

# Migration, Exile and the Anti-Apartheid Movement

# Alfred Hutchinson

## RESOURCES

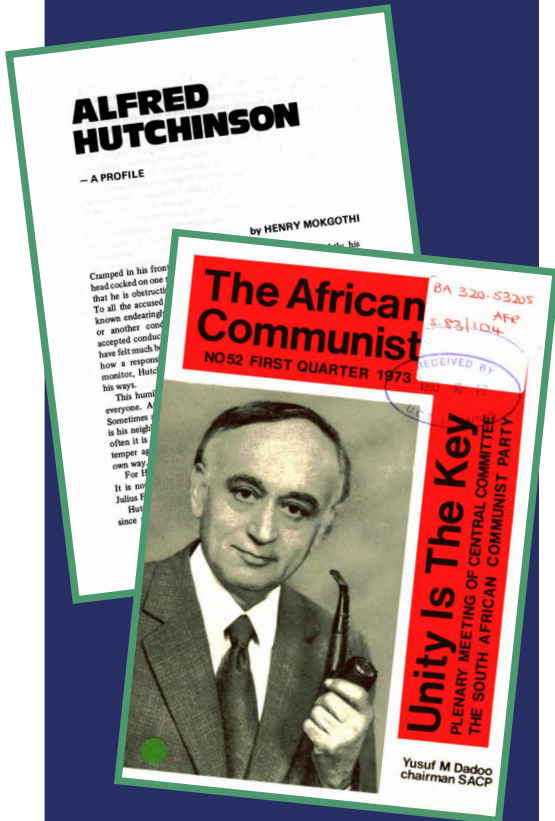




# Migration, Exile and the Anti-Apartheid Movement

## Alfred Hutchinson RESOURCES

*Below: The African Communist, journal featuring a profile of Alfred Hutchinson and one of his short stories.*  
*Source: Digital Innovation South Africa*



### Alfred Hutchinson - A Profile

*By Henry Mokogotho.*  
*Excerpt from The African Communist  
No. 52, First Quarter, 1973*

Cramped in his front row seat in the dock, leaning forward slightly, his head cocked on one side as though anticipating a complaint from behind that he is obstructing the view, is Alfred Hutchinson, accused No. 11. To all the accused and many others, this tall, self-effacing young man is known endearingly as 'Hutch'. And yet how many have not at one time or another condemned Hutch for his numerous offences against accepted conduct! Even those who have been guilty of graver offences have felt much better after giving some gratuitous advice to Hutch about how our responsible leader should conduct himself. And whoever the monitor, Hutch has shown genuine penitence, and promised to mend his ways.

This humility of Hutch has made him a favourite with practically everyone. At his room in Alexandra Township, he is never lonely

For Hutch Loves life. He believes that every person is basically good... His development since the days when he was a student at Fort Hare College, where he carried away a distinction in English in his arts degree, have been an interesting though painful, process. For Hutch comes from very well off parents; His father is Scottish, and his mother is from some royal Swazi house. Hutch Could quite easily have chosen to manage his father's farm as he is the eldest child, and so passed his life in the obscurity of Hectorspruit. but when he came to teach in Johannesburg in 1951, Hutch came under the influence of Duma Nokwe, a college friend, he was then studying part time for this law degree. Two more dissimilar persons could not be imagined: the one a rigorous logician, and even at that time, a man of the people and the other, and easy going individualist, rather fearful of the

'masses'. When the campaign for the defiance of unjust laws came in the winter of 1952, it accelerated a process of painful heart searching for Hutch. He was honest enough to admit that something had to be done about the mounting tide of oppression that came with the Nationalist government, and he could see the importance of the defiance campaign. But it also demanded he renounce his whole upbringing, and the relative comfort of his profession. In the end his honesty saved him, and he volunteered to defy the unjust laws. Then followed a period of preparation and peacemaking with himself during which he used to harangue the people in the train every morning when he went to school going from coach to coach, explaining the purpose of the campaign, in December 1952, Hutch defied the unjust laws in the same batch with Manilal Gandhi and Patrick Duncan. To this day he considers this the best thing he has ever done...

The following year in August, Hutch attended the 4th world festival of youth and students for peace and friendship at Bucharest in Romania. This was at the height of the Cold War, and naturally, we were eager to collect all the facts we could about what was really happening 'behind the Iron Curtain.' We used to go about Bucharest with our notebooks, wearing our most serious faces, interrogating people, and making jottings feverishly. But Hutch, he had already armed himself with some knowledge of the Romanian language before we got there, would go among the people and speak directly to them. After getting over the surprise of hearing Hutch speak their language so correctly, the puzzled Romanians would venture to ask 'are you Romanian?' And Hutch would laugh and tell them he was from South Africa! Hutch picked up most of his knowledge of the Romanian language from the little kids... Hutch always treated them with seriousness and apparently when the kids got home, they would speak about 'Alfred' to their parents, and soon Hutch at whole

families coming to visit him.

Back home in 1954 we tried to tell the people about our experiences. The majority of us relied on the dry statistical information that we had collected... Hutch, however, was a sensation, and many people who heard him speak at his report back meeting can still remember most of what he said. He conveyed the uninhibited hospitality of the Romanians, their love of peace, like ordinary people everywhere... He spoke about friendships with workers and professional men he had made in the pubs over mugs of beer. Today, among the ordinary people, the words 'Iron Curtain' no longer convey the sinister meaning that Cold War politicians would like to convey, and I am sure that here at home Hutch did more than any single person to remove that impression.

When Hutch was arrested at the Central Indian high school where he was teaching, the pupils did their best to restrain their emotions. For Hutch was not merely a teacher, he was a friend to every one of them. Indian school girls and boys outside the Drill Hall in the long months of the trial where the sign that it was visiting day to Hutch.

Hutch is a born teacher, but not one who sees only the blackboard, the textbook and, the four walls of his classroom. Life is his interest, and it throbs in his writing. The penetrating description, the deft, feeling phrase, his needle sharp perception and his deep sensitivity make his lines and paragraphs unforgettable. Above all, his unerring touch for the appropriate, so that one says 'There, Hutch has it! He's done it again.'

The other day, when African teachers were giving evidence against the 156 accused in connection with the Bantu Education school boycott, Hutch remarked quietly to me, a one time fellow teacher: 'there, but for the grace of God, you see us.'



## Alfred Hutchinson

### Exile Afternoon, Alfred Hutchinson

*Unpublished article, courtesy of Hazel Hutchinson, a piece Hutchinson wrote while in exile in London (c. mid-1960s)*

A few Sundays ago I took Ivan, our baby boy, to meet “the boys” from South Africa. Hazel had left Duma Nokwe and I minding the baby while she went with her mother and the other children to Redhill. This was no hardship as I wanted Duma to myself. Except for a brief encounter when he came to speak at a rally in Trafalgar Square a few months ago. I had not seen Duma since my flight from the South African treason trial at the end on 1958. I had lost contact with him and whatever I knew about him since I had gleaned from the press; his acquittal from the marathon trial with all the accused; detention during the state of emergency that followed Sharpville; a spate of bannings; house arrest; his arrest and pending trial on a charge of promoting the interests of the now banned African National Congress; his flight from South Africa. Now he and other representatives of the ANC had just returned from the United Nations. He was in London for only a few days before returning to Africa where he worked. I had dreaded meeting him after all these years. Had he changed? Would I still be able to make contact with him? Except that his health had suffered and his reserve grown deeper, he was still the same - or so I liked to think.

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Then the phone rang. It was Gwigwi. Could we come round to his place for a quiet drink and a chat? Unfortunately we were baby-sitting, Duma said. Why didn't he come round to us? All right; he was on his way. And when he came, he said he had come to fetch us. He brushed aside our objections. Bring the baby along. Argument was useless with that satyr. I threw a napkin into Ivan's carry-cot and mixed his afternoon drink. He would survive.

... I had first met Gwigwi in a Sophiatown shebeen one night. many years ago. He had been a leading saxophonist and an exponent of the new jazz of the African townships. Now his “township,” voice brought a fleeting memory of Sophiatown, “sof-town”, as its

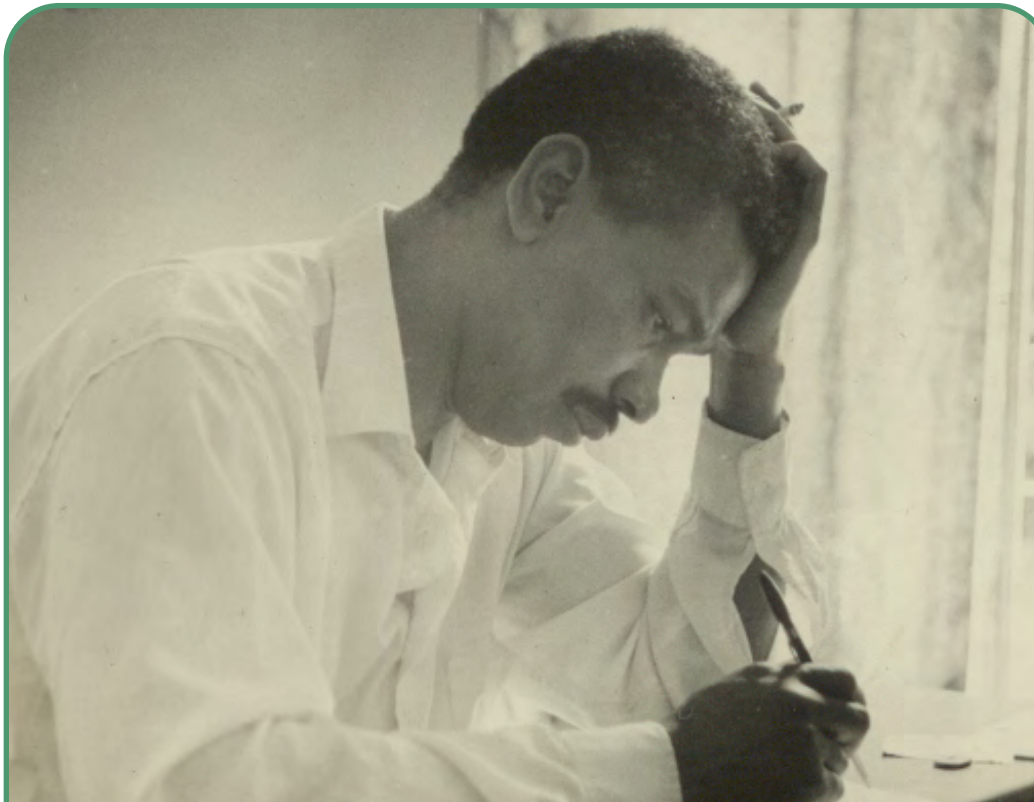
inhabitants affectionately called it. Poor dead Sophiatown, now a “white area”. But Gwigwi retained its vitality. He had come to Britain with “King Kong” and had stayed behind. His family was to have joined him months ago but there were hitches all along the way. He pulled up behind a bubble car on which tiny-sized April was working. We had arrived.

...”What's happened to Sisulu and the others?”

It was the doctor. It was as if a douche of icy water had washed the warm hilarity from the room. There was an introspective silence. Only the smoke, the smell of beer and the song hung in the air.

“We've heard nothing more,” said Duma. “But whatever it is, the situation's grim. Grim. There's another treason trial on the way, but this time the Nats have changed the rules. Only world opinion can save them. Otherwise...” Duma shrugged his shoulders in silent eloquence. “Things at home are bad.”

I thought of Walter Sisulu, the ANC underground leader, picked up with seventeen others from a Johannesburg suburb. I remembered the times at his home. Now the government had descended on him with a vengeance: Albertina, his wife, and Max, his son, were both in detention. I wondered who looked after the younger children now that their grandmother was dead. And Lionel Bernstein and Ahmed Kathrada, arrested with Walter, had been colleagues before my flight. How far had an exile to flee? I had run away but not quite far enough. We sat in a bemused silence remembering the people we had left behind. You could do your stint of British meetings; you could carry placards at demonstrations. But you felt it was not enough; could never be enough. I looked at the others in the room. Here we were - exiles - having talked the afternoon away in a London suburb. It was time to go. The exile afternoon was over. I changed Ivan's napkin and carried him to the car.







## Alfred Hutchinson

### Alfred 'Tough' Hutchinson

*South African History Online*

Alfred 'Tough' Hutchinson was born of coloured and Swazi parents in 1924 in the Hectorspruit district of the Eastern Transvaal, he graduated from St. Peter's Secondary School in Johannesburg in 1945 and obtained a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in English and teacher's diploma from Fort Hare in 1948. A leader of the African National Congress (ANC) in the Transvaal in the 1950s. He taught briefly in Pimville High School until his dismissal for participation in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. He then took up law at the University of the Witwatersrand but did not complete his degree. In 1953 he attended the World Youth Festival in Bucharest and also toured in Britain, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. From 1955 to 1958 he taught at the independent Central Indian High School in Johannesburg. He served as ANC Transvaal Provincial secretary, and was co-opted onto the national executive committee in the mid-1950s. Hutchinson was elected to the ANC executive committee in December 1952 and remained a member until 1958. During this time he enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand for a law degree, but did not complete the requirements.

From December 1956 until late 1958 he was one of the accused in the Treason Trial. Following his acquittal he left South Africa without a passport and went to Ghana, where he taught for some years at Accra University College, later making his home in London.

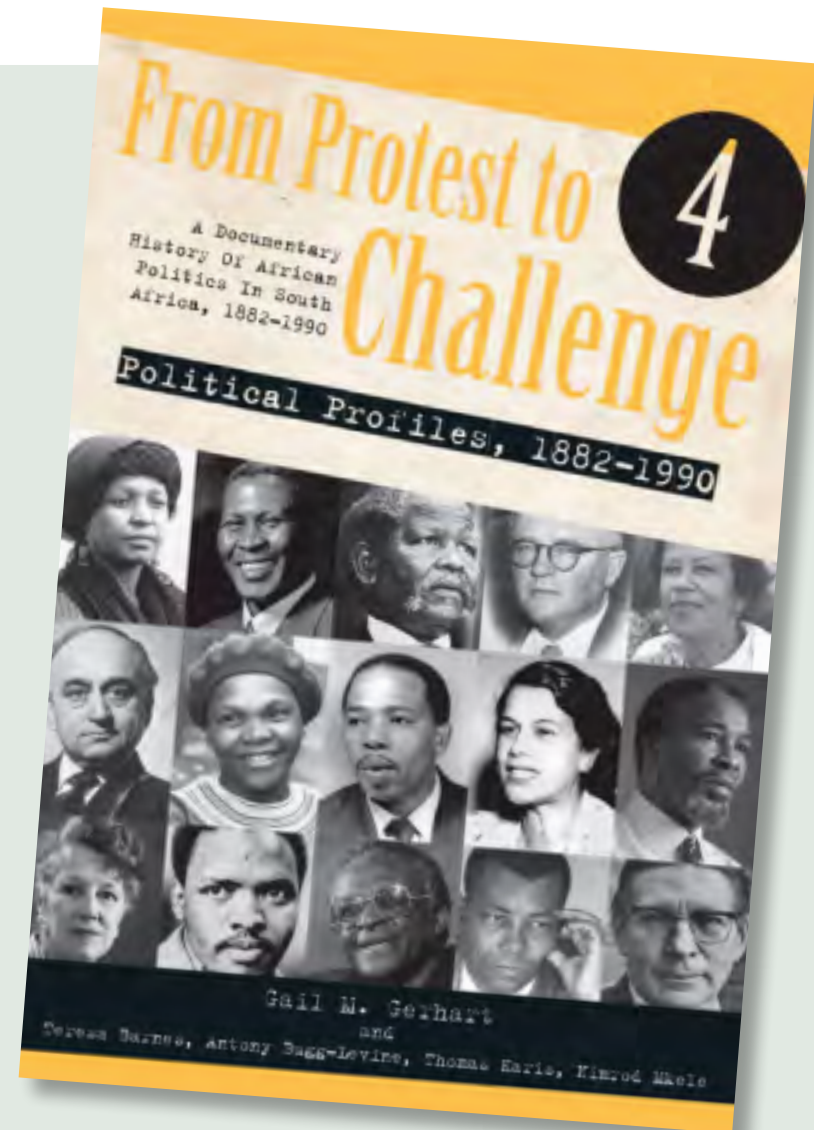
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He wrote the book 'Road to Ghana' (1960). He died in Nigeria in 1972. In October 1958 the indictment against him was withdrawn, but police arrested him for not having a pass, although as a coloured person under South Africa law he was not required to carry one. Nokwe successfully defended him in court, and Hutchinson made a swift escape from South Africa, reaching Ghana via Tanganyika in December 1958, just in time to attend the All-African People's Conference in Accra as an ANC delegate.

He worked briefly at Accra University College, then proceeded to Britain where he taught for about ten years, earning a master's degree on the side from Sussex University. Hutchinson in South Africa had published short stories in *Fighting Talk*, but his autobiographical book *The Road to Ghana*, published in Britain in 1960, established him as a notable writer, and was translated into seven languages. In 1964 the BBC Africa Service broadcast his radio play, *Fusane's Trial*, and the University of London Press published his play, *The-Rain Killer*. In 1971 Hutchinson accepted a teaching position in Nigeria, but his health deteriorated there and he died in late 1972 at the age of 48.

### References

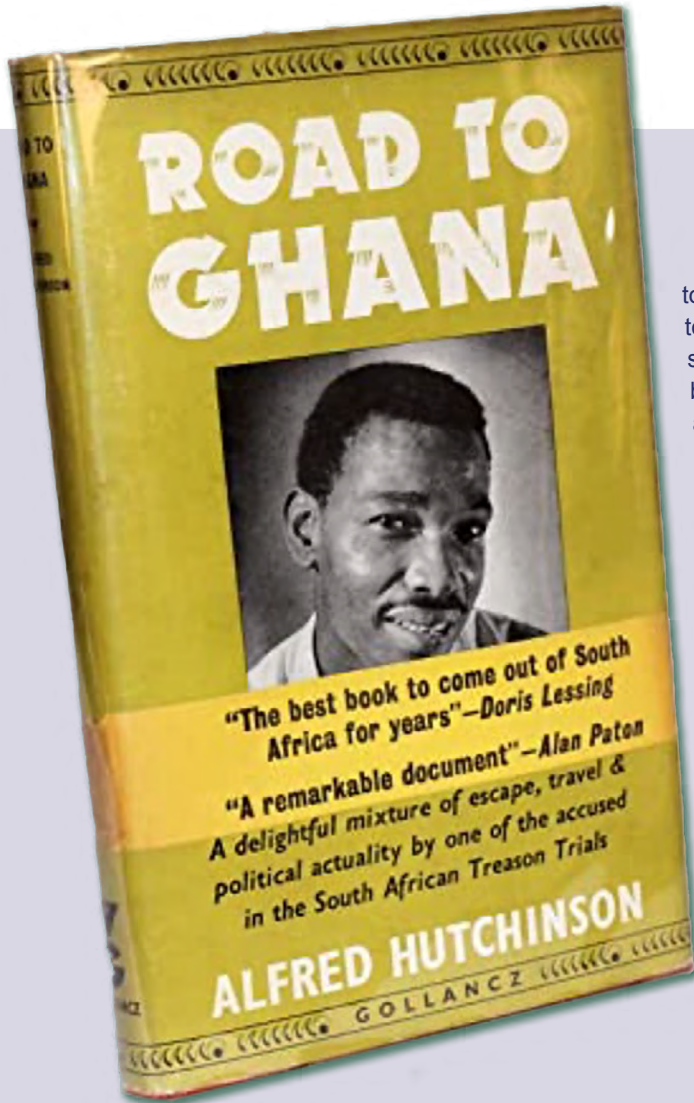
*From Protest To Challenge. Political Profiles Volume 4, p38. Gail M. Gerhart, Teresa Barnes, Antony Bugg-Levine, Thomas Karis, Nimrod Mkele. (last accessed 30 January 2019)*





# Alfred Hutchinson

## Migration, Exile and the Anti-Apartheid Movement



“Following a pause in the Treason to Trail, Alfred Hutchinson decided to flee South Africa. One evening he said goodbye to the woman he loved, boarded a train travelling northwards, and headed off into the unknown. This is the true story of one man’s flight across colonial Africa.”

*Left: Road to Ghana (1960)  
Alfred Hutchinson’s Autobiography*



## About this resource...

# Migration, Exile and the Anti-Apartheid Movement

This presentation is part of a resource collaboratively developed by **The Anti-Apartheid Legacy: Centre of Memory and Learning (CML)** and **UEA**. It is part of the CML's work to promote the legacy and values of the Southern African liberation struggle, whilst supporting contemporary discourse around social (in)justice, inclusion and multi-racial collaboration for social transformation

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AAM ARCHIVES

### Anti-Apartheid Movement Archives

*Forward to Freedom tells the story of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement and its campaigns to support the people of South Africa in their fight against apartheid. The AAM also campaigned for freedom for Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, and against South Africa's attacks on its neighbours.*



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