



## Newsletter 26/1

### **Tribute to Cedric Mayson.**

**(16 July 1927 - 23 May 2015)<sup>1</sup>**

June 2015

By Horst Kleinschmidt.

Cedric was a friend and comrade over more than four decades! We trusted each other like brothers. He risked his very life for me. At other times we argued like brothers do, and we built together that which was never for us, but always, we said, had to serve the common good. We worked together in the Christian Institute (CI) in the 1970's and when the CI was banned, and I was already in exile, we collaborated secretly to continue the task of bringing apartheid to its knees.

Before going into the brave actions Cedric undertook I want to say to Penelope: In paying tribute to Cedric, I also pay tribute, and say thank you, Penelope, for all that you contributed to the struggle, for all that you had to uphold and do for the children when Cedric was on the proverbial barricades of the struggle or later was in detention, then standing trial, obliged to flee South Africa and then serve the struggle from abroad. We all thank you.

It is not easy, maybe impossible to serve your family and at the same time serve in a struggle that demands ultimate commitment. You, Cedric sacrificed much of the family-life that your class (your middle-class background) demanded of you. Instead, you identified with those demeaned and downtrodden around you who could not be fathers and mothers, because apartheid denied them the normality of family life. In ultimate solidarity – the best virtue there is – you sided with those who had less.

Each one of you Maysons, wife, sons, daughters and grandchildren felt pain and anger at some time because husband or your father could, not be there for you, seemingly at your expense. – And, yes, expense there was, with consequences. I have thought a lot about the

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<sup>1</sup> This text is based on my tributes at the funeral held on 30th May in Benoni and the Memorial service organized by the ANC in Johannesburg, held on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from his theological writings, Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler's euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

brokenness that comes with commitment to a cause, to an ideal. I live my own sorrow as a politically involved father. I know what loss means, and try and imagine what loss means to my daughter for whom I was not there at the right moment or with the right support. Talking later about the void, the loss, is yet another hurdle we emotionally struggle with – even when the difficult times are far behind us. But you forgave him; because each one of you are conscious individuals and played your part in the struggle.

Maya Angelou, the American poet reminds us that history cannot be ‘unlived’. And now, when we look back, each one of you, knows that Cedric’s love was always there for you. Your husband and father did something more than live the part that convention demanded – he lived a life without which hope and betterment in the world cannot be imagined. Cedric did not merely think about, write about and believe in a changed world, one that built equality between people, but he acted to achieve such a goal. Let us today celebrate the man who had the courage to stand up and act for the greater good. I salute you, the Maysons for forgiving your father and for feeling pride in what he did and stood for. You know, and I know, that Cedric loved you deeply.

The time of Cedric’s life was not of his choice; it is an accident of history. He happened to live through the period when, in South Africa, the venal brew of institutional racism and authoritarian rule was at its height. Generations before him and those after him, I contend, were or are not faced with the choices Cedric’s generation faced. Cedric’s life’s events mirror the moment when our South African society was forced through the eye of the needle; you either acquiesced or you rebelled. Whatever you may have wanted from your father or grandfather, he stands today proud in this country, for he did not seek the easy way out. Cedric did not live the lie that most white people lived. He did not have silent, or verbal misgivings – as many whites claim today – he stood up and did something. And he was effective, otherwise his detention and torture would not have been as harsh and brutal as it was.

Judge Cathy Satchwell, then Cedric’s defence attorney confirms that Cedric was granted bail because the judge was persuaded that the man before him had been interrogated and tortured naked; that his hair had been pulled out to get a confession from him. Less visible evidence of his torture manifested itself later in Cedric’s life. Blows to his head had impaired his hearing.

Cedric belongs in the front row of honour. What he did, he did not do for politics, because he never sought high office or reward in the new South Africa; nor did he act out of vanity, for he shunned to write the story of his secret and underground life. He did not act for the glory of any religion because he saw organised religion, as we know it, as providing mostly comfort for those in or with power.

When he set out on his journey to challenge apartheid he said: I acted out of Christian conviction. Later, he said he was more comfortable to describe his actions as ethical, something that is common to all humankind, whatever the background, ethnicity or belief.

He was, toward the end of his life, capable of declaring that he was no longer a Christian if Christian meant association with riches or power.

When Cedric was editor of Pro Veritate, the Christian Institute magazine in the 1970's, his quest was for a true equality. The several books he wrote, dwell on this matter. He debated his points not only with South Africans but with people across the globe. I participated in these email debates - I was invited by Cedric to be representative of agnosticism. Neither Beyers Naudé nor Cedric had a problem to invite me to work with them despite this. I should add, neither did they ever seek to convert me. I remain as I was then and add, that in the days of the Christian Institute, Beyers Naudé and Cedric had no problem employing Jews, Hindu's or Moslems. They said quite simply: if the Christians cannot be found to take on apartheid, we have more in common with people from other faiths or traditions who share what is uppermost for us to deal with now.

Cedric had many gifts. He could gaze at the exceptionally bright night sky in Marloth Park and link in beautiful words the purpose of the universe to the betterment of all whom he called 'earthlings'. With considerable prosaic ability and deep spiritualism, he spent a lifetime in search of true equality between 'earthlings' as he called us.

For Cedric, ethics cannot be left as a matter to be debated. Wrongs, whether based on race or inequality demand action and involvement. And in the case of the apartheid state, it demanded risk. Cedric had courage that did not come from the soldier sent to the front line, but from the moral compunction that impelled him to act. Cedric belongs to a very special group in our resistance struggle. - Although sympathetic to MK (the military wing of the ANC during the struggle), he was not in MK. Cedric belongs to what may rightly be associated with the very best of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer tradition. Bonhoeffer<sup>2</sup> took his religious beliefs to a point where he accepted that, in exceptional circumstances, his actions could cost him his life. I am obviously not saying that Cedric was planning to assassinate the apartheid President, but he reached, through his theology, the point where he accepted that his actions, those I describe below, could have resulted in him being led to the gallows. He did this consciously and unsparingly.

Cedric understood, despite his panache for independence and a touch of individuality, that working through structures and being part of a collective was critical and the only means to bring about change. It was in this context that he joined and started working for the ANC. This occurred shortly after a banning order restricted him to effective house arrest in 1977. As an underground operative, he was inventive and agile. I recall how I smuggled a cassette

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from his theological writings, Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler's euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews. He was arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Tegel prison for one and a half years. Later he was transferred to a Nazi concentration camp. After being allegedly associated with the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler, he was briefly tried, along with other accused plotters, including former members of the *Abwehr* (the German Military Intelligence Office), and then executed by hanging on 9 April 1945 as the Nazi regime collapsed, just two weeks before Allied forces liberated the camp and three weeks before Hitler's suicide. (Source: Wikipedia)

tape of Oliver Tambo's January 8<sup>th</sup> ANC annual statement to him and Penelope. Cedric had managed to obtain a cassette-duplicating machine – 7 cassettes copied at a time. He then put on an overall, a crash helmet, got on to a motorbike to look as though he was an ordinary delivery man, rode to Soweto and dropped the ANC statement into selected letter boxes at the break of dawn.

Some of Cedric's sons were party to his illegal actions and I encourage you, the sons, to write down your stories, not just for your grandchildren, but for the building of a united and non-racial South Africa. The task to build the future has not passed. As you know, the challenge before us looms large.

What did Cedric actually do that makes him a struggle icon?

In 1977 Cedric wanted to meet Christians whose institutional structure was not aligned with the establishment and political power. On a trip to Europe, before his banning, I arranged for him to slip at Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin, without his passport being stamped by the East Germans. He wanted to meet the Christian Socialists of the Gossner Mission. We sat till long in the night in Auerbach's Keller debating equality. Much, much later Cedric told me that the SB's<sup>3</sup> had no whiff of him having been to a 'communist country'.

Cedric had a pilot's license. In a white parish in Middleburg he had once served, rich parishioners taught him how to fly. He kept on good terms with them and when the time came he would borrow their light aircraft in order to fly 'hot' political people into exile, in Botswana. I was his first 'parcel' designated to leave South Africa. My passport had been confiscated and when I faced a second detention, trial and imprisonment in relation to what later become known as the Tokyo Sexwale trial and 11 others, Cedric flew me out of the country.

On his nearly twenty such trips he would log a flight to what was then the 'homeland' of Bophutatswana, but instead of landing there he flew low in the valleys to avoid radar detection, and with the support of very high ranking Botswana officials deposited his 'parcels' in a mealie (corn) field near Molepololi. On his flight back he would land in Bop – just so the log showed he had done as he planned – an hour or two late, but no one noticed. You can imagine all the care we had to take to make sure that it seemed that only Cedric entered at the gates at Rand Central Airport and that in fact only Cedric boarded the small Cessna plane. Once in the air I climbed from the luggage section behind the back seats to go and sit next to him in the cockpit.

Amongst those he helped to escape are, CI staff person Oshadi Phakati and activist Jackie Selibi. As former President Thabo Mbeki testified at Cedric's funeral there was a plan for Cedric to take Steve Biko from his place of banning in the Eastern Cape to meet with ANC

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<sup>3</sup> SB is the abbreviation for Special Branch, the Secret Political Police who served the apartheid state.

President, Oliver Tambo and Thabo Mbeki when were on an official visit to Botswana. In 1977 this was to provide the first formal meeting between the ANC and BCM leadership. As ex President Mbeki pointed out, it was the time when the spy Williamson was still operating in the country. Steve Biko was killed by the SB only days before the meeting was due to take place. The struggle might have unfolded differently had they met and Steve lived.

Cedric and his sons also travelled to Botswana by car and motorbike. In Gaborone they would take the frame of the motorbike apart or take off the panels of the car, pack them with ANC and other banned literature, return to South Africa and hand over the contraband to those it was designated for.

Cedric and Beyers Naudé regularly composed what we called 'situational reports' and smuggled them out of the country to brief the exile movement about the exact state of affairs inside the country. Thabo Mbeki remembered how Cedric's reports informed the strategy and tactics of the ANC to compliment the internal resistance.

It is worth mentioning how reports and documents were transmitted. One of the ways to do this was through contacts I had in churches throughout Europe. They alerted me (in London) when clergy, bishops and the like went on so-called fact-finding missions to South Africa. I would write and ask if they wanted to meet banned persons like Beyers Naudé or Cedric Mayson and that I could facilitate such a meeting. They would generally be delighted to meet them. I then asked if they would take a small gift for my friends. Inside the gift I hid documents and letters that had been reduced to microfilm, the smallest form that documents could be reduced to at the time<sup>4</sup>.

All this lifts the veil of actual underground work, but it cannot adequately explain the courage and the risk that is involved.

Cedric did not seek riches, power or glory. He kept working at Luthuli House (the head quarters of the ANC) until he was well over 80. I respect him for his belief and effort to continue defending that that was best and worthy in the ANC. But he saw problems and had the strongest misgivings about what his movement had become, namely a vehicle for those with an appetite for power, who seek to enrich themselves and who abandoned the promise to act for the poor and marginalized. He repeatedly said: there are still good people in the ANC but I worry that they are fewer and fewer in number. His deep disappointment is hard to describe.

Cedric had many other qualities – his playful use with words, his sense of fun, his capacity to not judge others, his refusal to see otherness and his belief in building bridges between warring parties all stand out. He brought Christians into the ANC despite the unspoken misgivings of Communists, he was passionate about the true meaning of Ubuntu<sup>5</sup>, he sought

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<sup>4</sup> See Newsletter 25 on the website: [www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za](http://www.horstkleinschmidt.co.za)

<sup>5</sup> **Ubuntu** is a Nguni Bantu term roughly translating to "human kindness." It is an idea from the Southern African region which means literally "human-ness," and is often translated as "humanity toward others," but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that

understanding and co-operation between Black Consciousness and the ANC, and he promoted dialogue between faith traditions.

Your husband, your father and grandfather stands tall today and despite our tears and our sorrow, he deserves to be celebrated as one amongst the great of our country.

I am glad that Cedric and I could say farewell to each other just over a month ago. He said, 'I'm so grateful you came' and we both knew that it was likely to be the last time. Each night we had a scotch or two. We talked little but knew that we were there to support each other. Then a gentle hug and a smile on his face and Christine and I left the bush-veld of Marloth Park.

Remind your children and grandchildren and those after them, that gramps or granddad was true and honest – let us today celebrate a worthy life.

Hamba kahle Cedric, old friend, and dear comrade!

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connects all humanity".

Since the transition to democracy in South Africa with the Nelson Mandela presidency in 1994, the term has become more widely known outside of Southern Africa, notably popularized to English language readers by Desmond Tutu (1999). (Source: Wikipedia)