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# Ruth First: le campagne giornalistiche sudafricane 1947-1963

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a cura di

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## Il giornalismo come strumento di lotta

Ruth First scelse di dedicarsi professionalmente al giornalismo, inteso come strumento di lotta politica e informazione di protesta, dopo aver preso attivamente parte alle agitazioni che seguirono lo sciopero dei minatori nel Witwatersrand del 1946<sup>1</sup>; quello stesso anno divenne direttrice dell'ufficio di Johannesburg del *The Guardian*, settimanale fortemente influenzato dal *Communist Party of South Africa*<sup>2</sup>, che svolse un ruolo determinante nel sostegno al movimento di liberazione sudafricano<sup>3</sup>.

First fu probabilmente la più influente giornalista d'inchiesta della testata<sup>4</sup> e svolse da subito un ruolo chiave nel dare voce alle rivendicazioni degli africani e nel divulgare, condannandole, le ingiustizie perpetrate nei loro confronti, influenzando in questo senso l'impostazione del *The Guardian*<sup>5</sup>. Il settimanale cominciò, in quegli anni, a sostenere la cooperazione tra il Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) e l'African National Congress (ANC), i quali iniziarono gradualmente a superare la reciproca diffidenza e a stringere un'alleanza che nel corso degli anni sarebbe diventata sempre più salda. Fin dalle prime settimane in redazione Ruth, appena ventiduenne, descrisse nei suoi articoli, con uno straordinario acume e un inconfondibile tono tagliente punteggiato di sarcasmo, l'impatto sociale ed economico della politica segregazionista<sup>6</sup>: seguì scioperi e boicottaggi evidenziando le manifestazioni di solidarietà multietnica, mise in risalto le continue difficoltà degli *squatters*, rimarcò il problema della disoccupazione, denunciò le condizioni abita-

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Voices of Liberation. Volume 2: Ruth First*, HSRC Press, Pretoria 1997, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta Pellizzoli, *Introduzione. Ruth First: la morte, la vita, la memoria*, in "DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile", n. mon. *Ruth First: la morte, la vita, la memoria*, 26, 2014, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian: The History of South Africa's Extraordinary Anti-Apartheid Newspaper*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing 2007, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Les Switzer, *South Africa's Alternative Press in Perspective*, in *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., p. 90; 94.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk: Ruth First's early journalism 1947-1950*, in "Review of African Political Economy", 42, 143, 2015, p. 3.

tive degli africani nei *compounds* municipali e intervistò Yusuf Dadoo, Michael Scott, Hyman Basner e Anton Lembede. First collaborò costantemente con la stampa dissidente e, a partire dal 1954, assunse la redazione di *Fighting Talk*, il giornale della Springbok Legion, la cui linea politica, con il suo contributo, si avvicinò molto alle posizioni della Congress Alliance<sup>7</sup>, la coalizione politica multirazziale anti-apartheid<sup>8</sup>. Il *The Guardian* venne messo al bando tre volte a partire dal 1950, anno del Suppression of Communism Act o, in altri casi, costretto a interrompere la propria attività, ma ogni volta riprese tempestivamente le pubblicazioni con altri nomi, riuscendo in ogni caso a garantire l'uscita settimanale<sup>9</sup>. Quando fu messo fuorilegge nel maggio 1952 ricomparve come *The Clarion* e, due mesi dopo, riprese come *People's World* e poco dopo come *Advance*; dal 1954 fino al novembre del 1962 si ripresentò sotto il titolo *New Age*. Nel 1963, dopo l'ennesima messa al bando nell'ottobre 1962 e la pronta riapertura con nome *Spark*, il giornale, dopo 26 anni, fu costretto a cessare la propria attività, poiché su tutti i membri dello staff ormai pesava il divieto di scrivere o pubblicare<sup>10</sup>. Poco dopo, nel marzo 1963, dovette cessare le pubblicazioni anche *Fighting Talk*.

Ruth First, nata nel Sudafrica coloniale, razzista e maschilista, dove imperavano la segregazione e l'apartheid, dedicò se stessa alla lotta per la costruzione di un'Africa libera da discriminazioni e diseguaglianze, senza mai abbandonare quella rigorosa coerenza per la quale si espose personalmente a rischi notevoli. Ruth fu una giornalista instancabile, scriveva anche sedici articoli a settimana<sup>11</sup>, partecipava attivamente alle iniziative di protesta celebrandone i risultati nei suoi scritti; inoltre, la sua lotta non si chiudeva in un'ottica locale e manteneva costanti contatti con le organizzazioni e i movimenti radicali di tutto il mondo. I suoi articoli relativi alle proteste, alle rivendicazioni e ai boicottaggi colpiscono per la loro forza, per il ritmo incalzante con cui rendevano immediatamente partecipe il lettore delle ingiustizie e per l'entusiasmo con cui descriveva le conquiste del movimento di liberazione. I suoi reportage permettono di comprendere i meccanismi di sfruttamento del lavoro dei neri, le ragioni dello sviluppo della delinquenza nonché le modalità e gli intenti delle forme di protesta adottate dal movimento di contestazione. Gli articoli "sudafricani" forniscono quindi uno spaccato unico sul movimento di liberazione durante gli anni della segregazione e offrono una preziosa lezione di giornalismo politico, dove la sistematica e fedele esposizione degli eventi diviene, grazie al suo particolarissimo stile, contemporaneamente veicolo di informazione e coinvolgimento.

Sicuramente gli articoli della First si distinsero perché non si limitavano ad essere mere relazioni degli eventi, ma presentavano anche acute analisi sociali e politiche che permettevano la storicizzazione dei drammatici eventi in corso. Questo giornalismo rivelatore permise a un pubblico sempre più vasto, di comprendere a

<sup>7</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Voices of Liberation. Volume 2: Ruth First*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Roberta Pellizzoli, *Introduzione*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Les Switzer, *South Africa's Alternative Press*, cit., pp. 274-275.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo in the War Against Apartheid*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2013, p. 140.

fondo il problema dello sfruttamento agricolo e contribuì a porre le basi per i movimenti di lotta<sup>12</sup>. Il suo metodo di indagine e di esposizione giornalistica, il suo approccio scientifico e l'efficacia stilistica dei suoi scritti riuscivano a scuotere l'opinione pubblica: il caratteristico stile espressivo, così coinvolgente, efficace nell'indurre il lettore ad assumere un punto di vista critico, capace di incoraggiare atteggiamenti di protesta nei confronti delle ingiustizie, risulta unico e personalissimo. First faceva "parlare" fatti ed eventi lasciando al lettore il compito di interpretarli e di prendere posizione, introducendolo nella dura quotidianità degli africani nelle *townships*. La giornalista sceglieva spesso di riportare i discorsi diretti delle persone coinvolte negli eventi da lei descritti, lasciando che le parole conservassero tutta l'efficacia espressiva della situazione; contestualizzando puntualmente le testimonianze che raccoglieva, faceva sì che esprimessero la gravità della situazione o la volontà di lottare che esse comunicavano. Lavorando come giornalista in Sudafrica, First ebbe modo di analizzare approfonditamente l'apartheid come declinazione dello sfruttamento capitalista: Tale regime non poteva essere disgiunto dagli interessi economici alla base della conquista da parte degli europei e, in seguito, alla dominazione politica di segregazione, non solo del territorio sudafricano, ma di tutto il continente. La base teorica e ideologica su cui Ruth First elaborava e orientava le sue ricerche era marxista<sup>13</sup>, ma le sue posizioni risultavano spesso eterodosse, poiché First non esitava a mettere in discussione il dogmatismo del marxismo ufficiale, spesso entrando anche in contrasto con il marito Joe Slovo<sup>14</sup>, non accettava che fare politica significasse aderire ciecamente a un'ideologia: la trasformazione politica doveva avvenire sulle basi di una ricerca sociale tenendo conto delle contraddizioni presenti, delle lotte in corso, delle richieste della popolazione. First non si limitava a una mera esposizione informativa: era convinta che ingiustizie, soprusi e segregazionismo andassero combattuti individuandone e recidandone le cause; la mobilitazione doveva annientare il sistema alla sua radice.

### **Il giornalismo di Ruth First: i suoi articoli**

Lo scandalo di Bethal, le proteste delle donne contro i *pass*, la collaborazione multietnica per la lotta all'apartheid, i boicottaggi e gli scioperi, le condizioni di vita nelle *townships* e le conseguenze del regime segregazionista, furono le principali campagne giornalistiche portate avanti da Ruth First durante gli anni in cui visse in Sudafrica. Fin dai suoi primi articoli, la redattrice del *The Guardian* denunciò le gravi conseguenze dell'urbanizzazione su base discriminatoria, descrisse le durissime condizioni di vita dei neri nelle *townships* e spiegò come lo sfruttamento a cui erano sottoposti nelle industrie fosse alla base della crescita della manifattura nelle città sudafricane; fu instancabile nel riportare le persecuzioni che gli

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Maria Gentili, *Ruth First: militante internazionalista, giornalista, ricercatrice, docente. La lunga strada verso il Mozambico* in "DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile", n. mon. *Ruth First: la morte, la vita, la memoria*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16.

africani subivano da parte della polizia, spiegando le motivazioni che li spingevano a protestare per richiedere affitti e tariffe del trasporto pubblico più abbordabili.

First denunciò l'ingiusto sistema imposto dai *pass*; allo stesso tempo, seguì e sostenne assiduamente le manifestazioni e le lotte per la sua abolizione. I suoi scritti spiegavano inoltre come l'economia capitalista nelle aree rurali del Sudafrica fosse sostenuta dall'impietoso sfruttamento dei lavoratori a contratto e degli africani arrestati per infrazioni alle *pass laws*, mandati a lavorare nelle fattorie come pena alternativa alla detenzione carceraria. La giornalista documentò e promosse i boicottaggi e gli scioperi volti ad abbattere la discriminazione razziale e ad ottenere migliori condizioni di vita e di lavoro, riuscendo, nei suoi articoli, a incoraggiare le azioni di protesta con entusiasmo, sottolineandone i risultati e dimostrando come ogni successo fosse significativo nel percorso della lotta contro la discriminazione.

Nel corso della sua attività, First si interessò in modo crescente alla dimensione politica femminile ed alla multietnicità che spesso la caratterizzava; durante le *anti-pass campaigns* degli anni '50 sostenne la mobilitazione e la maturazione politica delle donne nella lotta di resistenza descrivendo, divulgando e sostenendo le azioni dei movimenti femminili, raccontando ogni storia con ottimistica approvazione e comunicandone il valore quasi eroico; Ruth aiutò le africane nella costruzione della loro nuova identità sociale<sup>15</sup>, sottolineando, più o meno direttamente, che il loro impegno nelle attività di protesta era non solo un energico rifiuto contro un sistema ingiusto, ma anche un'emancipazione da una società che ancora guardava la loro vivacità politica con un certo stupore.

Di seguito sono riportati alcuni articoli scritti da Ruth First dal 1947 al 1963: gli anni della sua attività giornalistica sudafricana. Gli articoli sono tratti da *Historical Papers Research Archive*, della Wits University di Johannesburg e dall'archivio *Ruth First Papers* conservato nell'*Institute of Commonwealth* di Londra e della raccolta di materiale archivistico della *Digital Innovation South Africa* (DSA).

### ***Pass laws e segregazione: la vita nelle townships***

Articolo n. 1. Per soddisfare la crescente richiesta di manodopera industriale che seguì lo scoppio della seconda guerra mondiale, il primo ministro Smuts permise un'attenuazione delle politiche segregazioniste affinché gli africani avessero accesso a posizioni semi-qualificate, anche se con stipendi considerevolmente più bassi<sup>16</sup>. In questo periodo la popolazione indigena nelle città crebbe del 57.2%, superando la popolazione urbana bianca, con un notevole impatto urbanistico e la conseguente diffusione di *townships* e di alloggi abusivi nella periferia di grandi città come Cape Town e Johannesburg. Il *National Party*, con il *Sauer Report* del 1947, propose l'istituzione totale dell'apartheid tra africani ed europei, sostenendo che l'accesso dei neri nelle città dovesse essere sottoposto ad un severo controllo. Questa strategia venne sostenuta dai lavoratori urbani e rurali bianchi, che espressero il loro supporto al partito guidato da Malan nelle elezioni dell'anno successi-

<sup>15</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left: The Journalism of Ruth First and the Guardian in the 1950s in South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960*, cit., p. 321.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk*, cit., p. 4.

vo<sup>17</sup>. Il *Group Areas Act* del 1950 poneva le basi per la divisione delle aree residenziali urbane secondo il criterio razziale, relegando la popolazione non bianca nelle *townships*. L'articolo "*Families Dumped in Veld. 'Let Them Sleep in God's Own Fresh Air,' Says Official*" fu pubblicato nel *New Age* il 7 aprile 1955 ed è consultabile nelle copie digitalizzate del giornale, raccolte nell'archivio *Historical Papers Research Archive* della Wit University<sup>18</sup>; First raccontò come la polizia intimò a 20.000 africani residenti presso lo *squatter camp* di Apex di lasciare le loro abitazioni abusive per essere trasferiti nella nuova *township* di Daveytown.

Articolo n. 2. Spesso le *townships* erano caratterizzate da sovraffollamento, scarse condizioni igieniche, infrastrutture carenti, limitato accesso all'istruzione e alti tassi di disoccupazione. Nell'articolo "*Alexandra – Where The Pass Laws Breed Murder*", pubblicato nel *New Age* del 12 luglio 1956 (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University), First spiegò, soffermandosi in particolare sulla *township* di Alexandra, come il sistema delle *pass laws*, che costringeva la popolazione non bianca a cercare lavoro in determinate aree, anche se queste non offrivano reali possibilità lavorative, determinasse il ricorso alla criminalità.

Articolo n. 3. Durante gli anni '50, la voce di chi si opponeva alla segregazione si fece sentire attraverso boicottaggi e scioperi imponenti. Il governo rispose con misure repressive e la presenza della polizia nelle *townships*. Il Native Resettlement Act del 1954 autorizzava la rimozione forzata degli africani dal distretto magistrale di Johannesburg e l'anno successivo cominciò ad essere applicato nelle *Western Areas* adiacenti al centro urbano: la *township* di Newclare, assieme a alle altre delle *Western Areas*, costituivano i quartieri a maggioranza africana più rilevanti del Sudafrica negli anni '40 e '50; questi insediamenti erano anche il centro dell'attivismo politico, capeggiato dall'ANC e dal CPSA<sup>19</sup>. "*Police Violence Against The People Must Stop!*". *Ferocious Assaults on Newclare Residents*" è il titolo con cui First, sulle pagine del *New Age* del 21 febbraio 1957 (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University), testimonia come la polizia arrivò ad assaltare la *township* di Newclare usando una violenza tale che due africani persero la vita, mentre altri 70 dovettero essere ricoverati in ospedale, alcuni molto gravi.

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<sup>17</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk*, cit., pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Wit University, *Historical Papers Research Archive, Publications, Newspapers and periodicals, 1952-1990*, *New Age* 1954-1962: <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/collections&c=AG2887/R>, consultato 1 dicembre, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Honor Lay, *Legislation, Dissent, and Violence in Sophiatown under Apartheid*, in South Africa History Online, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/legislation-dissent-and-violence-sophiatown-under-apartheid>, consultato 1 dicembre, 2018.

### **Pass Laws e detenzione in fattoria**

Articolo n. 4. Le *pass laws* furono istituite per monitorare e manovrare i movimenti degli africani assecondando gli interessi economici e le esigenze monopolistiche della dominazione inglese ed implicavano l'obbligo, per i nativi, di essere in grado di esibire in qualsiasi momento questo documento di riconoscimento, una sorta di dettagliato passaporto interno<sup>20</sup>. I nativi erano schedati, fotografati e su di loro era esercitato un controllo a scopo intimidatorio volto ad annientare qualsiasi libertà<sup>21</sup>. Alcuni tipi di *pass* permettevano di cercare un'occupazione, altri di viaggiare, altri ancora di poter circolare dopo le nove di sera. Se trovati privi di regolare *pass* gli africani erano passibili di arresto. Il *pass* teneva sotto controllo i movimenti della forza lavoro garantendo una riserva di manodopera a basso costo<sup>22</sup>. Le *pass laws* rappresentavano l'ossatura del sistema di segregazione e dell'apartheid, ed erano contestate dagli africani e dai movimenti di opposizione al regime. La redattrice del *The Guardian* denunciò come, in base al "*Petty pass law offenders' scheme*" applicato a partire dal 1947, gli africani arrestati per infrazioni anche minime alle *pass laws*, in seguito un accordo stipulato tra i proprietari terrieri e il governo, venivano inviati a lavorare nelle fattorie coem pena alternativa a lunghi mesi di prigione e pesanti multe. Solo pochi mesi dopo il suo ingresso nella redazione del *The Guardian*, la giovane giornalista accese la miccia che fece esplodere uno scandalo sulle condizioni dei lavoratori agricoli a Bethal, un piccolo villaggio afrikaner nell'Eastern Transvaal<sup>23</sup>, tristemente noto tra i lavoratori agricoli per i brutali maltrattamenti lì praticati, che qualche volta degeneravano in torture e persino in morti violente. Nel giugno 1947, un breve paragrafo pubblicato nel *De Echo*, un settimanale di Bethal, colpì la sua attenzione: riportava la decisione della *Boere Arbeidsvereniging*, l'associazione dei coltivatori locali, di smettere di fornire manodopera alle fattorie che abusavano dei lavoratori. Recatasi nel distretto agricolo assieme a Michael Scott, un prete anglicano noto per le sue campagne in difesa dei diritti degli africani, Ruth raccolse informazioni e interviste tra i lavoratori agricoli<sup>24</sup>. Il reportage apparve sul *Rand Daily Mail*, un giornale liberale di Johannesburg, nell'edizione di venerdì 27 giugno 1947 con il titolo "*Near Slavery in Bethal District*"<sup>25</sup>. Il resoconto accurato della loro indagine apparve sul *The Guardian* il 3 luglio 1947 col titolo "*There are More Bethals. - Says REV. SCOTT, 'The Guardian'*" (reperibile presso l'archivio *Ruth First Papers* conservato nell'*Institute of*

<sup>20</sup> Anna Maria Gentili (a cura di), *Ruth First: alle radici dell'Apartheid*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1984, pp. 220-221.

<sup>21</sup> Ruth First, *The new Slavery*, "Fighting Talk", ottobre 1956, in Donald Pinnock, *Voices of Liberation*, cit., pp. 53-60.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Maria Gentili (a cura di), *Ruth First: alle radici dell'Apartheid*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., pp. 90-91.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk*, cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Scott Annoys Bethal Farmers, "Rand Daily Mail", 23 giugno 1947; James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., p. 92.

*Commowearth* di Londra<sup>26</sup>). Ruth denunciò come il sistema agricolo capitalista ad alta resa nel distretto di Bethal, così come quello di molte zone agricole del Sudafrica, era sostenuto dallo sfruttamento selvaggio dei lavoratori a contratto, costretti ad accettare condizioni simili a quelle della schiavitù<sup>27</sup>. Seguì una commissione di inchiesta ma solo quattro capisquadra bianchi vennero arrestati, per poi essere rilasciati dietro una cauzione e sette fattorie vennero ritenute responsabili di abusi<sup>28</sup>.

Articolo n. 5. Il *Native Laws Amendment Act* del 1952, modificava l'*Urban Areas Act* del 1923 e introduceva misure di controllo che limitavano le libertà di circolazione degli africani. Il *Native (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act*, emanato nello stesso anno, non abolì i *pass* come il suo nome potrebbe suggerire, ma li rinominò "*reference books*" e ne fu imposto il possesso a tutti gli africani che avessero compiuto 16 anni, ponendo le basi per l'estensione di questo documento anche alle donne<sup>29</sup>. Essere disoccupati divenne un crimine. Non potendo risiedere e lavorare in un determinato distretto senza documenti in regola, la ricerca di lavoro diventava un problema insormontabile per molti africani, che si rassegnavano a violare le *pass laws* e a diventare dei fuorilegge perseguibili nei modi più severi. Nell'articolo "*Jo'Burg's "Slave Market". Arrested man "Persuaded" To Take Farm Work.*" pubblicato nel *The Guardian* il 2 giugno 1949, consultabile presso l'archivio *Ruth First Papers*<sup>30</sup>, la giornalista descrisse come, a causa della subdola alleanza tra possidenti e polizia, centinaia di africani venissero quotidianamente arrestati per reati minori, brutalmente indotti ad accettare il lavoro nei campi e immediatamente trasferiti nei distretti agricoli.

Articolo n. 6. Il "*Petty pass law offenders' scheme*" continuò a portare migliaia di africani ogni anno a lavorare nelle fattorie e nelle *farm jails*: se nel 1950 i condannati per trasgressioni alle regole imposte dalle *pass laws* erano circa 220.000, nel 1957 salirono ad un 1.250.000: la maggioranza di loro non compariva mai davanti alla corte di giustizia<sup>31</sup>. L'articolo "*Jo'Burg "Slave Market" Allegation Revived. The Man Who Was Arrested With The Street Sweeper's Broom In His Hand*", conservato presso l'archivio *Ruth First Papers*<sup>32</sup>, pubblicato nel *New Age* l'8 agosto 1957 riprende l'analogo titolo di quello pubblicato nel 1949 nel *The Guardian*, con l'obiettivo di sottolineare il vertiginoso aumento del numero di afri-

<sup>26</sup> Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICS) Ruth First Papers (117), Material deposited by Ros de Lanerolle [nee Ainslie] (117/2), Newspaper Journalism (fasc. 2), Newspaper cuttings relating to the Bethal farm labour scandal (b.2), c. n. n.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Webb, *Fighting Talk*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., pp. 92-93; *Four Bethal Farm Foremen in Court*, "Rand Daily Mail", 8 luglio 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left*, cit., p. 319.

<sup>30</sup> ICS, *Ruth First Papers*, 117/2, fasc. 2, b.2, c. n. n.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth First, *Exposure! The Farm Labour Scandal*, "A New Age Pamphlet", Real Print and Publishing Company, 1959, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> ICS, *Ruth First Papers*, 117/2, fasc. 2, b.2, c. n. n.

cani vittime di questo sistema. Nell'articolo First riporta il caso dello spazzino Nelson Langa, che fu arrestato per una *petty pass offence*: costretto a salire nel furgone della polizia<sup>33</sup>, venne trasportato in una *farm prison* di Bethal. La giornalista rese pubblico un documento, emerso durante il caso "Nelson Langa", che autorizzava ufficialmente le brutali pratiche di cui governo e polizia non avevano mai voluto prendersi la responsabilità. In essa, per la prima volta, venivano riportati i dettagli del sistema di reclutamento forzato per i colpevoli di reati minori.

### Proteste, scioperi e boicottaggi

Articolo n. 7. Nel gennaio 1957 la *Public Utility Transport Corporation* (PUTCO), nonostante le proteste degli africani che usufruivano dei servizi della compagnia per recarsi al lavoro, decise di aumentare di un penny il costo del biglietto. Ciò avrebbe contribuito a peggiorare le condizioni di vita già disperate di migliaia di famiglie africane, così, nel centro di Alexandra, si organizzò un boicottaggio: per circa tre mesi migliaia di scioperanti percorsero a piedi la strada che separava la loro abitazione dal luogo di lavoro, cercando di costringere la PUTCO a tornare sui suoi passi<sup>34</sup>. Il boicottaggio dei bus ad Alexandra fu descritto da Ruth per la rivista di Ronald Segal, *Africa South*, del luglio-settembre 1957, disponibile presso l'archivio digitalizzato *Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA)*<sup>35</sup>. Nella narrazione della giornalista i manifestanti diventano un vero e proprio esercito che sfida la segregazione imposta dalla Johannesburg bianca che ora non può che stare a guardare l'interminabile corteo di lavoratori. Con il suo tipico sarcasmo, First descrisse le azioni intimidatorie della polizia, le violenze e i soprusi volti a ostacolare la quotidiana marcia degli scioperanti e raccontò come, di fronte alla preoccupazione e all'ostilità del governo e degli industriali, centinaia di automobilisti bianchi avessero offerto passaggi agli africani, dando esempio di amicizia e collaborazione multiculturale. Lo sciopero rappresentò una importante dimostrazione di protesta non violenta.

### Le proteste delle donne

Articolo n. 8. L'interesse di First per i movimenti delle donne sudafricane e il suo sostegno alle loro manifestazioni di protesta fu presente fin nei suoi primi articoli per il *The Guardian*; si avvicinò al pensiero femminista soprattutto durante il periodo che trascorse a Londra dopo la partenza dal Sudafrica, quando condusse, assieme ad Ann Scott, una ricerca biografica sulla vita e le opere della scrittrice sudafricana Olive Schreiner<sup>36</sup>. Nel settembre 1955 venne annunciata l'effettiva esten-

<sup>33</sup> Ruth First, *Exposure!* cit., p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Alpheus Manghezi, *Ricordando Ruth First: la voce, il viso, il lavoro e il silenzio*, in "DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile", n. mon. *Ruth First: la morte, la vita, la memoria*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ruth First, *The bus boycott*, *Africa South*, 1, Africa South Publications, 1957, in *Digital Innovation South Africa*, <http://disa.ukzn.ac.za/asjul57>, consultato 23 novembre 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Roberta Pellizzoli, *Introduzione*, cit., p. 6.



sione dei *pass* alle donne che immediatamente organizzarono meeting in tutto il paese per discutere e pianificare la loro protesta, attirando enormi folle. Il 26 ottobre 1955 ebbe luogo una manifestazione a Pretoria, che coinvolse le donne di tutto il paese e First descrisse la marcia per il *New Age* celebrandone il clamoroso successo, raccontando come protestarono insieme donne di tutte le etnie, di ogni rango ed età presenti in Sudafrica. Le proteste *anti-pass* ebbero luogo in moltissime altre città e paesi di tutta la *Union* tra il 1955 e il 1959, parallelamente all'arrivo nelle diverse aree dei furgoni delle *anti-pass units*<sup>37</sup>. Pubblicato sul *New Age* l'8 marzo 1956 con titolo "*Germiston Women Protest Against Passes. Triumphant Demonstration to Native Commissioner*" (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University), First racconta come le donne di Germiston, città industriale poco lontana da Johannesburg, sfidarono le minacce della polizia per esporre al *Native Commissioner* le loro obiezioni all'estensione dei *pass*. La scelta di riportare le parole delle donne permette di cogliere da vicino lo spirito di queste proteste, portate avanti con tenacia e determinazione.

Articolo n. 9. Il governo iniziò a rilasciare alle donne i *pass*, evitando però le grandi città, dove l'opposizione era più organizzata. Il primo bersaglio fu Winburg, un villaggio agricolo nello stato libero dell'Orange; furgoni chiamati *Reference Book Units* entrarono nel paese nel marzo 1956 e iniziarono a distribuire i *pass* alle donne che, il giorno successivo, andarono all'ufficio del magistrato e li bruciarono<sup>38</sup>. Ruth si recò a Wimburg<sup>39</sup> e documentò i fatti, lanciando una vera e propria campagna mediatica. Il rogo dei *pass* a Winburg divenne un significativo esempio di lotta per le donne africane<sup>40</sup>. Il 9 agosto ebbe luogo una seconda protesta nazionale a Pretoria per portare al primo ministro Strijdom la voce dell'opposizione femminile alle *pass laws*. Come riportato in un articolo in prima pagina sul *New Age* del 16 agosto 1956 dal titolo "*Strijdom, You Have Struck a Rock*<sup>41</sup>. *20,000 Women Says "No" To Passes*" (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University), la manifestazione ebbe un successo spettacolare: migliaia di donne da tutto il Sudafrica raggiunsero l'*Union Building*, tanto che il vicino anfiteatro non riuscì a contenerle tutte. Come nel 1955 il corteo dimostrò una disciplina e una dignità esemplari e nessun rappresentante del governo volle ricevere la delegazione delle manifestanti. Per le donne riunite fuori dalla porta dell'ufficio del Primo Ministro ciò era la conferma della loro forza; lasciarono quindi le innumerevoli pile di fogli contenenti la petizione contro l'estensione dei *pass* fuori dalla porta di Strijdom<sup>42</sup>.

Articolo n. 10. Le successive manifestazioni di protesta che scossero il paese furono, usando le parole di First, "*like a sea at full tide, the waves of women's prote-*

<sup>37</sup> Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Onyx Press, London 1982, pp. 190-191; 193-194; Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left*, cit., p. 320.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left*, cit., p. 322.

<sup>39</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., p. 152.

<sup>40</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left*, cit., p. 322.

<sup>41</sup> Traduzione in inglese di uno dei canti intonati durante l'evento.

<sup>42</sup> Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* cit., pp. 193-196.

sts against the pass laws surge in”<sup>43</sup>. Nel *New Age* del 15 novembre 1956, con un articolo intitolato “Police Kill Two Pass Protesters” (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University) la giornalista descrive il cinismo meccanico con cui, nel novembre 1956, gli ufficiali governativi, recatisi a Lichtenburg per rilasciare i pass alle donne, reagirono violentemente alle manifestazioni di protesta<sup>44</sup>, sino ad aprire il fuoco causando la morte di due africani e un alto numero di feriti.

### Collaborazione e solidarietà interculturale

Articolo n. 11. Nell’ottobre 1952, venne lanciata la *Defiance Campaign*, campagna di disobbedienza civile contro le leggi ingiuste ispirata alle iniziative di resistenza passiva iniziate da Gandhi alla fine del secolo precedente che coinvolse uomini e donne di ogni etnia in tutto il paese<sup>45</sup>; anche First partecipò, sia come sostenitrice che come giornalista, a numerosi meeting e descrisse le azioni di protesta in corso per il *The Clarion*, neonato successore del *The Guardian*<sup>46</sup>. In questo contesto nacque il *South African Congress of Democrats* (SACOD), organizzazione radicale bianca anti-apartheid, mentre il *South African Communist Party*<sup>47</sup> venne segretamente ricostituito nel 1953<sup>48</sup>. A metà degli anni ‘50, le principali organizzazioni dissidenti africane, bianche, indiane e *coloured* diedero vita alla multietnica *Congress Alliance*<sup>49</sup>, che cercò di dimostrare la superiorità morale del *nonracialism* sull’apartheid nel quadro della non violenza facendo valere la giustizia della propria causa<sup>50</sup>. Ruth fu eletta nel comitato di stesura della *Freedom Charter*. Questa sorta di “manifesto della *Congress Alliance*” raccoglieva le proposte per un nuovo Sudafrica pervenute da tutto il paese<sup>51</sup>. Alla fine di giugno 1955, più di tremila delegati da tutto il paese si radunarono in un campo da calcio a Kliptown, una *township* situata nella periferia di Johannesburg<sup>52</sup> per approvare ufficialmente la *Freedom Charter*. Il *banning order*, che era stato imposto a Ruth durante l’anno precedente, le impedì di partecipare all’evento ma, con l’assistenza di Norman Levy, attivista del SACP e del COD, lo descrisse nel *New Age*<sup>53</sup>, aprendo la prima pagina con il titolo “*Freedom Charter Adopted. Congress of the People Epoch-Making Success in Face of Police Intimidation*”. Questo articolo, che apriva in

<sup>43</sup> Ruth First, *Women’s Pass Protest Grows*, “New Age”, 14 giugno 1956.

<sup>44</sup> Kshama Sharma, *Women of Africa: Their Role and Position in Society*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi 1989, p. 88.

<sup>45</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., pp. 139-140.

<sup>46</sup> Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo*, cit., p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Voices of Liberation*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> Les Switzer, *South Africa’s Alternative Press*, cit., p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Donald Pinnock, *Writing Left*, cit., p. 310.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo*, cit., p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> James Zug, *The Guardian*, cit., pp.140-141.

<sup>53</sup> Norman Levy, *The Final Prize. My life in the anti-apartheid struggle* in South African History Online, [www.sahistory.org.za/archive/final-prize-chapter-10](http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/final-prize-chapter-10), consultato 27 novembre, 2018.

New Age del 30 giugno 1955 (*Historical Papers Research Archive*, Wit University), sebbene non firmato, è ragionevolmente attribuito alla First, poiché, oltre a essere il principale fatto di cronaca tenutosi in prossimità di Johannesburg, abitualmente curato da lei per il settimanale, è redatto con il suo caratteristico stile dal ritmo vivace, nel quale la scrupolosa narrazione dei fatti assume sfumature ironiche e un tono incalzante. L'articolo mette in evidenza l'aggressività della polizia intervenuta per disperdere i manifestanti dopo aver compiuto pesanti atti di intimidazione ed interrogato uno ad uno tutti i presenti e sottolinea la ferma resistenza pacifica dei delegati. Il *New Age* dedicò alla manifestazione gran parte dell'edizione, pubblicando moltissime foto e riportando interamente il testo della *Freedom Charter*.

### La lotta dopo l'esilio

Articolo n. 12. Dopo la partenza dal Sudafrica, Ruth continuò dall'estero incessante lotta per la liberazione del paese: tenne discorsi a Trafalgar Square<sup>54</sup>, fu più che mai attiva nei dibattiti relativi alla situazione politica e sociale sudafricana, aderì al movimento internazionale anti-apartheid e intrattenne frequenti contatti con le *United Nations* perché venisse aperta un'indagine sulle condizioni dei prigionieri a Robben Island. Appena arrivata a Londra si dedicò alla stesura e alla pubblicazione di *117 Days* dove attraverso il racconto della sua detenzione, denunciò lo stato repressivo e dispotico del Sudafrica. Collaborò alla redazione di *The Peasants' Revolt* di Govan Mbeki, *Not yet Uhuru* di Oginda Odinga e di *No Easy Walk to Freedom* di Nelson Mandela, per il quale scrisse la prefazione<sup>55</sup>. Nel 1974, mentre era impegnata come insegnante presso la *Durham University*, Ruth, assieme ad altri colleghi, contribuì alla fondazione della rivista accademica *Review of Africa Political Economy*. L'articolo di Ruth "La Fondina nel Reggiseno"<sup>56</sup> apparve, tradotto in italiano, in *Liberazione*, 10 giugno 1965 (*Ruth First Papers*, Institute Of Commonwealth) e costituisce un esempio di come, dopo l'esilio, collaborò continuamente con numerose testate del vecchio continente facendo conoscere la difficile situazione politica sudafricana e promuovendo il movimento internazionale anti-apartheid. La giornalista, all'inizio dell'articolo, diede notizia dell'invenzione di una ditta di Johannesburg, "fondine da reggiseno" per le donne bianche sudafricane capaci di contenere una Calibro 38; questo inquietante accessorio si inseriva, come spiega Ruth, in un contesto di crescente militarizzazione della società del Sudafrica: una minoranza bianca, per mantenere il controllo su 13 milioni di africani, aveva istituito un regime segregazionista sempre più repressivo e razzista, instaurando un clima di forte instabilità e di insicurezza.

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<sup>54</sup> Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo*, cit., p. 146.

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 147-149.

<sup>56</sup> ICS, *Ruth First Papers, Original Deposit (117/1), Work for magazines, book reviews and other short pieces* (b. 5), c. n. n.

**Articolo n. 1**<sup>57</sup>.

*Families Dumped in Veld. "Let Them Sleep in God's Own Fresh Air", Says Official.*

"New Age", 7 aprile 1955.

JOHANNESBURG. Armed police stood by last week when Benoni carried out its mass removal operation to shift the first of 20,000 Apex residents to the new township of Daveytown. No houses were ready, and the families were simply dumped in the veld and left to rig up their own shelters. House building at Daveytown started some time ago and the authorities fixed the removal date at April 1. Last Friday was April 1, and though NOT A SINGLE HOUSE WAS COMPLETED, the first families were told to demolish their Apex shacks and to re-erect them in Daveytown. By the middle of the morning last Friday the first families were in the veld, their belongings all about them, trying to erect a shack from the dilapidated materials they had brought with them from their old Apex shacks. The main street entering Daveytown is, significantly, named Eiselen Street, after the secretary of Native Affairs, and Mr. J. E. Mathewson, Director of Non-European Affairs, was on the spot in the new township supervising operations. He stopped the New Age reporter as she was on her way in.

**"COULDN'T BE CHANGED"**

The removal plans were set for April 1, and could not be changed, he said. The train service was to start on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, for example, and the removal had to go through though the houses were not ready. Asked where the people would sleep if their shelters were not erected by nightfall, Mr. Mathewson retorted: "In God's own fresh air. What's wrong with that? I've camped in the open myself many a time!". This is the Mr. Mathewson who, asked by the Apex Advisory Board to help the people by providing money for the erection of temporary shacks until the houses were ready, said cynically, "You can't expect the Town Council to move you, build your shack and even cook your meals". The Apex residents are not against occupying the Daveytown houses, but they have been putting up strong opposition to going NOW, when they have to make do on the veld. They have been told to transport their materials from their Apex shacks to Daveytown but some of the Apex shacks are already so dilapidated that the material is virtually useless.

**NO EXPLANATION**

The people of Apex complain that the authorities have not called them together to give them any explanation of the removal plans and their new homes. They have been moved, said one man, "without the Council telling us the why and the how". The people asked for the authorities to address them, but to no avail. A deputation

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<sup>57</sup> Per esigenze di uniformità editoriale, i testi che qui vengono pubblicati appaiono senza il carattere grassetto.

sent by the people to interview the officials of the Non-European Affairs Department, was not given a hearing. People are simply being called individually to the Apex office, and told that they will have to move. A number are refusing to do so until houses are ready.

“IN THE DESERT”

The people object also that while Apex was only a Threepenny bus ride from Benoni's town area, Daveytown is 8½ miles out, and the weekly train ticket will amount to 7/3. These transport costs together with the monthly house rental £2/2/- will be far too heavy a burden on the average family. Above all, not a scrap of consideration has been given the families living in their pathetic shelters at Daveytown. For example, there are no shopping facilities provided for them to buy food. The nearest store is a mine store, some two miles away. One child was sent back to Apex last Friday, after her family had been moved out, to try to get credit at an Apex shop for bulk provisions. “We are as in the desert”, she said.

**Articolo n. 2.**

*Alexandra – Where The Pass Laws Breed Murder.*  
“New Age”, 12 luglio 1956.

The youngsters stood on the street corner in an untidy, shabby huddle. They were intent on the throw of the dice and seemed to see nothing else around them. Some looked no more than 17 or 18 years old, a few even younger. “Tsotsis?” Most likely, for Alexandra Township swarms with young Africans whose dead-end future has swept them into petty gangsterism. THERE CAN BE FEW PLACES WHERE THE PASS LAWS AND CRIME HAVE SUCH A STARK CAUSE-AND-EFFECT CONNECTION. It's really very simple to see – and quite frightening. Alexandra is the township thrust upon its own desperate devices. Men needing to work must run the gauntlet of township control as well as Johannesburg influx control regulations. Township men find jobs in Johannesburg – good jobs – only to be refused registration and told Johannesburg jobs are for Johannesburg Africans. They are directed to find work in Alexandra Township, nine miles from Johannesburg's centre. But the township has only a sprinkling of small factories and barely any other openings, for though the pass law regulations may say it is a separate local authority for employment purposes, everyone knows that Alexandra grew up to house Johannesburg's workers.

Uglier Each Year

Each year the picture gets uglier: new batches of school leavers strike out to find their first jobs, many get them, only to have them snatched from their grasps at the pass offices. So the township turns in on itself. Life must go on. A man must eat, dress, do something in his working hours. Some are caught in the daily manhunt in the township for farm labour. Some take another road. The crime wave in Alexandra Township, which its residents say is the worst they have ever known, is one of the by-products of this throttled community. There are the small-time gangs, the pick-pockets, the bag-snatchers, the thieves who waylay people at night and strip them of their clothes. There are the youngsters who pounce on the Thursday and Friday (visitors') bus queues; rush a victim from the queue, surround him,

empty his pockets. Some of these gangs have special beats and hang out on particular corners. Murder and assault are not, generally, in their scheme of things. A victim who resists, however, gets rough treatment. These days, they say in the township, even the gangs have fallen on hard times. Their members are no longer such snappy dressers; some have come down to tennis shoes, others are bare-foot. Decent jobs would do so much more for them – if only they would be allowed to work.

#### Jobs – No Gangs

There is the case of the 12<sup>th</sup> street gang. Its members found jobs in a local factory and the gang's activities faded out. But there is the story also of the school-leaver who found a job with one of the largest Johannesburg. Today he carries knockle-dusters and hangs out with the local gangsters. It doesn't take very long to turn a decent youngster into a petty criminal. Unemployment and desperation at the futility of trying to wriggle through the pass law maze do the trick in a jiffy. BUT THE SMALL GANGS THAT PLAGUE THE TOWNSHIP ARE LITTLE IN COMPARISON WITH THE TERROR SOWN BY ALEXANDRA'S BIG TIME GANG – THE SPOILERS. This gang runs like a machine. Its membership is said to be a few hundred by now and its freshest recruits are put through a training course in a house in the township known as the "Rough House". The Spoilers ride in cars. They "dress like Oppenheimers" one man said. Their game is the protection racket, well-planned robberies, house and self-breacking, the liquor racket. (There is the time they tell of in the township when whiskey was going at 15s. A bottle after a big whiskey haul).

The gang operates Chicago-style. The protection racket was carried not only into the taxi ranks (each taxi operates in the route was levied so much each week) but among the passengers who use the taxis.

#### Unchallenged By Law

The gang makes little attempt to work under cover. Assaults and robberies are carried out in broad daylight. The names of the leading gangs are known by the most in the Township, yet the criminals go free for the most part, quite unchallenged by the law. People have become afraid to report crimes to the police: there are the cases where charges were laid and yet not prosecutions followed. There are the instances where the gang members took reprisals against who reported them to the police. This is the township where some years ago the people were driven to organize their own Civic Guard to protect them from the gangs. Crime figures dropped impressively: even the police admitted that. Then the Government banned the Civic Guard organizations in Alexandra and everywhere. The people are not only the victims of persistent attempts on their lives and property, but they are paralysed, by the law, to do the thing that must best counter the work of the gangs. So the robberies become more frequent and the gangsters bolder and more brazen and the crime wave in Johannesburg's suburbs that the daily press is daily so shrill about, is slight compared to the terror of the gangs in the Africans areas.

**Articolo n. 3.**

*“Police Violence Against The People Must Stop!”*. *Ferocious Assaults on Newclare Residents.*

“New Age”, 21 febbraio 1957.

WHAT ACTION IS TO BE TAKEN AGAINST POLICEMEN WHO GO OUT ON PRIVATE WARS OF VENGEANCE AGAINST THE PEOPLE? AGAINST POLICE WHO BEAT UP AND INJURE INNOCENT AFRICANS? WHO WHO COMB TING PEACEABLY IN THEIR HOMES: NOT JUST A FEW, OR A DOZEN, BUT SCORES, ON ONE AFTERNOON?

These are the questions the police heads and the Government must answer about the police action in Newclare on the Sunday afternoon of February 10.

POLICE RAIDSHIT AFRICAN TOWNSHIPS EVERY DAY, BUT THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYTHING LIKE THE MASSACRE OF NEWCLARE THAT AFTERNOON.

Last week Newclare looked like a battlefield. Men and women with bandaged heads and limbs were to be seen on every side. On the evening of the police action, 70 people were treated at Coronation Hospital for their injuries. Four days after, 13 men were still in hospital. Two had not yet regained consciousness. A third man had lost an eye. Others had scalp lacerations, severe concussion, fractured arms and other injuries. In the streets of Newclare one could meet on every hand people who had been injured, people who had been witnesses to assaults all around them, women who had seen their husbands and sons dragged out of their homes and assaulted. In less than an hour New Age had interviewed more than a dozen victims, and more were to be found in every street. But even more horrifying – and as yet unreported in the press – is the account of how men who had been chased to the edge of the storm water drain that runs through Newclare were lifted up by groups of police and thrown into the rushing water. Two bodies were recovered the following day. The widow of one of these men saw her husband’s death with her own eyes.

#### THE START

How did all this start? Police raiding parties were always busy in Newclare, one of the last freehold areas and a Congress stronghold. On the morning of Sunday 10 a police party arrested a group near the outskirts of Newclare, but then the police were themselves attacked. One African constable was stabbed in the neck. (This man died on the Monday.) The police party made off rapidly. At about 2 p.m. in the afternoon large forces of police (some say two parties of about 150 each) moved into Newclare from two directions. Armed with guns, batons, kieres and other weapons, the police rushed from street to street, yard to yard and door to door. In many cases they do not seem even to have demanded passes. Buth in one instance after another, New Age was told, they pilled into the Africans they came across and savagely assaulted them.

Furniture in the houses was smashed. Men who kept under beds for protection were pulled out and dragged into the pouring rain to be assaulted. Groups of four and five police seized on one victim and belaboured him as he lay on the ground. Beds,

curtains and walls in some rooms still show blood marks. A Coloured woman living in Newclare described three separate assaults that took in front of her door. She told the police: "You are not hitting people, you are murdering them". One man decided to accompany two friends to the station. As he came out of his yard he was set upon by a large group of police who asked no questions, but assaulted him. Another man was sitting in his room when police broke in the window and hammered on the door simultaneously and then ordered him out in the storm. His right arm was broken and his head injured. An aged man wearing tribal beads was attacked and hit with sticks as he stood in the rain. There seemed to be no end to the assaults.

#### THROWN IN WATER

Mrs. Alice Lefa and her husband, Tsietsi, of Welman Avenue, had gone visiting that afternoon lower down in Newclare. Police came to the house where they were sitting and Tsietsi was taken out by them and beaten. His wife tried to intervene but was threatened. She then saw the police lift him and throw him into the storm-water drain swollen by the heavy storm. His body was carried away. The following day Mrs. Lefa was present when it was taken out from the water. There are at least two witnesses of this incident. One man whose house overlooks the water watched from his window. Another who lives nearby saw two men carried away by the water. Three drownings were reported from Newclare on that day. The version which appeared in the daily press was that men pursued by the police had jumped into the water to escape from them. Only two of the three bodies had been recovered by last week. One man had a very lucky escape. His wife told New Age how he had been beaten and was about to be thrown into the water when she and other bystanders screamed and intervened and he was then left alone.

#### SKULL INJURIES

Of the men admitted to hospital, the majority have skull injuries and concussion. Mr. Ephraim Mougokane of Watson Street, Newclare, is a tailor. Two European police burst into his room and asked him where he worked. He told the police he was a tailor and pointed to his sewing machine. One policeman said. 'Take him out', and he was immediately attacked with the butts of their guns. He was forced outside where there was a larger group of police standing he was assaulted again and then placed in a police van. He regained consciousness at the Newlands police station. Together with other injured men he was removed to hospital two hours later. This man alleges that while he was being beaten up one of the policemen was taunting him with the words 'Ayibuye lo Afrika' (meant to be Mayibuye i' Afrika). Mr. B. Moeketsi who is suffering from lacerations of the scalp said he does not live in Newclare but was visiting there. He was on his way to some friends when he was attacked in the middle of the street. He regained consciousness in hospital. Mr. M. Kaleli of Pollack Street said he was assaulted in his room. He regained consciousness in hospital.

#### PEOPLE ANGRY

Many of those assaulted are considering taking legal action against the police. The area is in ferment of anger over this ferocious police attack. Nor is the situation improved as day by day the police raids continue. Large numbers of men and



women are arrested under section 10 of the Urban Areas Act. WHEN IS THIS TERROR GOING TO END?, THE PEOPLE ASK.

**Articolo n. 4.**

*There are More Bethals. - Says REV. SCOTT.*  
"The Guardian", 3 luglio 1947.

JOHANNESBURG. - Exposure of the conditions of the Bethal contract farm labourers have created a sensation here, and throughout the country. Statements issued by the Prime Minister's office, from Major van der Byl's beside conference, have promised Cabinet and Native Affairs Department consideration. Newspapers' banner headlines indicate anxiety as to possible I.L.O. and U.N.O. repercussions. The Rev. Michael Scott, interviewed by The Guardian this week, drew attention to certain disturbing features of the Bethal affair as taken up so vigorously by Johannesburg's daily and Sunday papers. "We must not be deluded into believing it is only in the Bethal area that near-slave conditions obtain. I have requests from many parts of the country to investigate the conditions of farm labourers. "It must be remembered that the State has all along continued to subsidize agriculture and in consequence also the exploitation of farms labourers. "The Native Affairs Department has acquiesced in these conditions for over fifteen years. Through fear of losing the goodwill of the farmers it has even gone to the extent of appointing them on to committees to handle the distribution of the thousands of Africans arrested for offences under the pass and immigration laws. "The Government has connived at the immigration of labourers from Nyasaland by issuing them temporary permits and then arresting these 'offenders' who, at the expiry of their contracts, do not succeed in finding work or in finding their way back to their homes. They are then deposited across the border and have to walk hundreds of miles back to their villages. THIS THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO KNOWN ALL ALONG". The Rev. Scott emphasises that these conditions are in many respects worse than slavery. "In this century, after the Declaration of Rights has been signed, there are still human beings who are obliged to submit to such conditions in order to maintain themselves and their families. Let it be noted that there are no labour laws applying to agricultural workers and no trade unions to take up their cause".

**Our Reporter Investigates**

Last week The Guardian's Johannesburg reporter went to the Bethal district accompanied by the Reverend Michael Scott, to investigate conditions of farm workers and to follow up reports of ill-treatment amounting to slavery. The Reverend Scott subsequently gave an interview to the Johannesburg daily press, and it has now been announced that General Smuts is personally taking charge of an investigation into the allegations of ill-treatment. Government interest is explained naively by the Cape Times in its front-page report on Monday: "The Government regards the matter as of the utmost significance, seeing that Native living conditions in the Union will be discussed at the September meeting of the U.N.O. General Assembly". Below we give The Guardian reporter's description of

what she found on her visit to the Bethal district. It is not every day that the Johannesburg reporter of *The Guardian* meets an African farm labourer who, when asked to describe conditions on the farm on which he works, silently takes off his shirt to show large weals and scars on his arms. He explains he was severely whipped on his back, shouldered-whipped with a sjambok. He cannot really explain why. He knows that after the whipping he came in to the town to lay a charge with the magistrate; was then handed 11s. 4d. by his employer (pay for several weeks' work) and told he was discharged. This is the story of "Work Nyeilande", 15-year-old (note his age) contracted labourer from Nyasaland. We met him in Bethal about a mile from the centre of the town as we went to inspect two corrugated iron structures to which contracted labourers are brought in batches of 50 or 60 every Friday by the local farmers' recruiting organization. These labourers are recruited in the Northern Transvaal after crossing the border illegally from Rhodesia or Nyasaland in search of work. They are locked in the central compound for three or four days until they have been allocated to the local farmers.

#### IT BEGINS

This story begins really with a rather cryptic little paragraph in a daily newspaper reporting that a farmers' association in Bethal had decided not to supply labourers to farmers who ill-treated their workers. Your *Guardian* reporter and the Reverend Michael Scott decided to do an inspection "in loco". Farmers in the Bethal district will not admit it - residents in the town will excuse them things happen. But nevertheless the conditions of contracted farm labourers in the district are a scandal. The sort of thing that happens on many of these farms sounds like a story from the history of some ancient slave empire. Labourers are cursed and beaten, locked in their compound at night, have their clothes taken from them and savage dogs set over them...in case they should try to escape. Most South Africans know there is a permanent shortage of African farm labour in almost every part of the country. Low wages, long hours of work, harsh treatment by foremen are no inducement to Africans to stay on farms in they can get work in a good gang, or even on a coal or gold mine, or in domestic service, or in industries in larger towns. Farmers in the Bethal district go in for intensive farming. For the last seven or eight years the potato meale crops have been very good. As sufficient labour was not forthcoming from the surrounding area the farmers have organised their "Boere Arbeidsvereeniging" which is mainly a recruiting organisation. Recruiting officers are sent to the district of Messina where Africans from Nyasaland and Rhodesia cross the border into the Union illegally at Belt Bridge to look for work. The illegal immigrants are presented with an alternative: they may return to their homes...or sign a contract to work for at least six months on a farm chosen for them.

#### JUDGE FOR YOURSELF

There are 40,000 foreign contracted labourers in the Bethal district alone. They have probably all signed contracts, judge for yourself by this notice published in several successive issues of the weekly "Bethal Echo". "Any member of the Boere Arbeidsvereeniging who has assaulted, locked up or in any other manner whatever ill-treated any Native labourer recruited by the Vereeniging, or in any respect failed to carry out the conditions of the labour contract entered into between him and such labourer will have his membership of the Vereeniging cancelled and no further

Native labour will be supplied to such expelled member". Many of the contracted labourers try to escape. Quite a number succeed. To the farmer who plays £5 a head to bring a contracted labourer from the north this is a severe blow. So, too, is the fact that at the termination of their six-monthly contract few labourers wish to renew their contracts.

#### "ROUNDED UP"

This ever-recurring shortage of labour is one of the reasons for a meeting in Pretoria barely a fortnight ago of farmers' representatives and members of the Native Affairs Department. It ties up also with the recent Government notice that foreign Native labour is to be "rounded up" in the towns and given the familiar alternative of returning to the poverty-stricken territories from which they came, or work on the farms.

#### THEIR CONDITIONS

What are the conditions of these contracted farm labourers? They were eager to tell us. They sign on for a six month contract under which the most handsome remuneration is £2 for 30 working days. The contract spins out to eight or nine months in most cases as Sundays and rainy days are not working days. At the end of this contract the labourer has £12. From this deducted £3 1s. To repay the farmer for his journey to Bethal from the border of Transvaal. They are housed in barn-like buildings with concrete floor, often no windows, and no chimney or hole in the roof for smoke from braziers or open flames in tins suspended from the roof with wire, which serve as lights. We saw not a single blanket in any of these compounds. The labourers sleep on sacks.

#### WORKING HOURS

Working hours are long, especially at the height of the season. Some labourers get up at three o'clock in the morning and work till after sunset. On moonlight nights during the season work in the field continues till midnight. Those workers who fall ill in late afternoon – perhaps only an hour before knocking off – are not paid for the portion of the day they have worked. Those who fall ill for several days receive no compensation at all. More than one farm labourer summed up the conditions on the farms with the phrase: "There is nothing good". Asked what improvements in their conditions they would like the replies came fast from all sides: "More money". "Better food, a better place to live in". "An end to foremen swearing at us". "Not to be whipped". Informants told us there are better and worse periods in the lives of farms workers. During November and December, the peak farming periods, occur most cases of labourers being locked in at night guarded by "boss-boys" and dogs because it is at this time of the year the farmer can least afford to have his labourers deserting. Some of the most severe cases of ill-treatment of Africans have occurred as labourers were caught trying to escape from their compounds.

#### CASES OF ASSAULT

Even in Bethal the position has not gone unnoticed. Towards the end of May this year Balthasar Johannes Brenkman, a foreman on the farm Kalabasfontein, appeared in the Bethal Magistrate's Court on two charges of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm. In one case there were five separate counts, in the second, one. The complainants were all African labourers employed on the farm. One

described to the court how he had been bitten with a sjambok, and had been bitten at back of the knee by the dog set upon him. Another said he and another African had deserted the farm were overtaken on the road twelve miles away, knocked to the ground, kicked above and below the eye as they lay there. None of these complaints wanted to return to the farm. All asked that their contracts be cancelled. A third African said he and another labourer had asked whether they might not be allowed to stop work earlier as they worked till after sunset. He was beaten with a sjambok, taken to a storeroom, ordered to undress and beaten again, and then chained with some donkey chains, to another African and chased naked back to the compound, where the two Africans slept still chained together.

#### DISTRICT SURGEON'S REPORT

The district surgeon, in his report on his medical examination of this complainant, said he found three lineal wounds twenty inches long across the back, a laceration over the shoulder blades, another on the right thigh, wounds over the eye and one below the knee joint. "The conditions disclosed in this case are tantamount to slave driving", said the Magistrate, "On a farm of 400 morgen 25 Native labourers are employed and driven to work by means of the sjambok". He endorsed the remark of the prosecutor that the number of such assaults in the district had been prolific. The foreman was sentenced to a fine of £25 or one month's imprisonment, and the second charge, to a fine of £50 or three month's imprisonment. A week later the same magistrate heard the case of an African assaulted by another farm foreman.

#### WHILE TRYING TO ESCAPE

These assault cases are nothing new, and have been even more serious in the past. In 1944 there were two cases of homicide: Phillip Lebova and Fans Masai, both beaten to death while trying to escape. A Government inspector has recently been appointed to supervise conditions on the farms in the Bethal district. The Arbeidersvereniging is obviously alarmed that the frequency of assault cases will by no means help to overcome their labour shortage. But if a thorough inspection into labour conditions and legally imposed standards for employment of all farm labourers is necessary anywhere it is on these farms near Bethal. Meanwhile the feudal farmer tyrant continues to reign supreme on his own land. Nationalists and United Party caucuses listen to his voice from the platteland, and his vote will be eagerly solicited by both parties in coming election.

#### Articolo n. 5

*Jo'Burg's "Slave Market". Arrested man "Persuaded" To Take Farm Work.*  
"The Guardian", 2 giugno 1949.

Dr. Jansen, Minister of Native Affairs, talks about setting up labour bureaux, Africans call them slave markets. A new phrase has been coined by Africans this year. A man arrested for a pass offence who is sent to work on a farm will tell you: "I was sold to a farmer at the jail", or the court. Reports from all over the country received by The Guardian show that today the pass offices and the courts are becoming part of a huge organization for forcing African workers out of the towns and on to the farms. A vast new recruiting agency for farmers is being set up. At the Native Commissioner's Court in Fordsburg hundreds of Africans are charged

each day with pass offences. Only a handful manage to evade conviction, which means prison or hard labour on the farms, because most cannot pay their fines. Lining the streets outside this court can be seen cars and lorries, with an assortment of number of plates, from the maize and the potato belts. The farmers have come to get some cheap labour. In a shed near the court, as they wait, Africans are pressed to accept farm work.

#### POLICE RAIDS

Early each morning the pick-up vans drive up. They bring the men – and some women – picked up by the police raids the night before, men arrested for different kinds of pass offences, from being out ten minutes after curfew time, to entering the area illegally in search of work. Each man is given a number, his particulars recorded. About two hours later the accused are addressed by some official. No outsider is then allowed within hearing distance of the shed. The prisoners, none of whom have yet appeared before the court, let alone been found guilty, are told about the attractions of work on farms. For over an hour they hear about “free quarters, free clothes and food”. They are offered a six-month contract at the rate of £2 to £10s a month.

IF THEY ACCEPT WORK, THEY ARE TOLD, THE CHARGES AGAINST  
THEM WILL BE WITHDRAWN.

A further bait is the belief that when they have finished their contracts they will be allowed six days in the city to find work and become registered.

#### THE ALTERNATIVE

The alternative for the prisoners is obvious, as they have no money to pay fines. They are liable to heavy fines, conviction for weeks or months under section 29 of the Urban Areas Act – even three years in a work colony. Some fall in with the plan. Perhaps 20 will sign the contracts one day, 40 the next. But the vast majority will spend a few weeks doing hard labour in prison. And even then they may end up on a farm, under the convict labour system being used more and more in the farming areas which experience labour difficulties.

#### IN COURT

The negotiation in the shed over, the men are marshalled into line and move slowly from a series of weird cages into the court room dock. They wait in the open for hours till their turn comes.

On mornings when the roll is heavy – and when is it not? - the clerk of the court and the prosecutor get worried. Two hundred and sixty two cases to be heard, and is it usual for the court to sit only a few hours. “262-262 cases”, mutters the clerk of the court, striding up and down. He turns to an African constable: “We’ll have to do one a minute”. One after another the cases are brought forward. Some take 60 seconds. Then there is a youngster of 17 who takes 2½ minutes explaining that he was born in an urban area and has lived there all his life. In a few staccato sentences thrust at the hurrying interpreter, who shoots them over to the magistrate in terse Afrikaans, he manages to prove he cannot be endorsed out of the urban area. He is ordered to bring his mother and birth certificate the next day to substantiate his statements. That case exceeded its limit.

#### MAKING UP

The next three go through in 120 seconds. Hard labour or a fine for not having a proper service contract. Fine or a week in prison for being out late the night before. Heavy term or a fine for entering the town illegally. The court sometimes takes £100 a day in fines from those lucky ones whose relatives have traced them in time and can push notes to the arrested men through the wire fence as they wait to appear before the magistrate. In April a total of £1,530 was collected in fines, of which the municipality received £838 because a proportion of the accused were guilty of breaking municipal regulations like the curfew. But last Monday there was a tragic incident. A mother rushed up to the prosecutor with the money to pay her son's fine. She was too late. He had already put his thumb-print to a farm-labour contract, and the prosecutor would not let him go. The court must have one of the heaviest rolls in the country. As on a conveyor belt in a great modern factory the arrested men are brought forward, a few hurried sentences said, a conviction noted. Dusty records lining the dingy, improvised courtroom bear witness to the court's volume of work over the last few years. Over 700 cases a week; then more and more.

#### SEEN TREMBLING

The Africans lined up in the dock can be seen trembling, the sheets of paper with their details shaking in their hands, as they wait their turn. Can they say quickly enough the facts that will get them off before the prosecutor waves for the next man, and he is pushed towards the clerk to have his term and fine noted in the book? There is no time for argument. Those who plead Not Guilty are remanded and pushed aside. The work of the court must go on. The jails and the farmers are waiting outside. The country has a chronic farm-labour shortage.

#### **Articolo n. 6.**

*JO'BURG "SLAVE MARKET" ALLEGATION REVIVED. The Man Who Was Arrested With The Street Sweeper's Broom In His Hand.*  
"New Age", 8 agosto 1957.

In 1949 I wrote an article in "THE GUARDIAN", the paper that was banned by the Nationalists, called "Johannesburg's Slave Market". The phrase coined that year by Africans was "I was sold to a farmer at the court", and the article described the proceedings at the Fordsburg Native Commissioner's Court where Africans charged with petty offences were brought and pressed to take farm work. Outside the court the farmers' lorries waited to take their human cargoes to the waiting lands. This matter was raised in Parliament by Sam Kahn, M.P., and an outcry followed. The charges were denied. The scheme was purely voluntary, the authorities said. The furore subsided after a time, but week after week the stories continued to flow into the offices of NEW AGE – and other newspapers too – of Africans who said they had been taken to work on farms in Bethal, Kinross, Delmas and other areas after their arrest in the cities under the pass laws. Their stories are known in all the townships and locations. They had an echo in the Supreme Court last week in the case of Nelson Langa.

"SHEER FORCED LABOUR", COURT IS TOLD

The charge that the Government scheme for sending Africans to work on farms is sheer forced labour, induced by threats of prosecution, was made in the Supreme Court case of Nelson Langa that will undoubtedly make history whichever way the judgement goes. Sensational allegations have been made in this case. For the first time the Government scheme for farm labour was brought into the daylight for public scrutiny. (We print verbatim extracts of this alongside report.) An affidavit before court by Langa pointed out that the crime for which he had been arrested carried a maximum penalty of a fine not exceeding £1 or 14 days imprisonment. The scheme outlined in the NAD circular, he said, had no statutory justification. His detention was illegal. He alleged that at no time was he told if he refused farm work and was prosecuted and convicted the most that could happen to him was that he would be fined £1. Work on a farm for three to six months was out of all proportion to the merits of the trivial offence involved, said an affidavit placed before court. It emerged also during the proceedings that the service contract between Langa and farm owner Hirschowitz had been signed by a certain NAD official on his own behalf of the Bethal farmer whose power of attorney he had. The Judge more than once stressed that the Government officials who administer this farm labour scheme should give evidence, though, and the Judge's decision in the case is now awaited.

#### HABEAS CORPUS APPLICATION

Nelson was arrested for a pass offence on July 4, on his way from work. He was employed as a street cleaner by the Johannesburg Municipality and had his official work badge with his number on it attached to his belt. He protested that he was employed, but he was put on a lorry, after detention for a night in police cells, and taken to the Native Labour Bureau and subsequently to the farm of Max Hirschowitz in Bethal. His brother Innocent Langa searched for him after his disappearance and applied for a writ of habeas corpus for Nelson's release. A judge ordered his return to Johannesburg. Last week argument on costs took place in the Supreme Court.

#### ARRESTED WITH BADGE AND BROOM

In his affidavit Nelson Langa said he had his badge and broom on him at the time of his arrest. When he showed them to the policemen he was told to "voetsak". He told two European labour bureau officials he was employed and they said they were not interested. "They said they were giving me work because I had no pass. My right thumb was passed on a pad. I was not asked about this or told what it was about. As far as I can see this procedure was adopted with the case of every Native brought to the pass office with me".

#### DID NOT VOLUNTEER

When he arrived at the Bethal farm it was after dark and he was given two empty mealie sacks to use as blankets. "I slept in a prison building every night. The prison building was guarded by Natives with knobkerries...There are many Natives who are kept in forced labour at this farm against their will who often used to speak of their unhappy lot".

#### FARM JAIL AND QUOTA SYSTEM?

The affidavit of attorney Joel Carlson, who served the petition on farmer Hirschowitz for the return of Nelson, stated that Hirschowitz said he was prepared

to surrender Nelson. "In cases where employers demanded their boys back and the boys were willing to go he was prepared to allow them to go back to their employers". He said, according to Carlson's affidavit, but denied in his own affidavit before court, that he had spent £5,000 on erecting a farm prison, and had many hundreds of "boys". "He received a quota from the Native Aëaris Department at Johannesburg and at least one day a month was allotted to him by the Native Affairs Department when he received all the 'boys' available on that date. As far as he knew the 'boys' were volunteers and no one was forced to come to his farms".

#### THE OTHER SIDE – "PURELY VOLUNTARY"

The Government side filed seven affidavits by Government officials and Africans present when Nelson Langa "volunteered". The Chief Native Commissioner of Johannesburg, Mr. F. H. Cronje, said Nelson accepted farm work voluntarily. He denied that there was a prison on the Hirschowitz farm and that there was any quota system of labourers operated by the NAD. Mr. Halvar Sorum, the NAD Employment Officer, said in his affidavits that he always adopted the same procedure with "Natives brought by police". He said: "The police retire and I explain to the Natives I will help them. Die hulp watek het is werk. He said to make it clear: "Ek verkoop julle nie. Mens word nie soos donkeysverkoop nie. Ek dwing julle nie maar dit staan julle vry om die werk aan te neem of the weier". Those who volunteered were then asked to step forward. Those who did not volunteer were sent back to the police.

#### STARTLING TURN IN THE CASE

These affidavits all denied that Nelson had told official that he was already in employment. In court card NA I was produced and this showed that at the pass office Nelson Langa had been entered on this card and Springfield Compound given as his place of residence, and as his employer, Johannesburg Municipality. Counsel argued that the NAD officials must therefore have known that Nelson was in employment.

#### **Articolo n. 7.**

*The bus boycott.*

"Africa South", 1, Africa South Publications, 1957.

"The tiger has fallen", the people cheered. The streets were strangely quiet. First the great lumbering green buses of the largest transport organization for Africans in the country travelled empty along the route; later they were withdrawn altogether. But five and six hours every day endless stream of walkers filled the pavements. Over the rise that obscures Alexandra Township from the main road came the eruption of workers in the dawn hours when mists and brazier fires mingle indistinguishably together. End to end the road was filled with shadowy, hurrying figures. Then the forms thinned out as the younger men with the firmest, sprightly step drew away from the older people, the women, the lame. In the late afternoons and early evenings, the same crowds turned their backs on the city and again took to the roads. Down the hill the footsloggers found it easier (though by the tenth and eleventh weeks of the boycott many shoes were worn to pitiful remnants), the



spindly-legged youngsters trotted now and then to keep up, the progress of the weary women was slower still, here a large Monday washing bundle carried on the head, there a paraffin tin, or the baby tied securely to the back. In the pelting rain, through the suddenly fierce storms of the Johannesburg summer, running the gauntlet of police patrols, the boycotters walked on. They gave the cities of the boycott a new air. Here was no protest by Africans hidden among the dusty squares of the segregated locations, but an army of protesters, voting with their feet, it has been said, before the eyes of White Johannesburg and the Reef.

The year 1957 will be remembered as the Year of the Great Bus Boycott, and the cry "Azikhwelwa" ("We Shall not Ride) has left its stamp on contemporary events. "Azikhwelwa" is one of those terse, succinct, "magic" catchwords that epitomizes a whole legion of African demands, a concept of struggle, an entire campaign. There has been, and still is, "Maybuye" (May Africa Come Back), which dates from the thirties. Twin to "Azikhwelwa" is "Asinamali" (We Have No Money), said not self-pityingly, but defiantly, the slogan first used widely in the post-war squatters' movement that swept the Reef as a protest against the chronic housing shortage, and which is again on the lips of Africans in the cities. For months this year the country hummed with these two cries. From the week the bus company, the Public Utility Transport Corporation, jumped its fares twenty-five per cent, like a single shot fired, the people refused to board the buses. Throughout the long weeks of the boycott, the political initiative in South Africa passed out of the hands of the Government and the Cabinet into the hands of the African people. Not since the days of the Defiance Campaign had Africans held so strategic a position. Political controversy moved away from the sterile debates in the House of Assembly, where the Flag Bill receded into petty obscurity, and nation-wide attention was focused on this demonstration by a voteless, voiceless people.

First beginnings of the boycott were in Alexandra Township, nine miles out of Johannesburg on the Pretoria road, where three previous boycotts have been conducted in the last 13 years. Simultaneously, Sophiatown and Western Native Township joined the boycott, and Lady Selborne in Pretoria. Eastwood joined in, and Germiston and Edenvale. Some twelve days later a sympathy boycott was declared in Moroko and Jabavu, and though the fares on these routes were not affected, these townships marched in solidarity to the end. One thousand miles away, in Port Elizabeth, a sympathy boycott was also declared. Soon 60,000 people were walking anything up to 20 miles a day to work and home again. The cry "Azikhwalwa" and the boycott song banned by the S.A. Broadcasting Corporation rippled along the highways. For weeks the wires hummed with the latest boycott news. The press was filled with letters expressing the unanswerable case of the boycotters. The boycott not only held the headlines, it pre-occupied Cabinets Ministers, industrialists, municipal councils and political parties. Hundreds of White motorists responded by giving free lifts to the boycotters and in so doing achieved more for race harmony and amity than scores of public meetings and political tracts. Everywhere was common cause that people's refusal to ride the buses was an instantaneous reaction to the fare increases. Everywhere, that is, but in the ranks of the Nationalist Government. The day he returned from a visit to Europe and as he alighted from his 'plane, the Minister of transport, Mr. B. J.

Schoeman, delivered his Government's ultimatum in sharp staccato terms. As yet no investigation had been undertaken, the fact brushed aside.

The Government would not be intimidated, said the Minister. It was not prepared to intervene. Employers should help to end the boycott by refusing to pay workers for any time not worked, and should penalize them for late-coming or reduced productivity due fatigue. The public ("misguided") should not give lifts to boycotters. "If they want a show-down they will get it. The Government will not give way, no matter whether the boycott lasts a month or six months". What are the facts? It was the Manager of Pretoria's Non-European Affairs Department who stated publicly that most workers could not pay the increased fares. Over two-thirds of the Pretoria boycotters, he said, earned not more than £9 a month. They were unskilled pick-and-shovel workers, and the last wage award affecting them had been made in 1942. The old fares represented £10 a year, or more than one month's wages. The increased fares would raise that to £12 a year. Except that the figures have altered in the last twelve years to underline the poverty of the African people more starkly, a Government commission appointed at the time of the previous Alexandra Township bus boycott has the definitive say on the ability of the people to pay increased fares. In the 1944, after an exhaustive investigation, the Commission of Inquiry into the operation of bus services for Non-Europeans concluded that Africans could not only not afford to pay increased fares, but "it may be said that they cannot afford to pay anything" (for transport). "They certainly cannot afford to pay anything more in any direction, except by reducing still further their hunger diet". The Commission found that: "the vast bulk of African workers...were in 1940 unable...to meet even the minimum requirements for subsistence, health and decency...Notwithstanding improvements in minimum wage rates and the introduction of cost of living allowances, since 1940 the gap between family income and the cost of meeting the essential needs of the family has widened considerably, owing to higher prices. Rent, transport and tax make the most rigid and urgent demands on the African worker. They cannot be escaped.

The worker is compelled to live far from his place of work and must pay for his transport. The tax must be paid or he may find himself in gaol. Owing the compulsion imposed upon Africans by State policy and Housing requirements, rent and transport should always be considered together and these together take too high a proportion of the family income..." (in 1944 rent and transport averaged 18 and 6 per cent, respectively of family income). The Commission found that the average monthly deficit in family incomes was £3 or 5d. Since 1944 the gulf between income and bare subsistence needs has widened. In 1950 the monthly average family deficit was estimated to have risen to £4 17s. 10d., and by 1954 to £7 11s. 5d. Over the years the real value of wages has decreased, and the immediate shock affect of the boycott was to impress on industrialists and the general public alike the full impact of the below-the-breadline existence of the vast majority of urban Africans. The Africans could not afford to pay the bus fares increases. PUTCO, the bus company, on its side, made out a good case for its inability to carry on without further subsidy or a fare increase. Formed after the 1944 Alexandra Township boycott, the company was placed under judicial management in 1951 and began to climb out of its financial difficulties and to start paying a six per cent. dividend to its

shareholders only when a Government subsidy was granted from 1952 onwards. Year by year the subsidy on fares on sub-economic routes was increased until by 1956 the Government was paying to the tune of £207,475 (the Government fills two of the five director-ships of the Company and approves the chairman of the Board). Despite the subsidy, PUTCO'S 1956 year-end Company Report presses either for a higher subsidy or for transportation Board permission to increase fares. "The Company's financial position will become acute by January, 1957....Unfortunately a solution is not so simple, because the Company is not only a delicately poised financially, but also in its relations with the bantu world". So it was with some trepidation that the Company applied to the transportation Board for a fare increase. Earlier protracted disputes centred in Alexandra Township were still fresh in the Company's mind, and history was to come full circle in 1957.

It was October, 1939, that the bus companies then operating to Alexandra proposed a rise in the week-day fare from 4d. To 5d. A committee of residents was formed, campaigned for eight months against the fare increase, presented its case to the Road transportation Board, and negotiated with the bus companies. The Board turned down the bus company application. In 1943, however, the Board permitted an increase of the fare to 5d. On the first day of the new fare scale a huge procession of 15,000 people walked the nine and half miles to Johannesburg. The march continued for nine days, and then the bus companies gave in and the fares were once more reduced to 4d. The Government's Commission into non-European bus services that was appointed in January, 1944, made its findings known in November, concluding that the people could not afford higher fares; but before these findings were made public, the bus owners were putting forward claims for increased fares. The Government promulgated emergency regulations requiring employers to pay any increase in transport fares over and above those existing at September 1<sup>st</sup>, and the new 5d. Fares were then fixed. The United Party Government proposed that the workers collect these increased fares from their employers, but this was rejected in almost the identical terms in which the people of the township this year rejected the first proposed settlement to the current dispute, namely, that employers pay one shilling a week to their employees as a transport allowance. The people objected that the allowance would not cover casual workers, washerwomen, the unemployed, children. It placed the burden of collecting the extra 2d. A day on the workers; and many felt that employers would discriminate against Alexandra Township residents in favour of those living nearer the city. At a residents' meeting in November, 1944, to consider the 5d. Fares, a police ban on all gatherings of more than twenty persons was read, but by the morning after that meeting, the people had declared their boycott. The boycott continued for six weeks. The Government rejected a Johannesburg City Council proposal for the subsidizing of the service. An attempt by the Council to buy the buses and run the service to the municipal boundary was turned down by the Road Transportation Board. On the sixth week of the boycott there was talk of the people of Alexandra staging a stay-away from work protest, but in the seventh week a subsidized coupon scheme was improvised, whereby passengers bought 5d. Coupons for 4d. A number of independent bus companies operating on the route were taken over by the newly formed PUTCO, and the fares than reverted to 4d., with

promises that in time they would be lower still. This boycott had been victorious. The parallels between the 1944 and the 1956 boycotts are striking. So, too, are the differences. In both boycotts the central Government had disowned any responsibility for the dispute and stood aloof from any solution. In both the initiative for settlement had to come not from the obvious official quarters, but from industrialists, enlightened City Councillors, and African and democratic European bodies. In both cases the boycotts were settled despite the Government, not because of it. And yet the differences between South Africa's Governments in 1944 and 1956 are still the most telling factors in the total situation. The United Party Government in 1944 was still to some extent sensitive to public opinion, to public pressures. The Government of Mr. Strijdom is intransigent, intractable, unyielding. And nine years under this Government has changed African opinion too. It is not only more united, but also more demanding, more angry, increasingly suspicious because of promises because of promises never fulfilled, of undertakings that were never realized. These changes must be borne in mind in an attempt to explain and estimate the course of this year's three-month-long boycott and the thorny path trodden to a settlement. It is the national policy of segregation, or apartheid, which has led to siting African townships at the outskirts of the cities where land is cheapest and furthest from the White areas.

Apartheid and the colour bar in industry decree also that Africans shall do the lowest-paid, unskilled jobs and at rates of pay outstripped many times by White earnings. So heavy transport costs fall on that section of the population least able to bear them. Africans are not only the victims of segregation but they are forced to pay its heavy cost too. Far from this or any previous responsibility to provide cheap and heavily subsidized public transport for the poorest groups in the community, South Africa has turned normal, twentieth century principles of public finance on their heads. "African must pay for their own services" is the constantly recurring Nationalist Government theme, and so Africans face a sharp increase in their poll tax, now have to pay an additional levy for the building of schools in their locations, get the lowest school feeding grant for their children, and in many urban areas have just faced a rent increase amounting to 2d. A day. A number of technical solutions to the boycott were suggested in its early stages and any one of these could have resulted in a settlement. An increased Government subsidy to PUTCO rather than an increase in fares was an obvious solution, but the Government bore the weekly losses of the Company to stop its compromising or settling. An increase in the Native Services Levy, through which employers would have subsidized the bus company, was another obvious solution, but again the Government would have nothing of this, and employers who recognized their obligation to help subsidize transport were driven to try to improvise other voluntary and much more clumsy schemes. At the outset employers were hopeful of an interim transport fund, but the Government would not be hopeful of an interim transport fund, but the Government would not lend itself to this type of settlement either. A war measure which requires employers to pay directly to workers who use the buses the difference between original and increased fares could have been unconscious humor, could not be entertained by the Government for fear it would be accused of "using authoritarian measures!" On almost every side there was deep concern that a speedy settlement

should be reached. Employers, after all the chief beneficiaries of the system of cheap non-European labour, were convicted that Africans could not afford the fare increases and they were the first to try to devise ways whereby they could foot the extra bill. The Johannesburg City Council, which, in the 1944 boycott, had played the major role in launching the coupon system that led to the final settlement, was willing to contribute towards the subsidy. The public was on the side of the boycotters. The boycotters and their committees repeatedly announced their willingness to negotiate a settlement.

After the first few weeks of the boycott PUTCO, had it been a free agent independent of Government pressure, would have returned to the old scale of fares. Only the Government blocked the way to a settlement. It did more than that. It threw the might of the State machinery against the 60,000 walkers in a desperate bid to smash the boycott. Despite the denials by the Police Commissioner that the police force was being used to crush the boycott, every day brought fresh police acts of intimidation against both boycotters and sympathetic motorists. In a few weeks of mass raids, 14,000 people were arrested on petty offences, most of the raids being conducted on the routes travelled by the boycotters or in the chief boycott areas. Thousands of summonses were issued under the Road Transportation Act. Men were arrested and detained in the cells overnight for crossing roads against the traffic lights. Policemen armed with tape measures and guns measured car seats to ensure that no boycott sat on less than 15 inches of seat, scrutinized passed and driving licences, and made haphazard arrests. And as the boycott continued as strong as ever and these bludgeon tactics of the police and the Government failed abysmally, Minister Schoeman prevailed on PUTCO to issue an ultimatum that if the boycott was not ended by the end of February, the buses would be withdrawn and the routes abandoned. And in case of any other company had the notion that it could operate at lower costs, the Minister announced a new Bill prohibiting any company from operating on the routes from which PUTCO was withdrawing. It had become a matter of Government prestige that Africans should be compelled to pay the higher, even if there could be a lower one.

Why this attitude of the Government on the boycott issue? Sheer perversity, pique and blockheadedness? Another example to add to the already too numerous instances of the callousness and brutality shown to Africans? There was more to the Government attitude than all this. The Government alarm at the bus boycott sprang from its pathological fear of allowing the African giant to feel – and use – his strength. Nine years of Nationalist rule have been spent trying to bind the limbs of this giant, to halter and cripple him, to blindfold and muzzle him. The only answer to African demands that the Nationalists know is the threat, the restriction, the prohibition, the ban, the deportation order, the baton and the bullet. Deputations are turned away; political leaders dubbed agitators; trade unions outlawed. The Government has taken to itself the power to declare martial law (the Public Safety Act); may impose floggings for political offences (The Criminal Laws Amendment Act); may prevent an African seeking redress in the Court (the Prohibition of Interdicts Act). The strike weapon is illegal, and the avowed intention of the Minister of Labour is to “bleed African unions to death”. The Africans enjoys no vote, no representation on municipal or local bodies, no genuine method of

consultation with any authority. His free movement is harassed at every turn by the pass laws, tightened up every few sessions by a new amending Bill. His right of free assembly is limited by a network of prohibitions in municipal bye-laws and statutes.

The boycott asserted the right of Africans to protest. Despite all the prohibitions and the mountain of laws curbing African political action, Africans in Johannesburg, Pretoria and the Reef had found a method of struggle which could not easily be stamped out by law. It might come to that, but there is not yet a law on the Union statute book imposing penalties on Africans for walking to work and home again by way of protest against a bus company. The Government denunciation of the boycott as “political” was one of the sticks it hoped to use to beat the boycott, to ruin all chances of settlement, to frighten employers and the Chamber of Commerce and White South Africa as a whole with this spectacle of a menacing black force, using a fare rise merely as a pretext for engaging the Government in political battle to test its strength. For the bus boycott did, undoubtedly, develop into a political campaign. The economic facts, the poverty of a people that reckons its income in pennies, sparked off the boycott, and those who argue the economic basis for this protest could not be on firmer ground. But those who would separate the economic background from the political, who would see the African protesting only against a penny rise in fares, unmoved and unaffected by Minister Schoeman’s “break the boycott” threats, by the daily police intimidation, by the pin-pricks, the humiliations and the abject miseries of apartheid, erect distinctions which must be blown over in the first gusts of any African protest or campaign.

The Government, however, had its own reasons for characterizing the boycott a political manoeuvre. It was thus insinuating that the fare increase was merely a pretext for the boycott, whereas a prompt return to the 4d. fare could have been the most obvious disclaimer. The Government branded the boycott leaders trouble-makers and “workless township thugs”. But it is a Government deludes by the notion that it is only “agitators” who are dissatisfied, that only “Communists and left-wing extremists” express the demand for political rights of the African people; that only “red termites” organize protest movements. This is the fantasy world of the Native Affairs Department empire. It is the golden edict of these Native administrators that the Africans are satisfied with their lot and only those who fall under alien and left-wing influences try to revolt against Dr. Verwoerd’s paternal authority. Any expression of African aspirations, however mild, is “agitation”. But Africans are no longer bewildered, mute, raw tribal creatures. The boycott showed that the Africans in the town is an industrialized, settled, politically aware individual, organized, articulate, purposeful. His organizations are mature and resourceful. His resolve and his courage are not easily broken. Raw to criticism, enraged by opposition, and, above all, apprehensive of the bitter harvest which they know their treatment of the African people must inevitably reap for them, the Nationalists were forced to recognize in this boycott that apartheid has not succeeded in breaking African opposition and its backbone is stronger than ever. It needs to be. The negotiated settlement by which bus users would buy 5d. Coupons for 4d. and which finally drew the people of Alexandra Township back into the

buses is only to last three months. In the absence of a more permanent solution, new struggles clearly loom ahead. There is also the cry from all sides for increases in Africans wages. The boycott must be seen as a prelude to many related campaigns. Above all, the bus boycott highlights other lessons for South Africans. It often takes such dramatic episodes to convince complacent White South Africa that Africans feel their denial of rights so keenly. And it showed Africans what they had suspected and now know for certain: that in active campaigning for basic human and economic demands, their unity holds the key to success.

#### **Articolo n. 8.**

*Germiston Women Protest Against Passes. Triumphant Demonstration to Native Commissioner.*

“New Age”, 8 marzo 1956.

For several days before the women’s local demonstration against passes Germiston location seethed with reports spread by the police that the women would be shot if they demonstrated, and their leader Miss Bertha Mashaba had been arrested; yet on Saturday morning 300 women from Germiston, Natalspruit, Alberton and Elsnurg went through with their mass deputation to the Native Commissioner and from six in the morning till the afternoon they carried all before them. As a result of police visits to their employers both the chairman and the assistant secretary of the Germiston branch of the ANC Women’s League were sacked from their jobs the day before the demonstration. They are Mrs. Nally Mayakenu and Miss Gladys Tladi. The police watched all entrances to the home of Miss Bertha Mashaba, the League secretary, all Thursday night and most of Friday. They told her mother and father: “Your daughter will be shot. We’ll bury her. You’ll never see her again. Tell her to tell the women not to go to the Native Commissioner on Saturday”. They pulled a tenant out of his bed, confronted him with Bertha’s three sisters and ordered him to point out Bertha. Through the location the police went in groups showing their guns and telling the people the Native Commissioner had stopped the demonstration, that Bertha was locked up and that the women should stay at home on Saturday.

#### WOMEN’S REPLY

But on Saturday morning 300 women from the four areas with Bertha Mashaba, Gladys Tliadi, Nelly Myakeni and all the other leading women at their head, walked undeterred to the office of the Native Commissioner. Each member of the crowd signed the petition from against passes for women and waited outside while their deputation saw the Native Commissioner. One by one they spoke out their objections and the Native Commissioner listened. Said one: “We do not want to carry any kind of paper or pass even if it is written in letters of gold. The Commissioner told the women he did not make the laws. The women knew that, they said, but when the day came that they were issued with passes the Minister would instruct the Native Commissioner to do this. “So we are coming to tell you to tell the Minister that we do not want to carry passes”.

#### PETITION

The women's petitions said: We fear for our homes when we too are arrested under the pass laws. We fear for our children who will be left uncared for, helpless. What is to become of our tiny children, our babies dependent on their mother's milk, if we are to be torn from them for failing to produce a pass? Must we subject our young daughters to intimidation and humiliation at the hands of the police?" The Minister must withdraw the threat to impose passes on women, said the petition. The deputation spoke their objections quietly and resolutely, then, after hearing the Native Commissioner say he would forward their objections to the Minister and watching him record their names and addresses, they filed outside again and there, in the Native Commissioner's quadrangle, reported back to the crowd of demonstrators. Then back marched the 300 to the Germiston Location where they held yet another meeting. That day 57 women joined the ANC. Once the best traditions of the Pretoria march, over police intimidation.

### **Articolo n. 9.**

*Strijdom, You Have Struck a Rock. 20,000 Women Says "No" To Passes.*  
"New Age", 16 agosto 1956.

JOHANNESBURG – Premier Strijdom skulked somewhere out of sight in the Union Buildings, but the shattering roar of "AFRIKA" from the gigantic women's protest demonstration overflowing the amphitheatre below his offices rocked the Cabinet – and the country – to a realization that AFRICAN WOMEN DO NOT WANT PASS BOOKS. Last year's October demonstration was hugely impressive. Last week's – estimated at 20,000 women of all races – dwarfed the first. And for every women demonstrating in Pretoria there were many more, in their home towns and villages, who were part of this snowalling protest movement. The women burst into the new Zulu freedom song "Strijdom uthitta anafazi, uthinti imbokotho", which means "Strijdom, you've tampered with the women, you've knocked against a rock". Above all else this song symbolised the victory of last Thursday's national protest.

The Special (Security) Branch was present in full force at the Union Buildings, some detectives having travelled from the coastal towns on the same trains as the demonstrators. Throughout the day they watched the proceedings, and took photographs, but there were no incidents.

#### PERFECT ORDER

It was two and half hours before all the women protesters had filed through the Union Buildings and entered the amphitheatre, but throughout the operation went without a hitch. The women gave a superb demonstration of calm discipline. As mighty as the salute "Afrika", as thrilling as the singing of the few national songs chosen for the occasion, perhaps even more impressive was the half hour of chilling silence observed when all the women were assembled. With their thumbs up in the Afrika salute, the entire amphitheatre rose for the silent protest forms which every woman had signed. The only sounds to be heard were the cries of babies now and again, and they served only to accentuate that tense stillness. Nine leaders, carrying huge piles of protest forms, moved from the amphitheatre to enter the Union Buildings. They were stopped by a commissionaire, who later agreed –



after consultation with the police – to let five women through. Strijdom was nowhere to be seen, but the protest forms were left in his office. Back with the women Lilian Ngoyi reported briefly that though the Prime Minister had locked himself away, the women had made their protest to show that they did not want passes. The signing of the women as they dispersed echoed across the capital, expressing the bitter feeling of African women right through the country against the pass laws.

#### NEVER SO GLORIOUS

The gardens at the Union Buildings have never looked as glorious as when the women entered them last Thursday. In the morning, when the women arrived from all points by bus and train, every inch of the lawns was dotted with women, some in tribal dress, from the Eastern Province and the Northern Transvaal, factory workers, peasant women, mothers with babies, old women with lined faces, Congress women in the bright green and black blouse with black skirt that has in the matter of just over a year to come the accepted Congress women's uniform. At midday the sign to move up to the Union Buildings was given and the grounds became alive as, in groups of 50, the women moved forward to line the paths and the stairways in a guard of honour for the leaders from all centres. The 20,000 assembled on the stone tiers of the amphitheatre without sound or fuss. Among them the pressmen and photographers scurried about, the Special Branch looked on, and civil servants stared over the balconies at the spreading assembly. One hundred women came from Port Elizabeth in two special railway coaches. Women's contingents came from Bethlehem, Bloemfontein, Natal, and Ermelo; from the Reef and from Pretoria, from Cape Town, Paarl, Stellenbosch and Worcester. The night before the demonstration Lady Selborne threw open its doors to thousands, and in its Bantu Hall and in many location halls demonstrators came together in all-night "wakes" before the Day. By the following morning they were tired, but nothing could have kept them from the Union Buildings, and nothing did.

#### **Articolo n. 10.**

*Police Kill Two Pass Protesters.*  
"New Age", 15 novembre 1956.

LICHTENBURG. THE AFRICAN WOMEN OF LICHTENBURG LOCATION DO NOT WANT TO TAKE OUT PASS BOOKS, AND THE POLICE SHOOTING LAST WEEK IN WHICH TWO WERE KILLED AND 19 ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF PUBLIC VIOLENCE HAS NOT MADE THEM CHANGE THEIR MINDS. The issue of reference books – to both men and women, despite a denial by the Native commissioner in the press that women were not being registered – goes on, and not ten yards from the courtroom where the arrested men and women appeared last Saturday, the itinerant reference-book unit is at work in the district till the 20<sup>th</sup>. The women do not want to carry passes. But farmers in the district and employers in the town are putting pressure on them to do so. "A Pass, or your job" is the choice put before them. The news that women had to take out pass books was told to the teachers, who were to instruct their school pupils to tell their mothers to report. Some women who had queued to take out

passes dispersed when women from the location told them what this would mean. Others came out of their homes on the morning of Wednesday 7 to tell the Superintendent that they did not want to carry passes. They carried a small home-made flag that said so. It was while this crowd was being dispersed that the trouble broke. Women say that they were already turning back when some constables used their batons on them. Some stone throwing then ensued and the police opened fire. TWO MEN WERE SHOT DEAD AND SEVERAL WOUNDED. (MEN WERE AT THIS TIME COMING OUT OF THE LOCATION ON THEIR WAY TO WORK.)

#### AGITATORS?

The officials theme in Lichtenburg is “agitators fro outside” were the cause of the trouble. Some, like the “Noordwester”, say it was “one or other organization from the Reef”. Others insist the agitators came from Johannesburg; still others say Klerksdorp. When the women protested to the superintendent against passes he kept asking insistently, “Where did you get that flag? Who gave it to you?” The women said they had made it themselves. The hunt for “outside agitators” and the flag still goes on. White Lichtenburg last week was dusting its hands with satisfaction at the way the police had dealt with the peoples’ anti-pass demonstration.

#### EXCELLED HIMSELF

The public supplied the police with cool drinks while they were on anti-riot duty in the location. Lichtenburg’s M.P, Mr. M. C. van Niekerk, excelled himself. He visited the police while they mounted guard at the trouble spot to thank them in a little speech for their actions. He also sent a telegram to the Minister of Justice in the name of the “public in general” COMPLIMENTING him on the courageous way the police commandant, Captain I. D. Bosch and his men had carried out their duty, and avoided greater bloodshed, in the clash “between police and Natives”. The same Captain Bosch kept an attentive eye on the court proceedings on Saturday when bail was being applied for in the case of those arrested.

#### CHARGED

Among the 19 are two men injured in the shooting and still in hospital under guard: Robert Ngubane and Sam Justus. Among the nine women are four widows. Most of the women are mothers of from one to six children. The magistrate decided to release one of the women on her own recognisances as she appeared to be feeble-minded and an epileptic. During the court proceedings she fainted and had to be carried out of the courtroom. One of the accused men is a youth of 17. The women are Julia Nkopane, Rosy Lensie, Jemina Modupe, Elizabeth Mangapola, Sarah Melk, Jeannie Marping, Magdalena Moeng, Margaret Motsemme and Charity Thomas. The men are Solomon Moshosho, Robert Sebotsa, David Sechoaro, Isaac Kgosimang, Emmanuel Phetoe, Andries Kubelo, Lucas Masilo and Seth Mocoletsane. The Crown opposed bail on the grounds that police investigations were incomplete. It was said in court that further arrests are to be made. After argument by Mr. G. Bizos who appeared for the 17 (instructed by Mrs. S. Muller) the magistrate agreed to grant bail which was fixed at £50 each, with the condition that each of the accused had to report to the police once a day. The hearing will open on December 4. After Saturday’s court appearance the arrested men and

women went back to their cells, and the people from the location back to their homes to try to raise the £900 bail money. By then the reference-book unit had packed up for the weekend.

**Articolo n. 11.**

*FREEDOM CHARTER ADOPTED. Congress of the People Epoch-Making Success in Face of Police Intimidation.*

“New Age”, 30 giugno 1955.

Kliptown, Sunday night. - Beneath the great, green four-spoked Freedom Wheel, the symbol of the Congress of the People campaign, 2,844 elected delegates of the people adopted the Freedom Charter here this afternoon, pledging to strive, sparing neither strength nor courage, to win the democratic changes set out in the Charter for all South Africans. Each delegate was elected by anything from 10 to a few thousand people, and this was without doubt the most representative convention ever held in South Africa. It was also the most spirited.

NEVER BEFORE HAS AN DOCUMENT OR CONFERENCE SO CHALLENGED THE PRESENT NEAR-FASCIST GOVERNMENT, AND AS THE DELEGATES WERE CALMLY AND METHODICALLY ADOPTING ITS FINAL CLAUSES, THE GOVERNMENT BROKE INTO THE PROCEEDINGS IN THE BIGGEST POLICE SWEEP EVER SEEN IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY; WITH THREATS OF TREASON PROCEEDINGS, AND WITH A FOUR-HOUR-LONG INTERROGATION OF EVERY SINGLE DELEGATE IN THAT VAST CROWD.

All week-end great numbers of plain-clothes Special Staff men, rushed from every part of the country to the Kliptown conference square, had closely watched the proceedings. The conference was in its final stages this afternoon when at about 3.30 p.m. a large force of police was suddenly rushed to the area in trucks, and then stormed the delegates' enclosure. The first warning the crowd had of this was an announcement from the platform by Mr. P. Beyveled: “Armed police are approaching. We don't know what they want. Please keep your seats”. Then he asked the crowd to rise and sing the anthem “Inkosi Sikaleli”. As the voices rose, about 15 Special Branch detectives, escorted by a group of police armed with sten guns, mounted the platform. Every document in sight was removed, cameras and rolls of film confiscated, and all those on the platform were searched. It was announced that treason was suspected and the names and addresses of every delegate were to be taken. Mounted police sealed off the area backed by the railway line, and constables armed with rifles, which they held at fixed position as they moved through the crowd, threw a double cordon round the conference square, taking up position a few feet apart from one another to prevent anyone entering or leaving the conference site.

**CROWD BEHAVES MAGNIFICENTLY**

The police came well prepared. Hurricane lamps were standing by so Special Staff men could continue laboriously to record names and addresses fell; and separate tables were set up for Europeans and Non-Europeans. As each delegate left the conference site, he was interrogated at the police table and searched. Documents

found on him were retained and sealed in an envelope with his name. Every single European delegate was photographed by a flash camera. Delegates had their pockets searched, and though the police confiscated documents and publications they gave no receipts. The questioning and search went on until about 8 p.m. One African taken to the Kliptown police station was assaulted, and by the time he was released his clothing was covered with blood. The police removed all banners and flags on the conference sites. Members of the Special Staff were also seen entering the small Peace Pavillon and, with a knife, slashing the Peace exhibition to ribbons. The police also confiscated all monies lying on tables collected from literature sales, and carted away huge quantities of literature. When the delegates saw that all publications and papers were being removed from them as they were searched, some hurriedly made bonfires in the delegates' enclosure to prevent the police having the satisfaction of confiscating literature. Throughout the police questioning the people behaved as though quite unaware of the presence of several hundred armed police. They formed into groups to dance and sing, the brass band played, and the dancing went on until only a tiny group was left within the police cordon, and their time came to be searched. The crowd showed that it was completely fearless in the face of the police invasion, and the shouts of "Mayibuye Afrika!" grew louder and more spirited than ever in these last dramatic hours of the Congress. The chairman asked the meeting if it wished to proceed and when the crowd roared its assent, Mrs. Helen Joseph rose to introduce the section of the Charter demanding houses, security and comfort for the people.

#### FROM EVERY CENTRE

Delegates came from every centre in the Union of any size, from the reserves and locations, the farms and cities. They came by train, car, cart, lorry and bus, some even on foot, converging in Kliptown from all directions, to speak, as the simple, home-made banners announced, "of freedom". For one and half days Kliptown, a quiet little settlement in the Klip Valley, became South Africa in miniature. Old and young, grizzled patriarchs, and bright young children, clerks and scholars, doctors and ministers – every shade and facet of South African life was represented.

#### BEAUTIFUL DRESSES

Delegates entered the enclosed strip of veld where the Congress was held, marching and singing, under their banners and African National Congress flags. One delegation was led by a brass band. Many of the women wore beautiful dresses and shawls, elaborately embroidered in Congress colours, some of the Congress flag flying from their breast-pockets, others the tie, yet others the Congress scarf. The conference site fluttered with banners of all shapes, sizes and materials. Some said: "Down with Bantu education"; others condemned the pass laws. Phrases from the Freedom Charter were prominent: "The People Shall Govern", "All Shall be Equal before the Law". "Shame", shouted the crowd when George Peake, of the Western delegation, announced that his delegation's banners had been seized in the police station at Beaufort West where 50 delegates had been held up and not allowed to proceed to the conference. Leaders from all the provinces spoke from the platform to introduce the ten sections of the Charter. Then, one by one, first slowly but later in a deluge, the names poured on to the platform of delegates who wanted to speak. Everybody wanted to speak, and only a

sprinkling could, but they hearts, about the longings and hopes of the people, their hatred for apartheid and their will for freedom. Cries of “Mayibuye” and clapping punctuated every speech.

### **Articolo n. 12.**

*La Fondina nel Reggiseno.*

“Liberazione”, 10 giugno 1965.

La pistola per “le brave massaie bianche” è la recente trovata di una ditta, di Johannesburg. Ma è anche il sintomo preciso di una psicosi di guerra in uno Stato segregazionista dove una minoranza bianca di tre milioni spadroneggia con la forza bruta su una maggioranza nera di ben tredici milioni. Le spese per gli armamenti sono state triplicate: eppure non ci sono eserciti nemici ai confini del Sud Africa. Quale è allora l’avversario che si teme?

Johannesburg, giugno

Qualche giorno fa si sparse in tutto il Sud Africa, una notizia piuttosto curiosa. Una nuova ditta di Johannesburg, in vena di idee “avventurose” reclamizzava una “rivoluzionaria fondina da reggiseno”, nella quale può prender posto una pistola calibro 38. E così le brave massaie bianche ora portano rivoltelle nel reggiseno! Non è che un sintomo questo, di una psicosi di guerra in uno Stato segregazionista dove una minoranza bianca di tre milioni spadroneggia con la forza bruta su una maggioranza di 13 milioni. Le spese per gli armamenti sono triplicate in Sudafrica negli ultimi tre anni: ci sono 250 mila bianchi sotto le armi, pronti ad imbracciare il fucile; l’intero paese vive in una atmosfera di forte nervosismo e i sintomi della psicosi di guerra sono evidenti ad ogni passo: chi è il nemico? Non ci sono truppe straniere che premano sui confini, e neppure c’è stata alcuna minaccia di invasione. No, la minaccia di guerra parte dall’interno stesso dello Stato segregazionista ed ogni avvocato della separazione razziale, sia pur fanatico, sa bene che per quanto egli possa difendere con le armi lo *status quo*, questo regime razzista, il più rabbioso che il mondo abbia visto in uno Stato coloniale o semi coloniale, è destinato ad essere sconfitto. Il Sud Africa è il paese più ricco e sviluppato del continente africano: esso possiede il 43 per cento della ricchezza del continente, e i due terzi dell’oro di tutto il mondo; consuma il doppio dell’acciaio e dell’energia elettrica consumati dal resto dell’Africa; produce il 30 per cento del reddito continentale. Il segregazionismo riserva però la prosperità ai soli bianchi. La minoranza – un quarto della popolazione – assorbe il 67 per cento del reddito nazionale, mentre gli africani vivono con salari di fame: nelle miniere la paga media dei bianchi è quindici volte la paga media degli africani; in industrie secondarie la proporzione è di cinque a uno. La paga media di un bianco è di 425 sterline; quella di un africano, di 39 sterline. Sempre in tutta la storia del paese, la privilegiata minoranza bianca ha avuto il monopolio dei diritti politici e del dominio economico. *Ogni* bianco, anche il lavoratore più umile, ha un potere politico ed economico superiore a *qualsiasi* africano. L’unità politica dei bianchi, che mantiene al potere il governo fascista di Verwoerd, è in tal modo basata unicamente sul denaro – gli introiti del sistema segregazionista. Nel passato la

minoranza bianca era divisa sulla questione della tattica migliore da usarsi per tenere sottomessa la maggioranza negra. Oggi l'economia dell'imperialismo bianco e la filosofia fascista hanno dato vita all'estrema variante del dominio razziale, il segregazionismo, e l'opposizione parlamentare ufficiale dei bianchi in Parlamento si mantiene unita al governo su questa questione basilare: mantenere il dominio dei bianchi. Il segregazionismo significa che:

- la discriminazione in base al colore è sancita dalla stessa Costituzione.
- Il Sud Africa è il solo paese del mondo dove sia considerato un crimine per un negro possedere od occupare una proprietà senza il permesso del bianco. Gli africani possono possedere terra solo in un ottavo del paese.
- Il continuo processo di espropriazione terriera ha creato una massa di lavoratori senza terra costretti ad emigrare, i quali costituiscono per il paese una riserva di mano d'opera pagabile a basso prezzo. Questi uomini possono restare nelle città, e lavorare in fabbriche e miniere solo per la durata del contratto di lavoro; quando il loro contratto scade essi sono considerati immigrandi illegali.
- Gli africani devono sopportare il pesante fardello delle leggi discriminatorie e vengono incarcerati per ogni trasgressione a tali leggi. Il Sud Africa è tra le nazioni del mondo una di quelle che hanno il più grande numero di gente nelle prigioni; e il numero delle persone imprigionate giornalmente è *raddoppiato* negli ultimi dieci anni.
- Tutta la politica dell'educazione statale è tesa ad insegnare a tutti i negri, fin dall'infanzia, che "l'uguaglianza con i bianchi non è per loro". Sono queste le parole dello stesso primo ministro, Verwoerd.
- La politica del governo, come ha detto il ministro del Lavoro, vuole "far morire, svenandoli, i sindacati degli africani".
- Gli africani sono esclusi completamente da ogni partecipazione al governo.

Il segregazionismo nella vita quotidiana degli africani significa una discriminazione ed una persecuzione costanti e spietate. Gli africani non possono restare in strada dopo l'ora del coprifuoco; non possono fermarsi in alcuna città, senza un permesso ufficiale, per più di 72 ore; non possono entrare in alcuna associazione o comunità, anche se si tratta di una comunità africana, senza un permesso ufficiale; essi devono servirsi di ingressi separati nelle stazioni, di treni e di autobus separati, di separati ascensori negli edifici; agli africani è proibito entrare nelle librerie, teatri, musei e, adesso anche nei campi sportivi; essi non possono far visita alle loro mogli, lavoranti come domestiche presso bianchi, senza il permesso del datore di lavoro. La lista delle restrizioni è infinita e va crescendo ogni anno. Esiste una vasta forza di polizia e tutto un apparato burocratico per mantenere in opera la macchina del segregazionismo, ed ogni bianco è virtualmente un soldato dell'esercito d'occupazione che mantiene, in questo paese africano, i bianchi in privilegio e gli africani in soggezione.

Ogni giorno si assiste alla caccia all'uomo contro gli africani che contravvengono alle leggi dell'*apartheid*. Ad un africano può venir richiesto a qualsiasi ora del giorno e della notte di esibire i propri documenti per dimostrare che egli non sta commettendo alcun atto illegale. L'Europa occupata dai nazisti ha conosciuto questa caccia all'uomo: ma gli africani, nel Sud Africa, non hanno mai conosciuto

altro. È lo stato poliziesco in azione. La violenza è sempre stata endemica in una tale situazione. È inevitabile che una minoranza di bianchi, sostenuta dalla fede nella superiorità della propria razza – una stirpe eletta – finisca col ricorrere alla violenza contro la cosiddetta inferiorità dei negri. Non passa settimana che i giornali non portino notizia di atti di violenza contro africani innocenti: un bianco 29enne ha sparato ad un uomo di colore uccidendolo, è stato condannato a sei mesi di prigione per il crimine, ma cinque mesi gli sono stati poi condonati. Un poliziotto di 19 anni che sparò al petto di un prigioniero africano ebbe una multa di cento sterline. Questi sono episodi di violenza che si verificano tutti i giorni e rappresentano l'aspetto più brutto della vita sotto il regime dell'*apartheid*.

C'è anche un sistema ben organizzato di violenza politica senza il quale il segregazionismo verrebbe sconfitto dalla maggioranza. Negato loro ogni potere elettorale, gli africani si sono organizzati, attraverso il loro movimento di liberazione nazionale, attorno ad un programma per la terra, per il voto, per maggiori possibilità economiche e diritti umani per tutti. Le manifestazioni pacifiche e le proteste sono state però dichiarate illegali; alle assemblee la polizia picchia e spara; e gli scioperi politici di protesta sono stati fatti fallire mettendo l'intero paese sul piede di guerra. Inoltre, sia il Congresso nazionale africano che il Congresso pan-africano sono stati banditi e pertanto divenuti illegali, ridotti a movimenti clandestini. Il partito comunista fu bandito nel 1950 con il "*Suppression of Communism Act*" che mette fuori legge quale comunista ogni persona che cerchi di operare un qualsiasi cambiamento mediante un atto ritenuto illegale. Un africano ad esempio, che si siede sulla panchina di un parco che abbia l'etichetta *Whites only* (per soli bianchi), compiendo un atto di protesta contro le leggi discriminatorie, può essere messo in galera sotto accusa di comunismo! Il massacro nel 1969 a Sharpeville, di una folla che protestava pacificamente, segnò una svolta nella lotta nel Sud Africa per la propria libertà. Se le pacifiche manifestazioni di protesta venivano accolte a colpi di mitra, dichiararono i *leaders* africani, essi avrebbero adottato "nuovi metodi". Poco tempo dopo la *Umkonto We Sizwe* (la lancia della nazione) emerse come l'ala militare del Congresso nazionale africano, e venne instaurata una campagna di sabotaggio contro le installazioni governative. Il governo rispose a questo periodo di resistenza con repressioni selvagge: introdusse la pena di morte non solo per atti di sabotaggio ma anche per ogni tentativo di lasciare il paese per andare a istruirsi all'estero, anche se per normali fini educativi. Una legge sulla detenzione a tempo indefinito dei politici allo scopo di interrogarli e il ricorso alla tortura furono adottati dalla polizia politica per un periodo di 18 mesi nel tentativo di spezzare le forze clandestine di sabotaggio. Migliaia di persone d'ogni razza furono processate sotto accusa di sabotaggio, di cospirazione per rovesciare il governo con mezzi illegali, di appartenere a movimenti illegali.

Le prigioni sono piene dei rappresentanti della lotta per la libertà. A Robben Island, l'isola penale del Sud Africa che è considerata come la prigione più "sicura" per internarvi i prigionieri politici, sono incarcerati Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu e gli uomini del processo di Rivonia, scampati alla sentenza capitale soltanto grazie

alle proteste levatesi da tutto il mondo. Le proteste, tuttavia, e le pressioni in campo internazionale non hanno potuto salvare la vita dei 50 *leaders* politici – 49 africani e un bianco, John Harris – che sono stati mandati a morte negli ultimi tre anni. Migliaia sono stati incarcerati senza processo ed ancor più ne sono stati processati da selvagge e vendicative corti bianche; e molti, che già avevano scontate le pene loro inflitte, furono di nuovo arrestati e accusati d'altri reati al momento d'essere rimessi in libertà. Lo Stato poliziesco è diventato, nella speranza di vincere col terrore ogni lotta politica, lo Stato della galera. Ma le ingiustizie del regime segregazionista generano esse stesse le forze della libertà che si oppongono loro, e nessuna repressione può sottometterle. La segregazione è crudele e ingiusta, una forma diabolica di dominazione razziale ed un affronto non soltanto agli africani del Sud Africa, ma allo spirito delle nazioni libere dell'Africa e infine di tutta la razza umana. La segregazione è anche una immensa fonte di profitto, poiché il supremo obiettivo delle strutture che danno la supremazia ai bianchi è di spremere fino all'ultima goccia tutte le ricchezze del Sud Africa, sia dalla sua terra che dalle masse fornitrici di forza lavoro. I profitti che scaturiscono da questo sistema vanno non solo ai magnati delle miniere di Johannesburg, ai ricchi industriali e proprietari terrieri, ma ai milionari inglesi, statunitensi e di quasi ogni parte del mondo occidentale che hanno investito colà le loro ricchezze. Statistiche pubblicate dal Dipartimento Usa del commercio mostrano come il capitale statunitense in Sud Africa guadagni il 26 per cento di ritorno in investimenti nelle imprese tessili. Ci sono per lo meno 175 ditte statunitensi che hanno compiuto investimenti in Sud Africa. Circa il 70 per cento dell'intero capitale straniero investito in Sud Africa (calcolato sui 1.600 milioni di sterline) appartiene alla Gran Bretagna e agli Stati Uniti. Oltre all'industria mineraria, nella quale è investito un terzo del capitale anglo-americano, i paesi imperialisti hanno a che fare in ogni centro strategico dell'economia sudafricana: ingegneria pesante, industria chimica, macchinari agricoli, fabbriche di motori, fabbriche tessili, navali e, ultimamente, anche nella nuova industria degli armamenti. C'è collusione ad ogni livello tra gli investitori stranieri e i sostenitori locali dell'*apartheid*. Le potenze occidentali, i *partners* "dormenti" del regime di Werwoerd: da questo regime esse traggono enormi profitti e il loro ruolo nell'arena internazionale è stato quello di sabotare e dissanguare ogni tentativo internazionale di isolare con sanzioni lo Stato segregazionista.

All'Onu solo il Portogallo vota in difesa della politica dell'*apartheid*. Il recente rapporto del comitato di esperti delle Nazioni Unite per le sanzioni dichiara che le sanzioni economiche nel Sud Africa potrebbero essere efficaci se tutto un meccanismo di costruzione fosse organizzato tramite le Nazioni Unite. Il comitato di esperti raccomanda al Consiglio di sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite le seguenti misure da prendersi contro il Sud Africa:

- embargo totale sulle armi (L'Italia rientra in tale embargo sulle armi)
- embargo sul petrolio e derivati
- embargo su armi, munizioni di ogni tipo, veicoli militari nonché equipaggiamenti e materiali per manufatti di armi nel Sud Africa.



- cessazione dell'emigrazione in Sud Africa e di tecnici e di forza lavoro specializzata.
- interdizione delle comunicazioni con il Sud Africa.

La lotta per la libertà dei sudafricani sarà combattuta dagli africani stessi, sulla loro terra, con il loro coraggio e sacrificio. Nessun movimento di liberazione sudafricano ha mai creduto diversamente. Il progetto di una campagna internazionale di sanzioni, avanzato dapprima dal Congresso nazionale africano, riunitosi nel 1958 durante la prima conferenza dei popoli di tutta l'Africa, e poi portato alle Nazioni Unite, non è certo il frutto dell'illusione che la libertà possa essere importata dall'estero, concessa in dono al Sud Africa. La necessità di una larga azione interna ed internazionale si impone perché il segregazionismo, per la natura stessa di questo sistema, costituisce una minaccia per la libertà e la sicurezza di ogni Stato dell'Africa meridionale e centrale e Verwoerd ha detto a Smith e a Salazar che egli è disposto e deciso a mantenere l'ordine, con la repressione poliziesca, in tutta l'Africa meridionale, opponendosi non solo ai movimenti di liberazione del suo paese ma anche a quelli degli altri Stati.

Tuttavia lo scopo delle sanzioni non è già quello di richiedere l'intervento di altre nazioni – da giustificarsi sostenendo che la lotta per la libertà del Sud Africa non potrà in altro modo aver successo -, bensì quello di *far cessare* quell'intervento che già esiste e che ogni giorno opera per sostenere il regime di Verwoerd. Verwoerd fa molto affidamento sulle nazioni occidentali, perché esse non soltanto sono una fonte di investimenti, ma anche delle alleate politiche che possono appoggiarlo o fargli scudo contro le punizioni che potrebbero pervenirgli dalle Nazioni Unite – come è stato nel caso del South West Africa, ora dinanzi alla Corte internazionale di giustizia dell'Aia – e fornirgli le armi di cui egli ha bisogno per mantenersi al potere. Senza questi appoggi in Occidente, Verwoerd non sopravviverebbe. Queste nazioni lo sanno; e lo sa ogni bianco del Sud Africa. Ecco perché lo Stato segregazionista vive in quest'incubo, pur essendo all'apice del boom economico; perché le spese per gli armamenti vengono aumentate ogni anno; ecco perché in questo Stato è così diffuso l'isterismo, la psicosi collettiva di una guerra, anche se nessuna ostilità aperta ha avuto luogo; ecco perché le massaie sudafricane portano pistole sotto la camicetta.

L'*apartheid* poggia su forti basi economiche e gli imperialisti occidentali sono tuttora una grande risorsa di forze. Ma si va avvicinando il giorno in cui lo Occidente dovrà riconoscere che continuando ad appoggiare il segregazionismo perderà tutto il prestigio tra le nazioni dei vasti continenti dell'Africa e dell'Asia, dei paesi socialisti, dei forti movimenti democratici dei lavoratori nelle stesse nazioni occidentali – non ultimo quello dell'Italia – il segregazionismo può venire isolato e distrutto prima che esso possa fare altro male e minacciare la sicurezza di tutta la metà meridionale dell'Africa.