

In April 2012, a memorial meeting was held in Fish Hoek to remember Cosmas Desmond, a valiant fighter against apartheid and a friend of those who attended.

From Terry Shott:

Cos:

I first met you at the beginning of the 70's. I remember fondly our early encounters in your Parkhurst house while you were living with Snoeks, Horst and Ilona. That was during the days that I was at Wilgespruit. The special branch chaps always outside while you socialised illegally inside. Baking granola in your oven with Rob Collins springs to mind. 'Bye Bye American Pie' was a favourite one to dance to (banned in SA of course because of the lines – the Father Son and Holy Ghost, caught the last train to the coast).

You were a very important influence in my early political awareness in South Africa and indeed through later stages as well, when we again met up in London as exiles. You constantly challenged much of the orthodoxy of London exile politics.

End Loans to Southern Africa, the Canon Colin Education Trust and the British Defence and Aid Fund, were some of those forums where we shared political 'argie bargie'. The formal meetings were inevitably followed by an adjournment to a local pub, where the more interesting discussion and analysis took place, oiled by a few pints of ale – in your case I think it was likely to have been Irish whiskey!

Post 1990 we both returned for the first time to SA. I travelled with you on my first trip back after 1974 (you had already been back). We were on an Air Italia flight, where the stewardesses were very frugal with the whisky, I recall. That was a downer – but sharing thoughts and ideas with you on that trip was very important to me.

I appreciated you and Snoeks giving me a room at the back of your Durban North house, with the three boys, Christopher, Nick and Timothy. In the humid months around February 1990 (something), you complained that the European electric razor manufacturers advised that one should shave before wetting the face – but this was totally impractical in your new habitat in sultry Durban in February, as your face was wet all the time anyway. But you did used to cook up a storm for the family, which I was made to feel part of.

It was just such a pity that you did not get recognised and used in the building of the new South Africa. I know that was a frustrating time for you. Perhaps if you and others like you, had been listened to, we would have a better South Africa than the one we witness today.

My last two meetings with you were in December 2011 and April 2012 at Nazereth House. I was thrilled when you recognised me with a "Shott - what are you doing here" on the first occasion. The last time I saw you was hard – because that connection seemed to have broken. But you were still Cos – and I remember you as such.

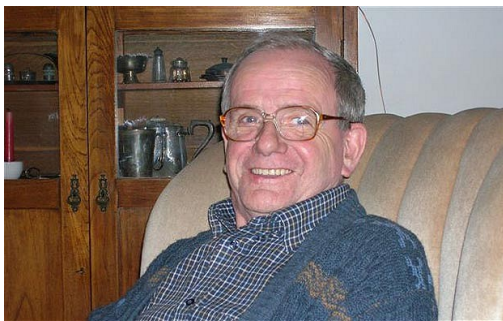
I agree with the sentiments expressed by Horst - Hamba gahle Cos! You are a very worthy son of our land!

Telegraph.co.uk

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Cosmas Desmond

Cosmas Desmond, who has died aged 76, travelled from London to South Africa as a Franciscan missionary and became the first foreigner to document the misery of millions of blacks uprooted and dumped far from their homes during apartheid resettlement programmes.



Cosmas Desmond

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Desmond was just 24 when he arrived in South Africa in 1960. Posted to a rural mission in Natal Province, he soon met people who had been forced to leave their homes and live in remote areas as the white South African government implemented plans to create 10 small, independent states, known as bantustans, for black people.

He recorded the misery that the policy inflicted in a book, *The Discarded People* (1970), which was published by an activist Church group, the Christian Institute, and went on to write a moving report on forced removals for *The Sunday Telegraph*. The article, headlined “Black exiles in the veld”, was followed by a secretly recorded Granada Television documentary, which Desmond helped to produce.

His description of the “homelands”, as the areas were also known, was unsparing. Here, he wrote, were the “dumping grounds for old people, women and children and the disabled whose labour is not needed for the white South African economy”. People who were already poor were removed from their smallholdings and villages, and further impoverished by being left in areas with few resources, schools or hospitals.

As Desmond's eyewitness accounts began to reach the outside world, the South African government moved to silence him. In 1971 he was subject to a five-year "banning" order that restricted his movement and meant that he was unable to be in a room with more than one other person, or be quoted in news articles. He was also placed under house arrest – which made it impossible for him to attend Mass.

Patrick Anthony Desmond was born in Stepney, east London, on November 19 1935, the fifth of nine children in a Catholic family . His father worked for Stepney Council as a fumigator.

At 11 Patrick won a scholarship to Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in Holland Park and went on to become a novice at St Mary's Friary in East Bergholt. He left for South Africa immediately after being ordained.

There he saw the implementation of the Group Areas Act which, over the following 20 years, would mandate the removal of more than 3.5 million black people from their homes in an attempt to enforce racial segregation. It was a time when blacks were subject to widespread prosecution for being in areas – usually seeking work – outside their prescribed "homeland". Black South Africans had to carry a pass at all times, a measure which sparked some of the first mass anti-government demonstrations, as well as trials of activists including Nelson Mandela.

Desmond moved from rural Natal to Johannesburg in 1969 to publicise the removals, and made many friends in the early 1970s among young black militants, particularly those in the Black Consciousness Movement such as Steve Biko, who eventually died in detention in 1977.

During Desmond's house arrest Horst Kleinschmidt, a white activist, moved with his wife into Desmond's home, dividing it so that, technically, Desmond could claim to be alone and not break the rules governing his detention. Kleinschmidt recalled that Desmond was particularly angry at not being allowed to attend Mass and, one Sunday, he smuggled the priest to church in the boot of his car. Once there Desmond defiantly preached his sermon.

Over the years – and despite constant police surveillance – Desmond began to help people leave the country to join the banned African National Congress in exile. But he was increasingly frustrated by the attitude of some in the Catholic Church whom he believed did not oppose forced removals with enough vigour. He resigned from the priesthood in 1973, but remained committed to his faith and was known by his Franciscan name, Cosmas, for the rest of his life.

After leaving the Church he married a human-rights activist and, when his friend and fellow anti-apartheid activist Rick Turner was shot dead outside his home in Durban in 1978, Desmond took his own family to London, where he joined the British arm of Amnesty International. He returned to South Africa in 1991 after the ANC was legalised and Mandela was released from prison. But he soon fell out with the ANC too, criticising it before democratic elections in 1994 for failing to demand full-scale land redistribution, and then afterwards, once it was in power, for its failures to deliver social services to those left destitute by apartheid.

At the end of his life Cosmas Desmond was the director of a children's organisation, Children First, and edited its journals.

He is survived by his wife, Snoeks, and three sons.

Cosmas Desmond, born November 19 1935, died March 31 2012

Cosmas Desmond

COSMAS Desmond, one of the most principled politicians that I knew both during my own political activities here and abroad when I was in exile, has passed away after Alzheimer's Disease left him more or less paralysed for a long while.

Desmond was a member of the PAC and a genuine Africanist and socialist in a principled manner. It has been rare for non-Africans to be members of the PAC, and for a white person it was even rarer.

Cosmas was rooted in the fundamentals of the African situation, and he was not blinkered by the circuitous confusions that racism has inflicted on the SA public and politicians. He was not enamoured of idealistic notions but the reality on the ground.

Nor did Cosmas allow his Pan Africanism to blind him to his socialist ideals on which he stood very firm. He did not separate the two.

As the PAC began to collapse, post-apartheid, this very talented person saw that he could not make any political contribution to the numerous problems that the country was facing.

He slowly withdrew from the political world as he realised that he had no active role to play. Even his political writings came to an end. He had written two political books, one of which was called *Discarded People*, a history of land dispossession in Namibia. He was quite an expert on the land question, and PAC members often referred to him on this matter, as on other political issues.

He was very scathing about talk on reconciliation when he knew that racism was still deeply rooted among the white masses.

After a stint with Amnesty International, he came to work at the LSPU (London Strategic Policy Unit) in London which was established after Margaret Thatcher abolished the GLC (Greater London Council). It was headed by Ken Livingstone to carry on the good work that the GLC had been doing and for which it had earned an international reputation.

It was there I got to know him better as we discussed the SA we would like to see.

Humble and unassuming, he had a sharp intellect that accompanied his moral integrity. He was also a storehouse of political information.

The centre stage occupied by the ANC isolated many talented people who did not agree with its policies.

In this way, SA lost the abilities of these people who had worthy contributions to make when incompetence in the ruling party (as with its corruption) is leading us from the ideals that so many thousands valiantly sacrificed and fought for.

The political life of Cosmas in the context of the SA situation is that you can be white or Chinese, what matters is the conviction of your political truth.

For Cosmas it was the rehabilitation of the African masses, who comprise 90 percent of our population, and 1 billion people in the context of Pan-Africanism.

They were the decisive factor in the construction of a transformed SA where the humanism of Africanism would meet the most oppressed section of the SA population and also give equal rights and citizenship to all regardless of their nationality.

This is the true meaning of reconciliation, and the way forward to meaningful nation building.

From my personal experiences, Cosmas was more truthfully Africanist than many Africans in the PAC, many of whom were political charlatans. The dismal state of the PAC today is the vindication of that.

Robert Sobukwe would be turning in his grave if he knew what had become of the PAC. But as he said, you could be white even, but as long as you stood for the rehabilitation and dignity of the African masses, you were entitled to the highest office in an African government.

BENNIE BUNSEE
CAPE TOWN

CAPETIMES

04/04/12

Activist Cosmas Desmond fought the good fight

**Kamini Padayachee
and Kyle Venkess**

DURBAN: Human rights activist, former Catholic priest and author Cosmas Desmond, died on Saturday aged 76.

He was born in London's East End and was 24 when he came to SA as a Catholic priest to work on a mission station in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

In the mid-1960s, he became outspoken about the apartheid government's resettlement of African people, starting his political activism.

**'...He spoke his
mind and he did
not seek favour
with anyone'**

Desmond travelled the country, researching the resettlement issue, and wrote the book *The Discarded People* in 1971, about the conditions in which resettled African people

lived. Because of the book, he was banned for five years and placed under house arrest. According to the banning order, he was not allowed to have visitors or to publish his writings. The ban was lifted in its fourth year.

In 1973, Desmond left the priesthood but remained a practising Catholic. He married and had three children. In 1977, he and his family left the country after receiving death threats and settled in London.

While there, he served as the British director of

Amnesty International.

Desmond returned to SA in 1991 and stood as a PAC candidate in the 1994 elections. He later worked as the director of children's rights organisation Children First.

His wife, Snoeks, described Desmond as an "outspoken critic of any injustice. When he saw any wrongdoing, he spoke his mind and he did not seek favour with anyone".

Desmond is also survived by three sons and a grandchild.

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Horst wrote: The memorial meeting on Saturday late afternoon was a huge success. It was held at Sunny Cove B&B in Fish Hoek. The folk who run it did not know Cos but as radical Christinas offered us their premises for free.

I counted 25 people who came. And now I am chasing them to give me their contributions in writing. Most of them I have, but I also want to get the photo's before I send it all to you. What is lovely is that folk commented or spoke who never met Cos but on whom Cos made an impact with his book many years ago.

Here's a list of who came:

Peter & Soveig Kjeseth, the B&B proprietors.

Virginia Zweigenthal

Josette Cole of the former Surplus People's Project

Catherine Collingwood

Terry and Barbara Bell

Malcolm and Emmanuelle

Carol Matin, a USA teacher caught with Cos' book on the Botswana border.

Renate and Jim Cochrane - Christian Institute

Norman Levy and Carol Silver

Louise Asmal

Sydney Duval

Anette Cockburn

Murray and Veronica Coetzee from the Beyers Naude School of Public Theology in Stellebosch.

Terry Shott

and Christine and myself

and some who did not sign.

Love to you from us all - I read your email to them!

Horst