

RUTH FIRST AND NEW AGE

BY WOLFIE KODESH

I was sitting in my office at "New Age" when in walked an ill clad, gaunt looking man. He said he had a message to convey from a friend who was working on Potgieter's potato farm in the Heidelberg district of the Transvaal.

I quickly ushered him into Ruth's empty office and started furiously reporting the remarkable story he had to tell. It transpired that he had miraculously escaped from the farm and avoided the manhunt by lying doggo throughout the daytime and only moving about at night.

Half way through the interview, Ruth First appeared and immediately took over the story. It was a harrowing one. He told of starvation and of deaths from exhaustion and whippings on the farm; of work, bent

over from sunrise to sunset in long rows, picking up the potatoes while behind them were sjambok-carrying "baas boys" whipping anyone who straightened up through sheer exhaustion. All of these slave workers had been "bought" at the detention centres for pass offences. Immediately they arrived at the farm, their clothing was confiscated and they were issued with dusty hessian sacks which became their official dress for the whole period of their employment.

We were horrified by this story. It seemed incredible and unreal. But the purpose of his visit, he said, was to inform us about one of the labourers who had given him the name and address of his wife in Alexandra township. He had already 29

FIGHTING TALK

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By CHIEF A. J. LUTULI

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THE TURNING BILL



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NEW FLAGS / N
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GERIA THE
LAT

Future

BANIS



AFRICANS DECLARE WAR ON APARTHEID

I.L.C.'s Advice To Unions

JOHANNESBURG

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N.R.C.'s Reaction To Govt. Ultimatum

From Ruth First

JOHANNESBURG

"NOW the fight comes out into the open," was the comment of more than one member of the Native Representative Council when the 10th abortive session of this body ended in Pretoria last week.

The duel between the Government and the N.R.C. had ended in a victory for the Council. The Government hoped, in disbanding the Council, to deprive it of an instrument that helps to unite the African people.

...IT RECEIVED WHAT IS INTANGIBLE TO A
...OF WAR

...Mr. Moroka, Professor ...
...Mr. Ishepo, Thoma, Mr. ...
...and Mr. Masingo were among the ...
...by a demonstration of National ...

The Council has ...
...in its ...
...to ...

"The Nationalists want us to
go back to our kraals," he said
"But were not Bulawayo and
Johannesburg and Woodbush"

(Continued on page 6)

KUOMINTANG PANIC

"PEACE OFFER" TURNED

THE ... of the Chinese ...
Sun ... Kuomintang ...
... peace offer

... future. We trust
of ...
will be followed
from which we ...
the moment.

Now is the time
to ...
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THIS WEEK

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contacted her and she had directed him to our newspaper office for help. Her husband had been arrested within a stone's throw of their home but had not been allowed to produce his pass. He was fearful about the fate of his family who did not and could not know what had happened to him. As far as they were concerned he had virtually disappeared into outer space. Could we please help his unfortunate friend?

We certainly could. We immediately called in Comrade Joe Gqabi and devised a plan of action. Joe was a boxer and a very fit athlete at the time. He had joined the staff and already shown his fearless qualities.

Journey to Heidelberg

We would drive out to Heidelberg and find out the exact location of the farm. Joe would act as a docile, meek and ignorant person who was making enquiries about his cousin who, he had been informed by the police in Johannesburg, was working on this farm. All he wanted to do was to tell him that his family were well and could the "baas" just allow him to greet his relative. Then he could go back and tell the wife that the "baas" was looking well after her husband.

It had to sound plausible and he had to wheedle his way into the confidence of the farmer to allow him to identify the man as names did not mean a thing to the Boers. "A kaffer was a kaffer" and they were all alike.

I drove and after a few hours we arrived at our destination. It was a large farm bisected by a wide, asphalt road. Joe got out and without hesitation started walking down a sort of lane towards a farmhouse.

There were quite thick bushes along the length of the road, but by carefully peering through these, we could see the long rows of hessian-covered figures bent over at their labours in the fields. It was a clear, hot, close day and must have been torture for them.

Raised shallow mounds

While waiting for Joe to reappear, I chatted with Ruth and looked across at the opposite, open side of the farm and noticed a row of about a dozen corrugated type of raised, shallow mounds.

It brought back to me the memory of our landing in Berbera in British Somaliland during the "Abyssinian Campaign" in the Second World War. Our landing ship — virtually a rowing boat — had been forced by a strong wind far down the beach. When we landed, we had to make our way at the double, back to the position on the beach which was our correct point of landing. On the way we noticed that some parts of the beach had several bumpy patches. We were curious about this and with a few heavy kicks with our army boots, displaced the sand to reveal dead Italian soldiers underneath.

I mentioned this to Ruth and she agreed it could be a possibility that these were also shallow graves, if we were to believe the terrible story of murders and deaths from sheer exhaustion that we had recorded. In any case it was worth investigating she said.

After a short while, Joe came tearing out of the gateway. He bellowed for us to open the back door and dived in head first and shouted for me to "hurry up and go, man, go!"

My black chevrolet tore down that road at breakneck speed and after regaining his breath, Joe related what had happened.

He had succeeded in convincing the huge old Potgieter to "maak gou kaffer, praat met hom en dan hardloop vinnig uit die plaas uit", (Hurry up, kaffir, speak to him and then run quickly off the farm). He had started walking submissively towards the rows of men in the distance, when he heard a van draw up with a skid and saw an even bigger and younger giant of a man asking his father who the "kaffer" was walking down towards the field. Joe slowed up, sensing danger and heard the younger man saying "nee Vader" (no

Father) and starting up the engine of the van. Joe beat a hasty retreat and only because of his athleticism managed to avoid being run over by the van which skidded to a stop. But by the time the younger Potgieter could move out of the vehicle, Joe had sprinted up the the gate and got into the car.

We decided after a while to return, not only because it was the direction back to Johannesburg, but also to view the scene at the Potgieter farm. Joe would duck down as we passed by and sure enough as we drew level with the farm, there were three "baas boys" with sjamboks emerging on bicycles, obviously to search for Comrade Joe.

New Age leads investigation

Comrade Ruth immediately got our lawyer to clap an injunction of habeas corpus on Potgieter to produce the one man we were looking for and briefed all the national English papers about conditions on the farm and whetted their morbid appetites still more by suggesting the possibility of exhuming bodies to determine the cause of their deaths. They all took the bait as expected and as was necessary for our purposes.

Potgieter in his utter boorish ignorance duly produced the wanted man still clad in his hessian garments. At first the wife burst into tears because she said as she saw him alighting from the distant van, that this was not her husband. Ruth was dumbstruck. How could this be? But as he practically staggered towards them and eventually stood smiling at her, the wife acknowledged that this scarecrow of a man was indeed her husband. He was literally skin and bones.

They were duly reunited in a heart-rending and emotional scene.

Back at the farm in spite of all the latest advances in science, it was impossible



for the pathologists of both sides to determine the exact causes of death of the decomposed bodies which were unearthed and whom Potgieter contended had died from natural causes.

But because of the original story published by "New Age" through the pen of Ruth First and photographs by Joe Gqabi and taken up later by the national press, the ANC decided to launch the historic Potato Boycott which is now written into the history of our movement.

It is sad to relate that both Cdes. Ruth First and Joe Gqabi have perished at the hands of the racist assassins and terrorists.

But we should all be proud of the magnificent work they have accomplished in the intervening years as members of the ANC.

Long may their memory bring honour and inspiration to our revolution. They are two of the leading makers of our history. We must build our country on the basis of the Freedom Charter which both Ruth and Joe so strongly espoused and gave their lives to accomplish.

New Age leads investigation