then he went back to Port Elizabeth and he was arrested, so when he was arrested he sent through a message to the comrades in Port Elizabeth that I should come and take his place on, you know, arguing the case for the workers - so when - but I had at bottom part (?) knowing that I could not help any group of workers, you see, so I went to the judge in Cape Town, who was nominated by us and Cde. Govan Mbeki had met him, to be the chairman of the Arbitration Board, so I went to him and he accepted that position - Sam Clivers (?) I think his name was Sam Clivers, but I'll look up in the Guardian now with you in advance, so I'll give you the correct names - I have to see for you the October, 1953 Guardian - '53 - and then the advance (?) of 1961.... (Tape off)

END OF SIDE ONE.

J.F. Was this the end of an era, that you were banned?

R.S. No - I went to the judge and told him my problem, that I not only for a union (?) but I'm not to help in any way, so he - and I told him it's written at the bottom - Oh, he says, cut it off because they - he doesn't think they have - if it will be typewritten they may have a copy, but with the handwrit - with (.....) he's sure they haven't taken a copy - that he just wrote it - so - and it was agreed that I will travel in a different name on the same plane with him, and in this way I'll come into Port Elizabeth, so I travelled on a different name - I bought - somebody bought a ticket for me in their name and I went on the plane - I didn't sit in the same - near him....

J.F. Who was this?

R.S. This will be the judge - we are going to the same Arbitration Board in Port Elizabeth, but at the end of Arbitration Board the pro - Eastern Province Herald, one of the papers, published a photo of three members - the employers' representative was Horwood, who was subsequently the minister of finance - I've got a photo of them - I mean them and me, you see - so then the story came out that I was there, but it was too late - the government didn't take action they had against me - it's Cde. - the judge was quite right that they must - by now they have forgotten which a change of (.....)

R.S. So whenever I possibly could, even I was banned from trade union and so on, I would - this was sort of the sign that I helped the - the workers in their - in Port Elizabeth.

J.F. When was the so-called Ray Alexander Act....

R.S. That was done in 1954, April, Act amending the Suppression of Communism Act - I'll tell you if you can take this off, because I've got here a file and I'll show you.... in 1960 I was - I went into hiding so they didn't find me - they didn't find me in 1960 emergency - I went into hiding and - but I was all the time in Cape Town meeting friends and so on, helped to organise our local Defence and Aid Fund really while I was in hiding, because I worked - I worked with a very good Quaker woman, May Mare-Parker, who is from the Moltino family, granddaughter of one of the - the - the prime ministers of South Africa, the early prime ministers - I stayed with her and worked with her - May, her first name, and a double name, Mare was her maiden name, and she was married to Dr. Parker so she May Mare-Parker, a wonderful person, and she introduced me to a great many leading families of South Africa, like Betty Solomon - not Betty Solomon but another Solomon (?) I've forgotten what her name is, but the early who were still alive, the families, so she introduced me to them while I was in hiding - she took me out and introduced me to places.

And even when I was in hiding I went into Langa location to see the children of our comrades who were detained, like for example, Johnson Ngwavela's children and Annie Silinga's....

J.F. John....

R.S. John Ngwavela, his children, his family, and also Annie Silinga's family, and others - I've forgotten now their names who their mothers were detained - the children, I visited them in their homes, and the same thing with Dora Tamana's children - well, in - in 1964 when Jack was given the banning order from the University we - I was - incidentally I was working right from the beginning on our book, Class and Colour, so I was collecting material, taking down interviews, and in '63 when they raided again our house they took away a whole lot of our papers, but I managed to get it back because - that's too long a story to tell - got it back from them and we hid away the - the papers, but in the meantime I was still carrying on doing research, and also while I was banned we brought out a little booklet that I'm going to show you, so I was fully occupied and I wasn't bored at all, until I came out to Zambia, and from Zambia I went for the first time to a conference of the Food Trade Union International of food workers, hotel and tobacco workers, a branch, or a department, a trade union department of the W - the World Federation of Trade Unions.

And since that time I attended various conferences from - representing the ANC Womens Section, as well as SACTU - we were - Mark Shope and I - did you meet Mark Shope?

J.F. No, I met Gertrude.

R.S. Gertrude - Mark is in Dar es Salaam, you can see him there - he left yesterday - so Mark Shope and I were the first live (life) delegates to go to the International Labour Organisation to represent SACTU, and I went as SACTU representatives in 195 - '70, '71, '72, '73, '74, '75, '76, and then in '83 again as a ANC representative.

- R.S. Now these meetings, conferences that I attended brought me in contact with leaders of countries of people who are fighting for liberation - I met Chilean people, Vietnamese - I went to a conference, sent by the ANC, in solidarity with - with Vietnam - that was in 1966, February - I met leaders from the whole of the African Continent who had already obtained independence, as well as those like Zimbabwean, Angolan (?) Mozambiquan, Namibians and (.....) so that broadened my whole outlook on the African Continent, and the role South Africa is playing in destabilising Southern Africa and is reaching out - as you know they did - to attack Mauritius or other places - and helped people to understand the role and the actions of the racist regime, and to give all support to our struggle to liberate our country - I think that is.
- J.F. I wonder if I could ask you a bit of a strange question, but I was listening to the BBC yesterday and they were talking about the economies of the socialist countries and someone said : Yes, but the GDR it's actually quite a strong economy - so this person who was representing the BBC point of view said : Well, of course the Germans are a hard working efficient people - which indicates an element of racism, a nationalism - I'm just wondering from you coming from Europe, coming from the supposedly hard working white race, which is a nationalist assumption and racist assumption, how did you find the way one works in a African country, in a third world country, in a black culture in terms of - even in Lusaka, that just - the socialist aspect, just the level of the pace in Africa, the kind of bureaucracy in a liberation movement - did you ever feel that you could work more efficiently than some of the comrades....
- R.S. No....
- J.F. Did you ever be bothered that things went slower - if you went to a World Federation meeting and you saw the Czechoslovakians or the Hungarians, did you ever think well, in Africa we do things slower?
- R.S. No, because it is all very well for people to say that we are slow, or that Africa's slow, but what they overlook is the years and years that Europe had developed, had development, while colonising the African Continent right from 1885 when they carved up the African Continent - they denuded the African Continent not only from minerals and wealth but also of its manpower, and didn't give them the opportunity for training in technolo - in technology and in science and so on.
- Take for example Zambia - Zambia had 100 graduates here and just a few - 100 people that had finished second year education, and just a handful of doctors and so on, so what do we - what do we expect....
- J.F. And did it bother you on a personal level - did you feel things where you wished they would go faster....
- R.S. No - well, I wished that they would - that they should develop more and - and help them and so on, but not with - in a way of saying they're incapable of doing it, you see - I was recently in GDR and I met comrades that are studying there from us, from the ANC, young women, and truly it excited me - here are the young girls - you know what would have happened to them at home - they would have been out of their schools, beaten up and perhaps killed, but there they are studying med - a doctor, a gynaecology, another one economist, another one a biochemist, a third one in - in geo-something else - high stuff, my dear really, these young girls.

R.S. And I - I say to them : Look, comrades, we'll need each one of you, take as much as you can of education from this place that you are given free, and you are given free because you are a member of the ANC - it's the ANC that negotiates for you the - the bursaries - and they get funds - even those that have babies, my dear - I saw their babies, lovely dressed, warm (?) looking well, and one of the com (?) said to me : Oh, yes, and from the 1st. April we are getting even a bigger stipendia for our children - not only that, all the German children are getting it, so are they getting it.

Now the - I was very excited to visit - the first country I visited was Bulgaria, on the way to that conference, then I went to Czechoslovakia - later I went to that conference in Berlin to - in solidarity with NAM, then I went to meet - in 1967 I went to the Soviet Union to its - part of its 50th. anniversary, and there I was given the opportunity of visiting the country from where I was born, Latvia, and that was a great excitement to me, in which I've written a little piece that night when I arrived there, because I - when I was still in Latvia, in Riga, I was dreaming (?) and working for a free Latvia, a Latvia that would join - that it belonged the rest of - of the socialist republics, and there I was in that free Latvia.

And in fact the very night that we were there there were the Vietnamese troop, a cultural group of Vietnam where, you know, acting, and I went to that, and I went to the places which I knew was very strictly oppressed, and now the children at school - I was taken to one of the schools, I was taken to a factory, and I saw free Latvia - so of course then subsequently - and I met my comrades with whom I was working together, and they introduced me to a comrade with whom I went to school together, and she's still my dear friend.

On my way to Berlin I phoned her up from Moscow to say hello to her - she's one of the women that had run away from Latvia because - and she worked in the Metro - she helped to build the Metro - she's a engineer - she was subsequently teaching maths in a - in the secondary schools - so everywhere in the socialist countries I met comrades who are wholly, fully committed to help our liberation struggle, and they don't spare themselves - they give everything that they possibly can for our struggle, and that working class and international solidarity that we received from them from the socialist countries plus this solidarity from all other, you know, progressive people, maybe from the Scandanavian countries or from Britain and America, although Reagan carries on a, you know, against us, but the people of America - not as one (?) comrade when I was criticising Reagan she got up, she said : Please, Cde. Ray, remember that Reagan is not speaking for the whole of America - and that we know that he's not.

J.F. Tell me, did you ever organise white South African workers?

R.S. Yes, in our union, the Food and Canning, we had white workers, and when I was organising sweet workers they were working in the factories.

J.F. How did you find them to organise?

R.S. Well, just workers - workers need higher wages and better conditions of work, and they understood that they can't be on their own - they're a minority - I mean I met white trade union leaders at conferences.

J.F. But that's the leaders - I just wonder....

R.S. But workers too come (.....) I organised them - I organised sweet workers - they worked with me on the committee - I organised food and canning workers - I'll show you in the booklet....

J.F. But percentage-wise they are a small....

R.S. Small, of course, yes....

J.F. I just wonder if you....

R.S. It depends which industry are the workers - say, for example, the engineering workers, they were - but all the same in all industries the white workers are a minority.

J.F. But there certainly aren't many - you hear one or two stories of a white worker who's asked to join SACTU and - but it's very small....

R.S. That's right, it is....

J.F. I'm just wondering....

R.S. .... because the - the bourgeoisie, the ruling class, had co-opted them and is working, you know - gave them privileges at the expense of the black man, so many of them were taken in by these bribes - I don't mean bribes like money, but they were given the right to all kinds of jobs - you see, they were not the first in the - in the present (?) to be fired - the first to be fired during the 19 - during the hungry years were the black men.

J.F. And what kind of hope do you have for the future South Africa when you have so much in the media about the white workers in the (..... ..).....

R.S. Yes, this is very serious and it's very worrying, but (we do constantly appeal to the white workers, SACTU does, the Communist Party, the ANC, that they must join the working class, that they're - they're - look what's happening today - (there is a great deal of unemployment) - white workers are also out of work) - you know that in - in Johannesburg they had to be given - go to soup kitchens - the - (the Nationalist Party cannot solve the problems of the hunger and the poverty that is prevailing in South Africa.

6  
They're spending so much money on armaments, so much money on ammunition to fight in Namibia, that social welfare is cut down, and the white - the white workers in South Africa are going to face the - the - the wrath, the hatred of the black man, so it's for them the best thing to do is to join with the black man to struggle for liberation. - (on that I'm certain, that the day will come when more and more white workers will come over to our side, but it is to the effect that while the rich are coming to meet with the ANC, the white workers have not yet come.)

J.F. What will make them come, do you think, what....

R.S. Well, the more, (the stronger our movement comes for liberation, the more they will realise that they cannot get anything from the Nationalist Party - the protection they had all the years, the safety, will not be there for them, because the Nationalist government will not give protection to the white people in South Africa) - that is why you have students and clergymen coming to discuss things with the ANC - now I want to show you this.....

- R.S. .... went to London in 1965 with Jack - to England - and he was there - he told you that he was in Manchester University - well, I went to study at the same time (?) to write - I joined the university and I took up three subjects - you had to take a minimum, so I took up German Russian and lab - and industrial relations, and there I was - I studied there in Manchester University.
- J.F. I wonder if I could ask you, so much has been written - I don't know if you saw the paper from the York conference?
- R.S. Yes, not all, I just - I have some of them, but I didn't have time to read them - you mean about post-apartheid?
- J.F. Ja, there was a certain paper by Rob Lambert, I think.
- R.S. Yes, I haven't read it.
- J.F. He's saying - he's writing about the lessons of the '50s, and so often in South Africa there is this talk about it.
- R.S. Well, I - can you just tell me what he's writing and then I....
- J.F. He - let's forget him for a second, I don't think that's of interest (?) but I'm just wondering in South Africa people will say the lessons of the '50s - unions and community organisations - and they'll say the lesson was SACTU shouldn't have gotten involved with community issues, just like SAWU shouldn't.
- R.S. Well, look, my dear, any trade unionist that is worth his salt must take part in the lives, the problems of the people in their townships and in their areas and so on - you will see when you read our little booklet, New Life, how we took up the issues not just of rent, of housing, clinics, about education - I can't imagine anyone calling himself a trade unionist and thinking that his job is only wages and conditions of work - his job is the life of the people.
- J.F. And what about with your ideological background, what about those who worry about the working class hegemony, the African working class hegemony, the idea of will the workers lead in an alliance like congress alliance, like UDF, what is....
- R.S. I'm not worried about it - to me the issues are clear, that the working class in South Africa, the black working class is in the forefront of the struggle of bringing about changes - you can see what is happening today - you've seen the NUM resolutions, right - COSATU is having the July meeting - and these people that were saying the unions mustn't get involved with local - I mean like for example, at first they would lose - they had to change their tactics.
- J.F. I just think that I should ask a little tiny bit more about the Jewish question - I just wonder why so few are like you politically - there are the Zionist Jews, the ones who left politics and didn't get involved in anti-apartheid - why do you think that so many - you have the Slovos and the Ray Simons - and is your husband Jewish also?
- R.S. No.
- J.F. That have been involved, and then you've got the masses of synagogues and Jewish businessmen - what is the....

- R.S. You mean what - first of all I was already in the illegal movement at home - when I came at the age of under 15 I was involved - well, I was very fortunate, my father was a socialist, so he introduced me to socialist books reading.
- J.F. But there are others who experienced oppression, experienced pogroms and yet they were so easy to move into (.....) and Zionism.
- R.S. Yes, well, look, it is, as it's (?) all over the world, every - all peoples, we're not the same - I think what was Harry saying that - I've forgotten the - the - the proverb (?) made by (.....) about people, that we are all different, and I see now Gorbachev is making the point that it is good that we are different to be - to pass on to each other the differences and the lessons and experiences, so I can't say why have I been different to others - my understanding of life, the fact that I was a great reader of books - I think that is mainly it - my intellectual development was of a higher level - I, for example, came out in the same boat with some other Jews, girls and boys - they went into business, they went - their interest was to get married and have children - I wasn't interested in that.
- My comrade with whom I had from school, you know, we're in love, he remained - he was arrested the day after I arrived in South Africa - I arrived on the 6th. November, he was arrested in Riga on the 7th. November - I've never seen him - he was killed by the nazis - when I went to the Soviet Union in '67 I heard the whole story of him - so the - there is differences in people - Slovo went also with - came - well, he came as a youngster to South Africa, but in the army he met Jewish fellows - they didn't do what he was doing.
- J.F. Because there are other Jews who felt the survival of the Jewish they would say race would be more important than looking at the African plight, the black plight of South Africans - they were very concerned with that....
- R.S. They were concerned with themselves only, you see - now we can't be concerned with ourselves only, we - we are part of a community, we are part of a people, we are part of a country, and therefore it is correct for us to do what we are doing - I mean I have no hesitations - if I have my life all over again I would do it the same as I've done.
- J.F. The last thing I just wanted to ask you was this topic of non-racialism that I'm looking at, is it important, is it just a small aspect, a peripheral aspect, is it central - how do you see this issue?
- R.S. Well, I think the - it is not a small issue - we are living in a race dominated, race ridden country, where hatred is being generated by the RBB's (?) and the others and - and also by black racists - what - well, I'm not going to mention names, but you know, the AZAPO people and the others - you've read some of the stuff, you've referred to their interviews, so we can't say racism is unimportant - it is a very important issue for us, and therefore the preaching of human rights and - and exposing racism what it is is very important in our struggle and will become so more important as time goes on.
- J.F. And ideologically is it related - is there an ideological base or is it just a nice concept?
- R.S. No, it's a - the ideological base, the base that human - that workers irrespective of race - what is a trade union - a trade union is an organisation, a basic organisation of workers, elementary organisation of (?) the workers irrespective of race, religion, colour and sex.

R.S. And therefore, for an example, when I see that the ICFTU is supporting CUSA and AZACTU, you know, I say to myself that is contrary - it's a negation of the principles of trade unionism, truly, because the whole principle of trade unionism - of trade unionists, which was, you know, pronounced by early trade union leaders of - or peoples, you know - I'm take it (?) the Webb's book - they give a definition of a trade union - Beatrice and Sidney Webb - and it's all the time underlined, irrespective of race, irrespective of colour and so on - so when ICFTU support CUSA, AZACTU, as they have done before and not SACTU, which until COSATU was the only principal trade union centre in South Africa, then I say that they are not truly trade unionists - I argued this with them before, and I'm prepared to argue again and again that a trade union is elementary organisation of the workers irrespective of colour, irrespective of race, irrespective of sex and religion, because you have in early Europe trade unions divided up on the Catholics and the Christians and so on - did that bring unity to the working class? - (no.

END OF INTERVIEW.