

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Movements > World level (Movements) > Radical Left (Movements, World) > **Dennis Brutus (1924-2009): “Political organiser and one of Africa’s most (...)**

# **Dennis Brutus (1924-2009): “Political organiser and one of Africa’s most celebrated poets”**

Saturday 30 January 2010, by [BOND Patrick](#), [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 26 December 2009).

Contents

- [Hamba kahle Comrade Dennis \(...\)](#)
- [We mourn the passing of \(...\)](#)
- [Sport mourns two men who \(...\)](#)
- [TRIBUTE TO DENNIS VINCENT \(...\)](#)
- [Against the Current: Rememberi](#)
- [Dennis Brutus, 1924-2009: \(...\)](#)

## **Hamba kahle Comrade Dennis Brutus (1924-2009)**

*There will come a time  
There will come a time we believe  
When the shape of the planet  
and the divisions of the land  
Will be less important;  
We will be caught in a glow of friendship  
a red star of hope  
will illuminate our lives  
A star of hope  
A star of joy  
A star of freedom*

— Dennis Brutus, Caracas, October 18, 2008

### **By Patrick Bond**

December 26, 2009 — World-renowned political organiser and one of Africa’s most celebrated poets, Dennis Vincent Brutus, died early on December 26 in Cape Town, in his sleep, aged 85.

Even in his last days, Brutus was fully engaged, advocating social protest against those responsible for climate change, and promoting reparations to black South Africans from corporations that benefited from apartheid. He was a leading plaintiff in the Alien Tort Claims Act case against major firms that is now making progress in the US court system.

Brutus was born in Harare in 1924, but his South African parents soon moved to Port Elizabeth, where he attended Paterson and Schauderville high schools. He entered Fort Hare University on a full scholarship in 1940, graduating with a distinction in English and a second major in psychology.

Further studies in law at the University of the Witwatersrand were cut short by imprisonment for anti-apartheid activism.

Brutus' political activity initially included extensive journalistic reporting, organising with the Teachers' League and the Congress movement, and leading the new South African Sports Association as an alternative to white sports bodies. After his banning in 1961 under the Suppression of Communism Act, he fled to Mozambique but was captured and deported to Johannesburg. There, in 1963, Brutus was shot in the back while attempting to escape police custody. Memorably, it was in front of Anglo American Corporation headquarters that he nearly died while awaiting an ambulance reserved for blacks.

While recovering, he was held in the Johannesburg Fort Prison cell which more than a half-century earlier housed Mahatma Gandhi. Brutus was transferred to Robben Island where he was jailed in the cell next to Nelson Mandela, and in 1964-65 wrote the collections *Sirens*, *Knuckles*, *Boots* and *Letters to Martha*, two of the richest poetic expressions of political incarceration.

Subsequently forced into exile, Brutus resumed simultaneous careers as a poet and anti-apartheid campaigner in London, and while working for the International Defense and Aid Fund, was instrumental in achieving the apartheid regime's expulsion from the 1968 Mexican Olympics and then in 1970 from the Olympic movement.

Upon moving to the US in 1971, Brutus served as a professor of literature and African studies at Northwestern (Chicago) and Pittsburgh, and defeated high-profile efforts by the Reagan administration to deport him during the early 1980s. He wrote numerous poems, 90 of which will be published posthumously next year by Worcester State University, and he helped organise major African writers organisations with his colleagues Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.

Following the political transition in South Africa, Brutus resumed activities with grassroots social movements in his home country. In the late 1990s he also became a pivotal figure in the global justice movement and a featured speaker each year at the World Social Forum, as well as at protests against the World Trade Organisation, G8, Bretton Woods Institutions and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Brutus continued to serve in the anti-racism, reparations and economic justice movements as a leading strategist until his death, calling in August 2009 for the "Seattling" of the recent Copenhagen summit because sufficient greenhouse gas emissions cuts and North-South "climate debt" payments were not on the agenda.

His final academic appointment was as Honorary Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, and for that university's press and Haymarket Press, he published the autobiographical *Poetry and Protest* in 2006.

Among numerous recent accolades were the US War Resisters League peace award in September 2009, two Doctor of Literature degrees conferred at Rhodes and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in April 2009 — following six other honorary doctorates — and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the South African government Department of Arts and Culture in 2008.

Brutus was also awarded membership in the South African Sports Hall of Fame in 2007, but rejected it on grounds that the institution had not confronted the country's racist history. He also won the Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes awards.

The memory of Dennis Brutus will remain everywhere there is struggle against injustice. Uniquely courageous, consistent and principled, Brutus bridged the global and local, politics and culture,

class and race, the old and the young, the red and green. He was an emblem of solidarity with all those peoples oppressed and environments wrecked by the power of capital and state elites – hence some in the African National Congress government labelled him “ultraleft”. But given his role as a world-class poet, Brutus showed that social justice advocates can have both bread and roses.

Brutus’s poetry collections are:

*Sirens Knuckles and Boots* (Mbari Productions, Ibaden, Nigeria and Northwestern University Press, Evanston Illinois, 1963).

*Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (Heinemann, Oxford, 1968).

*Poems from Algiers* (African and Afro-American Studies and Research Institute, Austin, Texas, 1970).

*A Simple Lust* (Heinemann, Oxford, 1973).

*China Poems* (African and Afro-American Studies and Research Centre, Austin, Texas, 1975).

*Strains* (Troubador Press, Del Valle, Texas).

*Stubborn Hope* (Three Continents Press, Washington, DC and Heinemann, Oxford, 1978).

*Salutes and Censures* (Fourth Dimension, Enugu, Nigeria, 1982).

*Airs and Tributes* (Whirlwind Press, Camden, New Jersey, 1989).

*Still the Sirens* (Pennywhistle Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1993).

*Remembering Soweto*, ed. Lamont B. Steptoe (Whirlwind Press, Camden, New Jersey, 2004).

*Leafdrift*, ed. Lamont B. Steptoe (Whirlwind Press, Camden, New Jersey, 2005).

*Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader*, ed. Aisha Kareem and Lee Sustar (Haymarket Books, Chicago and University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2006).

He is survived by his wife May, his sisters Helen and Dolly, eight children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren in Hong Kong, England, the USA and Cape Town.

\* Patrick Bond directs the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal:  
<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs>.

---

### **Statement from the Brutus Family on the passing of Professor Dennis Brutus**

Professor Dennis Brutus died quietly in his sleep on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, earlier this morning. He is survived by his wife May, his sisters Helen and Dolly, eight children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren in Hong Kong, England, the USA and Cape Town.

Dennis lived his life as so many would wish to, in service to the causes of justice, peace, freedom and the protection of the planet. He remained positive about the future, believing that popular movements will achieve their aims.

Dennis' poetry, particularly of his prison experiences on Robben Island, has been taught in schools around the world. He was modest about his work, always trying to improve on his drafts.

His creativity crossed into other areas of his life, he used poetry to mobilize, to inspire others to action, also to bring joy.

We wish to thank all the doctors, nurses and staff who provided excellent care for Dennis in his final months, and to also thank St Luke's Hospice for their assistance.

There will be a private cremation within a few days and arrangements for a thanks giving service will be made known in early January.

---

## **We mourn the passing of Dennis Brutus and celebrate his incredible life**

### **Anti-Privatisation Forum**

December 26, 2009 — The Anti-Privatisation Forum and all of its 30+ community affiliates are saddened by the passing away of Comrade Dennis Vincent Brutus earlier today in Cape Town. Comrade Dennis passed away in his sleep, aged 85. At the same time, we celebrate his incredible life of literary, intellectual and activist principle and commitment to justice and equality for all.

Many other activists and movements here in South Africa and across the globe will no doubt provide ample affirmation of comrade Dennis' amazing life journey and activism. His personal sacrifices, achievements and involvement in a wide range of social and political struggles over the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> are legendary. Comrade Dennis was always on the side of the oppressed and remained true to his principles in fighting for an anti-capitalist South Africa and world. His pen and his voice were always a thorn in the side of the rich and powerful, whether here or abroad and were constant reclaimers of our collective consciences and humanity.

In the ten years since the formation of the APF, comrade Dennis was a regular source of solidarity, encouragement and lively debate. He never shirked from joining the fight against narrow nationalism, ethnic chauvinism and gender oppression and always had a word of encouragement and affirmation for his fellow comrades.

While we will miss him greatly, we celebrate his life along with all his family, friends and fellow activists.

Hamba Kahle comrade Dennis!

---

### **Two poems by Dennis Brutus in Caracas**

Below are two poems presented by veteran anti-apartheid and global social justice activist Dennis Brutus, in Venezuela for the eighth meeting of the Network of Intellectuals and Artists in Defence of Humanity and the World Forum for Alternatives, October 18, 2008.

Dennis Brutus

Poem immediately following the conference, in the Hotel Alba overlooking Caracas mountains,  
5:50am on October 18, 2008.

*Saffron dawn glimmers  
beyond the mountain's blue bulk  
my shoulder's reflection infringes  
on the window's dim report  
So let some impact from you my words echo resonance  
lend impulse to the bright looming dawn*

\* \* \*

Poem delivered at the closing session.

*There will come a time  
There will come a time we believe  
When the shape of the planet  
and the divisions of the land  
Will be less important;  
We will be caught in a glow of friendship  
a red star of hope  
will illuminate our lives  
A star of hope  
A star of joy  
A star of freedom*

In thanks to President Hugo Chavez and the people of Venezuela,  
Dennis Brutus  
October 18, 2008, Caracas.

---

*Dennis Brutus  
When a big tree falls,  
its branches reach afar, for  
a journey begun is a journey begun.  
Where the brave falter not of fear  
but in their moments of own, could,  
in the bathroom, cry, alone.  
Hamba Kahle Comrade,  
For in your journey ended and ours yet  
a readiness ever you us inspire.*

Martin Mhando  
Assoc. Professor  
Media Studies  
Murdoch University

---

## **Social Movements Indaba - Kzn**

Mon, 12/28/2009

We mourn the loss of Comrade Dennis Brutus

Comrade Dennis though having moved from the physical world still inspires us by his courage, his philosophy and selflessness. Dennis inspired even as he struggled to change the world for the better of the greater collective and for posterity.

In no uncertain terms we can bear testimony to the fact that the world was changed by him as he moved through it. Dennis shaped minds and influenced even his detractors because of his courage, intellectual status, commitment and integrity.

The world will be a little less friendly, a little emptier without Dennis but we know that he will live forever in the minds and hearts of those who knew him. I can with greatest of pride say, "in my lifetime I knew Dennis Brutus and he made me a better person for having known him."

We offer our condolences to his family Comrades and friends.

Hamba kahle Dennis Hamba Kahle

Rassool Snyman

The Social Movements Indaba - Kzn

---

## **Sport mourns two men who fought for their beliefs until the end**

<http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index.php/news/content/view/full/84971>

Tuesday 29 December 2009

**by Jon Gemmell**

***Cricket comment: Celebrating the lives of anti-apartheid campaigner  
Dennis Brutus and Daily Worker sports editor Lester Rodney***

Those who enjoy their sports alongside their politics are mourning the loss of two huge figures over Christmas. As sports editor of The Daily Worker in the United States, Lester Rodney was an early campaigner for the integration of baseball.

The US Communist died aged 98 on December 20. His life is celebrated in an article written for the Morning Star on March 26 2008.

Rodney lived 13 years longer than the South African anti-apartheid activist Dennis Brutus, who died in his sleep at home in Cape Town on Saturday morning.

Brutus was born in Harare, but moved to South Africa as a boy. Early political activity included journalism, organising with the Teachers' League and Congress Movement and leading the South African Sports Association as an alternative to white sports bodies.

South Africa's first official policy on sports was forced on the regime by a number of developments which indicated a growing unease with racism.

In 1956, the International Table Tennis Federation withdrew recognition of the white South African body and acknowledged its black counterpart, while FIFA became embroiled in the country's football structure.

A number of black organisations, including the South African Cricket Board of Control, pressed for international recognition.

The government reacted with an official sports policy that decreed that whites and blacks should organise their sports separately and prohibited mixed sport. In addition, no mixed teams could represent the country abroad and international sides competing in South Africa would have to be all-white.

The official sports policy afforded the government the right to determine not only which teams could play South Africa but also the racial composition of these sides. The government even laid down which sporting bodies should be affiliated to international associations.

The opposition targeted international sides and succeeded in getting both Brazil and the West Indies to cancel visits to South Africa.

They then targeted the Olympics demanding either non-racialism in South African sport or, failing that, the expulsion of South Africa from the Olympics and international sport.

The Suppression of Communism Act made Brutus a criminal in 1961. He fled to Mozambique but was captured and deported to Johannesburg. There, in 1963, he was shot in the back while attempting to escape police custody and forced to wait for an ambulance that would accept blacks.

Sentenced to 18 months, Brutus spent time on Robben Island in the cell next to Nelson Mandela. He was also banned from teaching, writing and publishing in South Africa and eventually settled in the US as a political refugee. From there, he continued his campaign against racist sport.

However, the white international sporting community showed little interest in South Africa's racial policies. When Brutus wrote to members of the Olympic movement in 1963 asking them to join the struggle against racist sport, New Zealand's IOC member Arthur Porritt dismissed him as a "well-known trouble-maker."

MCC secretary Billy Griffith took the line that South Africa was too important to be left out of world cricket and that anyway there was no colour bar in the constitution of their (white-only) cricket board.

Much was made of "traditional links" and "essential communications." Following the election of Sir Cyril Hawker as president of the MCC in 1970 Brutus asked whether his position as chairman of Standard Bank had anything to do with these links and communications.

Such exposure led administrator Wilfred Wooler to inform Brutus that "we have no sympathy with your cause in any shape or form and regard you as an utter nuisance."

Despite the obstinacy of certain establishment figureheads, Brutus proved instrumental in the apartheid regime's expulsion from the 1968 Mexican Olympics and then in 1970 from the Olympic movement. Gradually South Africa became excluded from most sports.

For his efforts, Brutus was nominated alongside Ali Bacher for induction in the South African Sport Hall of Fame in 2007.

His reaction to this nomination highlights his proud heritage of political struggle. He used the showpiece event to reject the nomination on the grounds that he couldn't "be party to an event where unapologetic racists are also honoured, or to join a hall of fame alongside those who flourished under racist sport." "Moreover," Brutus argued, "this hall ignores the fact that some sportspersons and administrators defended, supported and legitimised apartheid."

Brutus maintained his fight for social justice into his last years. He remained committed to reparations for black South Africans from corporations that benefited from apartheid. He also advocated social protest against those responsible for climate change.

In an open letter about the recent Copenhagen climate change conference he warned against "brokering a deal that allows the corporations and the oil giants to continue to abuse the earth."

His family said Brutus lived his life in the service of justice, peace, freedom and protecting the planet. "He remained positive about the future, believing that popular movements will achieve their aims."

It is with this sense of optimism that he will be best remembered.

---

## **TRIBUTE TO DENNIS VINCENT BRUTUS**

**JUBILEE SOUTH AFRICA**

1924 - 2009 M.P. Giyose, on behalf of Jubilee South Africa

Born in 1924, Dennis Brutus belongs to the generation of South Africans amongst the oppressed whom I regard as the generation of revolution. People sometimes want to trace the ideas of an eminent individual to the innate qualities imparted by heredity. Those who think like this might be happy to consider that Dennis, born in Zimbabwe, came from a father who established the first non-racial teachers organisation in the then race ridden Southern Rhodesia, part of the colonial system that had planted the race seed deep in every corner of what came to be known as the Third World. Thanks to the birth of such an organisation, the ideological leadership in the educational struggles of Zimbabweans soon came under the aegis of Joe Culverwell, the eminent teacher who many years later took charge of the education system in Zimbabwe during the heroic period of the Zimbabwean revolution. To this day, the legacy of the early educational advances of the newly independent country remains perhaps its most notable achievement.

Alas, the devotees of the theory of heredity go amiss. The seed of revolt was at large at the time that Dennis came to South Africa and went through school and university. The educational struggles in Zimbabwe found their counterpart in this country in the form of the Teachers League of South Africa whose aim was to build a radical liberation movement. The teachers and students at the forefront of this resistance are now contained in every history book recording the revolutionary impulse of those times. Dennis was both influenced by and active in these struggles. In short, he was a product of his day.

### **HIS POETRY**

Dennis' Letters to Martha and Stubborn Hope have become the most famous record of protest in undoubtedly some of the most abhorrent prison conditions in history, not just in Africa, but all over the world. Dennis has published some 15 volumes of poetry which are collected at the Dennis Brutus Resource Centre of Worcester State University in the USA. Because he was without doubt born in the bosom of the collective inspirations of the Greek goddesses or muses of poetry, Calliope, Eutepre, Erato and Thalia, the writing of poetry came easy to him. In a lifestyle which seemed to defy the aging process in his late 70s and early 80s, he would spend the night at an international conference in the outdoors, hopping from political circle to political circle, taking in or sowing more mischief. Yet at the break of dawn in a night in which he could have had no more than a 100 winks, he would in a flash put a poem on the table and read it out loud to his friends. The poem would be a reflection of the hopes of the moment, usually already casting a long glance to future battle fields whereat Dennis was calling the world social movement to arms yet again. This was no mere case of stubborn hope but rather of hope on the wings of flighty social adventure.

Once I had the honour of travelling to England and Scotland with Dennis and slept in the same room as the great man. Dennis went to bed and emerged from his sleep on each night and morning with a verse on his lips. As I travelled around London with him, I discovered that he had an intimate knowledge of the history of that city and its reflection in each phase of its development in the poetry of one well known English poet or another.

Truly, the oppressed of our times could not have sought a better muse to essay their hopes, triumphs and tribulations.

### **HIS POLITICAL IDEAS**

It is true that Dennis' life has straddled the most energetic sources of ideas in the liberation movement of this country. After starting his political life in the educational struggles of his youth and being active in the Teachers League of South Africa, he went on to join the congress movement.

During this time, the most intense area of work he undertook was in the sports arena, where he fought long and mightily against the fraud of an Olympic sports movement which kept the vast majority of the citizens of the country outside its fold. Having spent time mobilising various sports formations for specific purposes, he finally settled in the ranks of the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) with its slogan "No equal sport in an unequal society". He continued his activism in this arena long after 1994, when it was becoming transparent to everybody that equality in sport had not been achieved in the new political era.

Perhaps, the most prominent ideas upheld by Dennis belonged in the sphere of political economy. He was such a formidable critic of the role played by debt in the economics and human rights of the people of the world that he was one of the founders of Jubilee South Africa in 1998. He has been its most active patron ever since, joining the organisation in its strategising, campaigning, educational activities and action on the streets. As a result, the organisation named its library after him. That is also why he became both an active campaigner for reparations and a principal plaintiff in the Alien Torts case in the United States against transnational corporations that aided and abetted the Apartheid regime.

He was even more impressed by the domination of the modern world by powerful class forces in the North and was keenly aware of the role played by the two Ugly Sisters, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in ravaging the lives of the poor in all countries, but especially in the societies of the South. He was also active in the international Jubilee movement and thought it was of prime import that the oppressed people of the world should find a rallying call for themselves in the World Social Forum. Consistent with these views is the position he took in the social movement agitation during the World Summit for Social Development in Johannesburg in 2002. On this occasion he spearheaded such a masterful media campaign against both Nepad, its South African authors and the leaders of the powerful countries of the North that Essop Pahad, Minister in the Office of the President, was moved to dub him "Dennis the Menace"!

When he was already bed ridden, he expressed his strongly felt concerns at the capitalist system as an enemy of Mother Earth and that the great powers were organising a fraud in Copenhagen. He urged the organisations of the oppressed to put up such a counter pole to them in that conference as would recall the events of Seattle at the end of the last century.

## **GANDHI**

I have it as my opinion that Dennis was a political factor much much larger than his diminutive form. He was one of the central moral forces of the modern world. Perhaps this is why at the end of his life he was drawn towards the ideas of the great Mahatma and he wanted to conduct a university course and political seminars among the poor to share and debate the central thoughts of that teacher. To the end of his days, Dennis turned the world stage into his own classroom and he, son of a teacher, also its supreme school master, walked hand in hand with his pupils and fellow teachers so as to better understand the world.

He sought this understanding not merely as an academic pursuit but rather in order to change it. When I saw Dennis already on his death bed, he spent the entire two hours of my visit instigating me to action against the forces of capitalism ravaging the planet.

Without him, our movement is that much poorer. His ideas and actions have inspired many and it is now the duty of those he has left behind to live up to the glorious example he has set.

Issued on behalf of the National Executive Committee Jubilee South Africa  
M.P. Giyose National Chairperson Port Alfred

27<sup>th</sup> December 2009

---

**Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane extends condolences on the death of anti-apartheid activist and poet, Professor Dennis Brutus**

Pretoria - Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, today on Monday 28 December 2009, extended her heartfelt condolences to the family of anti-apartheid activist and poet, Professor Dennis Brutus.

"Once more death has robbed us of one of Africa's greatest sons of the soil whose contribution to the struggle against apartheid and passion for social justice and human rights for all mankind has left an indelible mark in South Africa and the international community, said Minister Nkoana-Mashabane.

"Comrade Dennis Brutus understood fully well that South Africa could not occupy its rightful place in the family of nations within the global village and reach its full potential without ridding herself of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination which the United Nations correctly defined as crime against humanity.

"In this regards, as we celebrate his lifework as a South African poet and political activist let us remember that Professor Dennis Brutus's poetic licence was first and foremost inspired by the quest for the restoration of human dignity and achievement of a better life for all. As a result of small steps he took, notably his successful campaign against all-white South African sports, our country is today a thousand miles ahead and on the eve of hosting 2010 Fifa World Cup," continued Minister Nkoana-Mashabane.

"On behalf of President Jacob Zuma, the government and people of South Africa we extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, May, the children and the entire Brutus family during these trying moments" concluded Minister Nkoana-Mashabane.

For further information contact the Ministerial Spokesperson, Malusi Mogale, on 082 675 0380

Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Pretoria South Africa

28 December 2009

---

It is with immense sadness that we mourn the passing of Dennis Brutus, African activist and award-winning poet. The South African sport boycott owed much to his fierce commitment and relentless organizing, from his founding of the Coordinating Committee for International Recognition in Sport (1955) to the South African Sports Association (1958) and its successor, the South African Nonracial Olympic Committee. Dennis connected sport with the quest for human rights in powerful and probably unprecedented ways. Thanks largely to SANROC and its international allies, racist South Africa was expelled from the Olympics and world football. These global indictments of apartheid were huge and often undervalued milestones in the struggle against apartheid. Rest in peace Dennis. Hamba kahle.

---

## **FREE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOUTH AFRICA**

We FBCSA pay tribute to Comrade Dennis. Comrade Dennis is always forefront of the powerless regardless of region or creed.

Thein Win Free Burma Campaign, South Africa

---

## **COMAFRICA (Rio de Janeiro)**

O ATIVISTA ANTI-APARTHEID E POETA SUL-AFRICANO Dennis Brutus faleceu enquanto dormia, no sábado 26/12/09, aos 85 anos de idade em sua casa em Cape Town.

Neste ano de 2009, o comAfrica.org, dentro de suas atribuições, contribuiu com depoimento, materiais de seu acervo e indicações de contatos no Brasil e África do Sul, inclusive o do Prof. Dennis Brutus, para que a celebração e lembrança das primeiras manifestações brasileiras contra o apartheid em 1959 pudessem ser consubstanciadas nas reportagens apresentadas pelo programa Esporte Espetacular,

(<http://video.globo.com/Videos/Player/Esportes/0,,GIM1093159-7824-ESPECIA...>) que revelaram ao Brasil também a importante contribuição de Dennis Brutus para que tais manifestações acontecessem em 1959, quando como dirigente da South African Sports Association recém fundada como alternativa às organizações desportivas racistas, teve a iniciativa de enviar o telegrama ao Presidente do Brasil Juscelino Kubitschek no qual pedia para que não permitisse a participação do time brasileiro num jogo de futebol em moldes racistas .

Dennis Brutus ficou preso na Ilha de Robben junto com Nelson Mandela em meados de 1960. Seu ativismo levou o Comitê Internacional Olímpico a proibir a participação da África do Sul desde os jogos de 1968 até o fim da segregação, quase 30 anos depois.

Ele foi para o exílio em 1966 e mais tarde veio para os Estados Unidos da América para ensinar Literatura e Estudos Africanos na Northwestern University e na Universidade de Pittsburgh.

Ao longo dos anos, escreveu mais de uma dúzia de livros de poesia, incluindo dois durante o confinamento. Ele deixa sua mulher e oito filhos. Nos últimos anos, Dennis Brutus era Professor no Center for Civil Society na Universidade de Kwa Zulu Natal , cuja homenagem por ocasião de seu falecimento está transcrita mais abaixo (em inglês) .

Mesmo em seus últimos dias , Brutus estava plenamente engajado, defendendo o protesto social contra aqueles responsáveis pelas mudanças climáticas , e promovendo a causa das reparações para os sul-africanos negros cobradas das grandes corporações que se beneficiaram do apartheid. Ele era um dos principais demandantes no processo baseado no Alien Tort Claims Act[ [Lei de Reclamação de Danos Estrangeiros], uma lei que permite a cidadãos de qualquer nacionalidade processar em tribunais estadunidenses por violações de direitos ou tratados internacionais.] contra as principais multinacionais envolvidas , um processo que no momento está avançando no sistema judiciário estadunidense.

Relembramos aqui as palavras do prof. Dennis Brutus ao povo brasileiro na entrevista que deu ao programa Esporte Espetacular

((<http://video.globo.com/Videos/Player/Espportes/0,,GIM1093159-7824-ESPECIA...>)) : “Gostaria de mandar um recado agora que estamos celebrando a data: Muito obrigado por terem nos ajudado nesta luta pela humanidade. Eu agradeço profundamente . Obrigado!”

“A Luta continua!” Este slogan tão conhecido em nossa língua portuguesa e que se incorporou, no âmbito das lutas de libertação nacional, a várias línguas da África Austral, com a sua sonoridade do nosso vernáculo, bem caracteriza a obra de Dennis Brutus e sua vida, cuja divulgação nesta língua merece continuar.

Instituto ComÁfrica Salomon Blajberg ,Ph.d. Viena Diretor - Comunicação Director - Communication  
Caixa Postal/POB 15132 CEP 20.031-971 Rio de Janeiro - RJ Brasil Telefone: +55-21-3495-1985  
Telefax/Correio de Voz/Voice Mail  
+55-21-2553-5388 Celular/Mobile +55-21-9662-1327 salomon comafrika.org - dircom comafrika.org  
[www.comafrika.org](http://www.comafrika.org)

---

Grace Kwinjeh: Comrade Dennis, you shall be missed! Your work lives on. I shall always remember your comfort and inspiration in UKZN during my time of despair, recovery, no greater mentor than you, I hope to keep the video of the Wolpe lecture and your inspirational words then. Thank you for the books, poetry and taking all that you believed in to the last minute, second, your courage, convictions will be honoured!

---

James Kilgore: My condolences to Dennis’ family, comrades and friends. I now live in Illinois and even years after Dennis lived here, his legacy and legend as an anti-apartheid campaigner remain. I met him briefly in the late 90s, with his trademark beard and canvas tennis shoes. He showed us there was an alternative to aging gracefully or with bitterness. He aged with fire!! What a spirit and inspiration - a militant for all ages. We will miss him but we have his vast writings to remember him by.

---

Sammie Moshenberg: Hamba Kahle — your gentle soul and strong leadership shall be missed.

---

Christopher Lee: This is very sad news, but what a full, accomplished life. My favorite poem of his is ‘Sharpeville.’ I use it for teaching often and have a copy permanently posted on my office door.

---

Mojalefa Murphy: The news of Dennis' passing on came as I was listening to his comments on Democracy Now, and recalling our failed attempt to get him a visa to enter Canada from the US, last fall. According to the Canadian administration, having been sentenced to serve time on Robben Island, he had a criminal record that disqualified him to enter Canada, a prohibition that somehow did not apply to former President Nelson Mandela and others! The liberal politicians in our constituency had then suggested that he obtain a letter of recommendation from Mandela and present it to the nearest Canadian embassy in the US. When I related this suggestion to Dennis on the telephone, he laughed and explained that he would find it very difficult to reconcile his political position in respect of the post-1990 neo-liberal South Africa and a possibly humiliating request for support from one of its principal architects to deliver a strong message of opposition! I will remember him for his dismissive laughter on the telephone, his principles and unwavering commitment to economic justice for all. Our condolences to his family and all loved ones. His legacy lives on and will be protected by his constituency - the poor and their plight.

---

Doug Henwood: Aside from his great political work, I was always moved by what a warm and good human being he was. Of course I never knew him well but was always moved to see him.

---

Ruy Braga: Dennis will be remembered among us, Brazilian socialists, as a WONDERFUL comrade. This is a very sad day for all of us. Our sincere condolences. Socialists greetings.

---

Peter Rachleff: Dennis and I intersected first at Amherst College then at the University of Pittsburgh. It warmed my heart to know that he continued to stir pots in my former stomping grounds. We reconnected at conferences at UNISA and Wits in 2001, where he was positively impish in cahoots with Ben Cashdan. A few years later, I was tickled to imagine him performing Marx himself in several stagings of Howard Zinn's 'Marx in Soho.' Who, I wondered, could be more appropriate, could embody the old radical better than this old radical? I thought of Dennis' hair and beard as having waited decades to be ready for this role. No need for make-up! We re-connected once again in Pittsburgh, just three years ago, at a memorial for our comrade Steve Sapolsky. Dennis' sweetness just filled whatever room he was in. I have so enjoyed Patrick's efforts to make Dennis' poetry available to all of us. We will carry him forever in our hearts and spirits. Hambla kahle, comrade.

---

Sandile Gumede: I'm 24, journalism graduate from DUT. Remember when him & CCS Staff were demonstrating outside US Embassy, Durban, against Prof. Adam Habib's refused entry to the US. I couldn't believe there's a person who puts his life in line for another being. He left an impression that will last forever. I'll remember him as an academic who did more than just study, someone who leaved his life to there fullest refusing to retire, a true role model to the youth. 'Death can not be proud', Prof. Brutus used it to rest."

---

Vineeta Gupta: Dennis always seemed so timeless that news of his passing away almost sounds like a false rumor. He will always live in memories of people whose lives he touched directly or indirectly. I have one of his hand written poems that I willpost on the fan page.

---

Yash Tandon: The passing away of Dennis, this great sage, is big loss to us all. He has left behind a good, humane legacy and a challenge to us all.

---

Fantu Cheru: Terrible news indeed! It is quite a loss, but Dennis had for many years, enriched our lives and kept us to our principles.

---

Ari Sitas: Fine man, fine poet and activist. My generation grew up with Letters to Martha, matured to play soccer in bad conscience and will continue making it hard for empire until it vanishes. He knew during the last few weeks that this was, is and will be so.

---

Peter Waterman: Dennis provides us with an exceptional model - the social movement activist who does not 'take power' (i.e. is not taken by power) once the revolution 'succeeds' but who continues to build power from outside and below. He was also a modest revolutionary since, every time I met him at a World Social Forum, it would take some minutes before I recognised him, or was reminded by mutual friends of who that quiet guy, listening to the conversation, was. He could, surely, have been Minister of Culture, or something like that, in an new ANC government. But, as his life suggests, he seems to have thought that culture was not created by ministers. He joins my pantheon of modest revolutionaries and/or internationalists, alongside Maria Elena Moyano of Peru, Chico Mendes of Brazil, Shankar Guhar Nyogi in Chhatisgarh, India. Condolences to his family, friends and comrades, he will be well remembered - even, probably, by those who took the handful of silver, the privileges of office.

---

Azwell Banda: I first met Denis through his poetry, when I was in high school, in Zambia. His poetry took pride of place among some of Africa's greatest writers such as Cyprian Enkwensi, Elechi Amadi, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, and so on. This was at the height of dreams for the search for an authentic African literature, when the series 'African Writers' was at its best. This was when newly independent African governments made such writers essential reading in their schools. Denis provided the essential poetry such a search needed! Little did I know that more than two decades later, I would meet the man in person - but with personal fortunes completely reversed! He then was a citizen of a 'liberated South Africa' while I was in the wilderness! I cannot agree more with all those who will simply chose to celebrate Denis' life, rather than waste time mourning, at his passing away. African, surely, bids goodbye to one of its greatest poets!

---

Rethabile, <http://poefrika.blogspot.com/2009/12/rip-dennis-brutus.html>: Terrible news has just reached my ears. The lion has died. The lion sleeps tonight. Professor Brutus fought the apartheid regime and helped bring down some of its structures, almost single handedly. He was a poet whose poems he wrote while in prison on Robben island are mainly why this blog exists, and why I write poetry. Letters to Martha, the book is called. What do you begin to say when the pillar falls? Do you cry for the empty future (Brutus's 'the weight of the approaching days') or celebrate his life? Dilemma. I have celebrated his life on this blog and privately in the rooms of my heart. I choose to mourn, now. So, what are we gonna do? Who's gonna step into his shoes? What will them think, now that he is dead? That we're weaker? That they're stronger? We must mourn no matter what. He will live through his action and through his words, none of which spoke louder than the other. Let us mourn, then, this man who has done so much for you and for me, and so little for himself. Let us mourn because orphans mourn, and let us hope that because of this departure, we will soon move from mourning to morning.

#### Their Behaviour

Their guilt is not so very different from ours: —who has not joyed in the arbitrary exercise of power or grasped for himself what might have been another's and who has not used superior force in the moment when he could, (and who of us has not been tempted to these things?)— so, in their guilt, the bare ferocity of teeth, chest-thumping challenge and defiance, the deafening clamor of their prayers to a deity made in the image of their prejudice which drowns the voice of conscience, is mirrored our predicament but on a social, massive, organized scale which magnifies enormously as the private dehabille of love becomes obscene in orgies. © Dennis Brutus

Posted by Rethabile

---

Vinod Raina: In far off Bhopal in India, The news of Dennis's passing away feels very sad - for one I will miss his occasional postings on the Jubileesouth list serve. It has been an honour to have known

him on the WSF and Jubileesouth platforms. His solidarity in defense of justice anywhere in the World was spontaneous, and infectious; his sense of compassion immense. The best tribute to him, of course, would be to celebrate his life by doing more vigorously what he did best - resist all forms of injustice and stand up for the downtrodden. Emulating his poetic expressions would of course be very tough. With profound condolences to his family and immediate friends.

---

Berend Schuitema: A Comrade and Friend, Dennis Brutus has passed on his spear and many activists, especially those in the Eastern Cape are privileged and proud to carry forward his spirit of total dedication with absolute integrity in the long march still ahead of us. With Dennis around we always felt the immediacy of the struggle and the certain belief that not only is our other world possible, but already in the making and arriving sooner than we may think. My first meeting with Dennis was in the Eastern Cape in a more recent period. Often he was hosted by my family in East London and always with a humility and respect for whatever people he came across and always fitting in as part of the family. Very precious memories remain and especially those warmed by his irrepressible sense of humour. On occasion we went into a CNA together to glean and buy whatever there was. I bought The Economist and he had this to say: 'When I was in Port Elizabeth, long ago, I went into a CNA to buy The Economist. The person at the counter looked at me curiously and asked, 'is this for your boss?'" I looked at him even more curiously to which he replied with a giggle, 'I am glad that you caught the colourful humour!" I never had the privilege of meeting up with Dennis in exile. His voice preceded him in his poetry, much was spoken of him while he was working with the Defence and Aid, and there were always comrades coming and going to the SANROC office in London (Close to Marble Hall, if my own aging memory is not failing me!). Dennis you are more than an icon - you have become larger than life and we will always be proud of you!

---

Lamont B. Steptoe: I am still in shock and saddened by his death. I will continue to honor his life and work and speak of his great and noble deeds as I continue my own work. I am deeply grateful that I knew and worked with him for as long as I did. His legacy is a brilliant crystal struck by the sun, blinding in its glare.

---

Alice Thomson: This is so sad. We will mourn the loss of this wonderful soul and celebrate the gift of his life to us.

---

Demba Moussa Dembele: The passing of Dennis Brutus is an immense loss to the international social movement and especially to the progressive African movement. Dennis was a man who dedicated his entire life to the struggle against capitalism and oppression in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. He was a great source of inspiration and wisdom for all of us who happened to know him and

work with him. He was a man of great intellect and strong convictions. Yet, he was a model of modesty and simplicity, like all great men or women. I had the privilege to share an apartment with him in Porto Alegre (Brazil) during the 2002 World Social Forum. We spent hours talking about struggles around the world and in Africa. I greatly enjoyed listening to him. He took an active part in the struggle against the illegitimate debt of Africa and other countries of the South. He was present at all major Jubilee South events. The last time I met him was in Nairobi in August 2008 during the Africa Jubilee South Assembly. We, at AJS, are proud to have had him as one of our most esteemed and respected comrades. His example will continue to inspire us. To his wife, children, grandchildren and close friends, we express our deepest and most sincere condolences. It has been an honor for me to have crossed your path, comrade Dennis. Rest in peace, dear comrade!

---

Paul Saoko: Dennis was a son of the world and very famous here in Kenya through his books. We grieve with you and the rest of South Africa. God Bless his soul.

---

Michael Friedman: Dennis was a truly consistent fighter for equality in South Africa. After the fall of the apartheid regime, he continued to struggle against the neoliberal regime that deepened existing inequality. He also spoke out against the apartheid existing in the Middle East.

---

Horace Campbell: Please accept our deepest sympathies. The spirit of Dennis Brutus will live among all of those strive for peace and justice.

---

Ilse Schreiber Noll: I am so sorry to hear that Dennis has died. I will miss him. We had collaborated on several artist books over the years and I admired Dennis for his generosity and kindness and strong ideas. I am so glad I had him as a friend and that he still got the artist book with his poem 'Poetry Fleeing' as he had wished for me to use this poem. Please let me know if there is an organization or anything I could contribute too in his memory, which Dennis might have wished for.

---

Robert Compton: Dennis, a warrior to the end will be missed. A true humanist with a heart of gold and a razor sharp mind.

---

Issa Shivji: Devastating news. Denis has left a rich heritage - immeasurable contribution - unwavering commitment - fighting to the last - and enjoying it - a man of the era of liberation. Go well. We shall not betray you.

---

Neil Tangri: Condolences to us all on the death of one of our leading lights. I hope he saw us through the worst of times.

---

Nnimmo Bassey: Dennis was such a huge inspiration. He lived his life to the full. Always at the forefront of the struggle. Never gave up hope! In the face of health challenges he still wanted to be in Copenhagen. Even wrote poems on the matter at hand and posted a video on youtube. He wholeheartedly backed our struggle to keep fossil fuels in the soil. Many of us will remember him in Swaziland when he acted Marx. I remember him showing up at the US Senate when I went to testify against the human rights abuses of oil TNCs. He came with talking points! May we keep being inspired by folks like him. Strength to his family!

---

Tina Abreu: From Angola, my deep condolences. I learnt to appreciate Dennis Brutus thoughts and fights reading CCS updates, videos and statements posted around important issues for all of us and was very sad with news received today. Our best tribute will be to continue campaigns and fight for causes he believed in and illuminate others with his insights.

---

Emmanuel Massawe: So sad indeed! But, anyway GOD loved him more than us. Let him rest in peace. I will treasure his memories for years to come. I read one of his poems in my High School studies in Tanzania. I met him in South Africa in 2007. We talked and I shared with him the insights I got from his poem. He was very friendly, talkative and approachable. He showed a sense of humor and strength even in his very last days of his life. Rest In Peace Dennis Brutus!!

---

Shalmali Guttal: This is very sad news. I first met Dennis when Jubilee South was formed, and met him subsequently several times during social fora events and mobilisations against the World Bank-

IMF. He was always sensitive, inspiring and so supportive of even the smallest acts of resistance to imperialism, racism and exploitation that we felt powerful listening to him, and confident that we could change things. His own political history was/is already proof of that. If there were more people like him in the world, we would have many more people inspired and motivated to organise and mobilise against war, racism, capitalism and all forms of injustice. I request that those of you who know Dennis' family convey my own and Focus' condolences to his family. We will always remember Dennis with the deepest respect, fondness and admiration.

---

Nair Jayaram: It is with deep sadness I received the passing of our Brother and Uncle Dennis. I wonder if you remember me, I am the younger Brother of the Late Billy Nair living in 'exile' in Canada. My Family and I send our heartfelt condolences to the family and pray that the Almighty grant all of you peace, comfort and consolation during this period of mourning. We all must take comfort that Dennis had done his service to the upliftment of Humankind and especially for the people of South Africa. He has been the stalwart that fought for the freedom of the people and saw that all South Africans had eradicated the abhorrent Apartheid Regime together with their vile practices. He was an extremely disciplined human being and was not influenced by greed like many from the liberation movement. He stood his ground and was never ashamed to say his piece when it mattered. There are few from the liberation struggle that can take credit like Dennis. I am sure he will be in great company where he is going to and will be sitting around the table discussing the problems of South Africa and its people. His work in the Anti-Apartheid struggle will go down in the history books of SA and with special attention to his getting SANROC started and getting SA sport boycotted Internationally. To Sister May, you had the company of one of the best in South Africa and do cherish the good times that you both had together. I say : HAMBGA GAHLE, COMRADE AND BROTHER AND UNCLE TO SO MANY. Jay Nair, Mississauga, Canada

---

Jakes Gerwel: His contribution to the struggle against apartheid and his efforts to bring about social justice in the world are appreciated and will be remembered for many years to come.

---

Charlene Smith: Sleep well Denis. I appreciated the way you embraced us all as friends and would give gifts of poetry, but most of all how you embraced every aspect of life and truly loved. Condolences to your family and to your very wide circle of friends who will truly grieve, but most of all will keep your spirit alive as the years progress.

---

Monica Martins: My condolences in the name of those who make the Nationalities Watch research group and World Tensions journal. Today, I learned a lot more on Dennis' inspiring life and want to share these memories with Brazilian people.

---

Isaac Otidu Amuke: Dennis Brutus, a name that to me meant resilience, you inspired many all over the world, you took the right position of the writer/poet in society, spoke the talk and walked the walk, may you Rest In Peace as your thoughts and spirit keep inspiring. SALUTE!

---

Deniz Kellecioglu: Condolences to his family and millions of people inspired by his words and person. An inspiration that will live on for a long time. Much respect.

---

Marcelle Brinkhuis-Abrahams: Our sincere condolences to the family. Tony, Jenny, Jerome and Matthew. You are in our thoughts. Our signed first edition of Poetry & Protest (UKZN) will be treasured. The writings therein resonates profoundly and will be used to stimulate the thinking and sharpen the conscience of Rory & Liam.

---

Daniel Pink: About a quarter of a century ago — when I was a young, impressionable Northwestern student wondering what I wanted to do with my life — I signed up for an upper-level seminar called “Writing Poetry.” It turned out that I was somewhat adept at deconstructing poems — and just plain awful at writing them. The person who helped me figure that out, and who gently urged me to apply what I’d learned in class to endeavors outside of poetry, was my professor — an extraordinary poet named Dennis Brutus. He died today at the age of 85. Brutus cut an imposing figure in the seminar room. He had a rich voice, a sprawling beard, and a thick mane of hair. But what gave him a stature that I’d never encountered, as well as a certain ethereal quality, was his story. He had come to the U.S. as a political refugee after having been one of South Africa’s leading anti-apartheid activists. He pioneered the idea of using sports as political lever to persuade the all-white government. And for his writing and rabble-rousing, he spent a couple of years at Robben Island with Nelson Mandela. One of Brutus’s poems, “Somehow We Survive,” is among the few poems that remain stuck in my head after all these years. I offer this long snippet in his memory.

Somehow we survive and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither.

Investigating searchlights rake our naked unprotected contours. . . . boots club the peeling door.

But somehow we survive severance, deprivation, loss.

Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark hissing their menace to our lives,

most cruel, all our land is scarred with terror, rendered unlovely and unlovable; sundered are we and all our passionate surrender

but somehow tenderness survives.

---

Biko Agozino: When I first met Dennis Brutus on the campus of the University of Calabar in the 1980s during the African Literature Conference Series that Earnest Emenyonu organized, he looked so tall and so larger than life that when I met him again in Pittsburgh in 2002, I could not believe that it was the same person. We shared an Azania Heritage Foundation platform discussing reparations for slavery and for apartheid crimes. He briefed us on the litigation against companies that benefited from apartheid gold and I expressed the view that litigation might benefit lawyers who corner 40% of the payout more than the litigants and recommended that pressure for legislation, negotiation and arbitration might produce more substantial 'reparative justice' in the long run for the victimized. Later, Dennis agreed to grant me a videotaped interview in his office at the University of Pittsburgh during which he taught me a few lessons. I had read the dolphin poem in the Stubborn Hope collection during high school and believed that the reference to a father was metaphorical, not knowing that it was a poem to his own children about freedom in the open seas with all the risks being preferable to the security of the swimming pool from the point of view of the dolphin; his children had asked him for a dolphin poem, he explained. But when I interviewed him in Pittsburgh, feeling like one of the children for whom he wrote it, he did not pretend, just an honest reality check. I interviewed him about his anti-apartheid activities and he explained something that had been bothering me for a long time, given my own name: why did Steve Biko not join the ANC? The explanation of Brutus was that the ANC would not admit white people and colored people back then, Brutus himself had to join the colored people's congress, for instance, and progressive whites had no choice but to join the CP. Biko was of the view that anyone who was for the struggle should be allowed full membership. This explanation reminded me of that scene from Cry Freedom where Denzel Washington as Biko responded to those who queried what a white man, Donald Woods, was doing in the Township and Biko asked them to witness the education of a white liberal, an education that probably helped to save the life of Woods when the regime went after him. It took a long time before the ANC came round to the correct position of Biko in terms of inclusiveness but it may have been a sign of the times with apartheid decreeing separateness in organizations. I am yet to check this fact with ANC activists. Brutus will never die! I told him as much at the end of my interview with him. What was he still doing in Pittsburgh when he could be exercising greater moral and intellectual leadership in South Africa? He expressed concern about the violence in the country but I reassured him that no one would dare touch him if they knew what he represented. He must have been planning the relocation and surely enough, he achieved a lot more in those final years than he could have achieved in exile, at least judging by all those honorary doctorates that our Baba Dolphin gathered in the wild compared to the sterile chlorinated pool that he resisted being deported from when the wild sea was still ruled by apartheid sharks!

---

David P. Kramer: Let me offer my condolences on the passing of Dennis Brutus to his family, friends comrades and colleagues and specifically in the FBC circle to Patrick and Dale who knew him so well. May the very full life that he lived continue to inspire you in all that you do.

---

Chadwick Allenbaugh: Dr. Brutus remains a beacon in my memory with his enduring spirit, infectious laughter, unrelenting sharpness, his great appreciation for sport and chess, and humble service and true leadership for causes greater than one person, yet courage.. to stand.. to act.. to speak and prove one person can and did make a differen...ce for many far beyond himself, his loves, his country. I met Dennis as our professor, friend and eventually honors thesis advisor aboard the S.S. universe on a round the world circumnavigation.. today as I'm sailing into Kona I can recall traveling to the peace center in Hiroshima japan, entering the congress of south African writers in Capetown 1995, visiting with his son in hong kong of similar wit and spark, with fellow writers and laureates from Africa that extended not simply respect but always a celebration for what Dennis always shared.. overcoming struggles and never giving up on the struggles that continue. Whales are breaching on my Kona approach this morning reminding me as they did when we approached capetown. His spirit continues to inspire, his lessons I will never forget to act upon, my love to the Brutus family. A great man, a true friend, with great sadness for this news but a quick smile for the memory of the pain he endured with a spirit much like the Hawaiians say..Imua.. Onward.. Forward...upward!

---

Richard Knight: I was very sorry to see that Dennis Brutus passed away. The African Activist Archive Project website ([www.africanactivist.msu.edu](http://www.africanactivist.msu.edu)) has descriptions of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (SAN-ROC) and the Dennis Brutus Defense Committee. There are PDFs of documents of both organizations and for SAN-ROC a photo of Dennis and a button. Also, the American Committee for Equality in Sport and Society (ACCESS) has a lot of material where his name appears. To see these three organizations go to Browse and click on the name.

---

Graham Bailey: Somehow one could not quite conceive of the energy and vitality that we saw slowly diminishing over the last few years, finally running out. Immensely sad at his passing, I believe that we all know that the best testament we can offer to Dennis who would want us to celebrate his life by learning from and mimicking his leadership, indefatigable energy, and total commitment to the ongoing struggles globally for Justice for the poor and disadvantaged, is to do just that.

---

Debra Stoleroff: I met Dennis in 2004 when he spoke at a peace and justice/ anti-war conference I helped organize here in Vermont. After the conference he continued to write and support the work I do. Until two years ago, he received, consistently read and commented on a weekly peace, social and environmental justice activist e-newsletter I send out to about 800 people in Vermont. I was always humbled by the fact that he was compelled to write me. I felt supported by him; his recognition meant a great deal to me. I would like to let his family know that Dennis, unlike most well-known

activists, took the time and effort to support those of us who fight for peace and justice at the grassroots level. That his efforts were greatly appreciated.

---

Monika Idehen: It is only today that I received the sad news - what a great loss. My sincere condolences to all his family and friends. I had the great privilege of knowing him and the pleasure to hear him call me a friend. I remember a poem he wrote many years ago, for Kwame Toure I think, which might be a bit comforting. It is one of the 85 poems I translated as a birthday present for him.

Tribute

He does not die who lives in the consciousness of his people

he does not die whose works endure in the society of his people

his spirit lives when the memory of his people preserves his work and his words

and when his deeds continue to march forward to shape the future

---

Desmond D'Sa: A giant amongst men, a principled man, a fighter for the poor, a soldier for the oppressed, a father to us all. Hamba kahle baba we tu.

---

Lars Gausdal: Personally, I had the honor of attending some of his lectures last year in Durban. His engagement and commitment over the years has and will serve as motivation for a activist-rookie as myself.

---

Branny Mthelebofu: We all know the truth and we all saw what Dennis went through, a hero amongst heroes of the world, the man i know as a father, grandfather and a man of the people. He lived to share his own knowledge, his empire. He has continued doing that until his last days on earth. We share our love to him and to your family. My wish is to see his name honoured in the world, that is the reason i was so close to him through filmmakng. I have learned many things from him and will share his knowdge with the rest of the world.

---

Joseph Hutchison: South African poet Dennis Brutus, imprisoned and exiled for his anti-apartheid

views, passed away the day after Christmas at his home in Cape Town. I met him once, at a poetry reading on the campus of Regis University in northwest Denver. A short, compact, self-contained man with gray Einsteinian hair, he read poems about systemic and individual brutality in a quiet voice that only made the horrors more vivid. He also read tender love poems and aphoristic, philosophical verses, poems of exile and celebration—all burning in the shadow of his vast sadness. Here are a few of them, drawn from *A Simple Lust: Collected Poems of South African Jail and Exile*:

[two from 'Letters to Martha']

5

In the greyness of isolated time which shafts down into the echoing mind, wraiths appear, and whispers of horrors that people the labyrinth of self. Coprophilism; necrophilism; fellatio; penis-amputation; and in this gibbering society hooting for recognition as one's other selves suicide, self-damnation, walks if not a companionable ghost then a familiar familiar, a doppelgänger not to be shaken off.

10

It is not all terror and deprivation, you know;

one comes to welcome the closer contact and understanding one achieves with one's fellow-men, fellows, compeers;

and the discipline does much to force a shape and pattern on one's daily life as well as on the days

and honest toil offers some redeeming hours for the wasted years;

so there are times when the mind is bright and restful though alive: rather like the full calm morning sea

[two written after exile]

Sometimes a mesh of ideas webs the entranced mind, the assenting delighted mental eye; and sometimes the thrust and clash of forged and metalled words makes musical clangour in the brain; sometimes a nude and simple word standing unlit or unadorned may plead mutely in cold or dark for an answering warmth, an enlightening sympathy; state the bare fact and let it sing.

I am the exile am the wanderer the troubadour  
(whatever they say)

gentle I am, and calm and with abstracted pace absorbed in planning, courteous to servility

but wailings fill the chambers of my heart and in my head behind my quiet eyes I hear the cries and sirens

---

Kate Heney: I would like to extend my sympathies after hearing today of the passing of Dennis Brutus. It was a pleasure and an honor to have met this brave and brilliant man during our studies in May at the CCS. He really was a special human being, and I wish you comfort during this difficult

time.

---

Noel Cabangon: I would like to extend my most profound condolences to the family of Dennis. How he fought for justice has inspired most of us and we shall never waver. He will remain in us in all our struggles. The struggle continues! Mabuhay Ka Dennis Brutus! (Long Live Dennis Brutus!)

---

Noam Chomsky: It was with great sorrow that I learned of the passing of Dennis Brutus, a great artist and intrepid warrior in the unending struggle for justice and freedom. He will long be remembered with honor, respect, and affection, and his life will be a permanent model for others to try to follow, as best they can.

---

Selim Gool: After teaching in P.E. Dennis came to C.T./Western Cape and met 'the intellectuals' of the NEUM/anti-CAD fraternity and became a left-wing socialist, left them and joined the ANC ("Alliance") of Stalino-Nationalists and then fought with them later for their post 1994-KAK: Mbeki's 'HIV/AIDs denialism, with Asmal's OBE rubbish and 'Afrimative Action... See More' crap in the by now 'Africanized' Public Sector, for theirhorrible lies and corruption, stealing of State monies and ARMS DEAL spending etc, and later, fought for a Good Leftist Socialist Programme, so let us NOT forget this comradeds!

---

Sarah Dionne: I am a former student from the University of Ottawa and came over to Durban with the first group of students with Rex Fyles in 2008. While we were at the centre we met many wonderful, inspiring people, but none so amazing (in my opinion) as Dennis Brutus. I had read some of his work before we arrived and was especially excited to meet him. I am so sad to hear that he passed away earlier this week, and wanted to offer you and his family my sincere condolences. I really loved his poetry, and will now treasure my copy of Poetry and Protest even more. Thank you so much for including him in our CCS course; it was a pleasure to have met him.

---

Tony Clarke: I will never forget that incredible evening several of us spent last May with Dennis at his bedside - reading poetry, swapping stories and sharing analysis - sprinkled with bursts of laughter into the wee hours of the morning. For many, Dennis was a beacon of 'stubborn hope' in our movement and will be greatly missed. But, let us resolve to commit ourselves to keeping his

spirit alive by continuing the multiple struggles for which he dedicated his life.

---

Briggs Bomba: I just learnt with total sadness of the passing on of Dennis Brutus. I am with Comrade Fatso here in Harare and we are both devastated by this loss of one of the greatest and most principled fighters for justice. He lived a full life and his works will continue to inspire our struggles. I am very thankful that we were able to video skype Denis into Busboys and Poets for what was his last Washington DC performance. Please assure Dennis' family that we are with them in this hour of loss and we wish them all the strength to deal with this loss.

---

Laurence Shoup: I have always admired Dennis, and was fortunate enough to know him briefly when i was a graduate student at Northwestern U. in the early 1970's, we protested the war together, among other things.

---

Yunus Omar: We mourn the passing of Professor Dennis Brutus from our midst, and celebrate a life of immense proportions. Please accept my condolences to you during this sad and reflective time. Professor Brutus' life (many aspects of which will doubtless be explored in greater detail in the weeks and years ahead) impacted on, and will continue to impact on, many lives. Professor Brutus' life and legacies certainly do not need our hagiographical interventions. A life spent in pursuit of justice does not need embellishment to make it worthy. We are reminded of the immensely powerful public stance taken by Professor Brutus on the occasion of his intended induction into the SA Sports Hall of Fame. Hopefully the call made by Professor Brutus on this, and other occasions, will be actualised, i.e. to convene fora (in the arena of sport, et al) that will lay bare the injustices of the past as they continue to be re-articulated in extraordinary ways in the present.

---

Alexander Billet: Reading Dennis Brutus' poetry tells you just about all you need to know about him. A man of deep compassion, an ironclad sense of solidarity, someone whose formidable way with words never managed to overshadow his love for humanity. Perhaps this is why he was never bowed during his life, even as he was incarcerated in South Africa's Robben Island prison for opposing Apartheid... When Apartheid fell, he remained critical of the African National Congress for embracing the harsh neoliberal measures that have continued to keep the South African people oppressed. His kind of unwavering, humanistic radicalism extended to all corners of the globe. One of his most recent appearances, not long before his death from cancer on December 26<sup>th</sup> at the age of 85, was when he called for the "Seattle-ing" of the protests at the recent Copenhagen climate change conference. The handful of times I met Brutus were enough to confirm this impression of him. Kind, upbeat and friendly, he was a man whose words and actions were firmly rooted in the belief that ordinary people can change the world. We would do well to learn from that resolve today.

---

Dan Connell: I first met Dennis in the early 1980s while he was fighting deportation proceedings the Reagan Administration had begun against him on some bizarre technicality that served only to underline the moral bankruptcy of the regime. I believe it was at an anti-apartheid event at which Dennis did a reading from his book "Stubborn Hope," though the venue—like much else from those distant years—escapes me. However, I never got over hearing him speak "Sharpeville" with spell-binding intensity. It closes with:

Remember Sharpeville Remember bullet-in-the-back day

And remember the unquenchable will for freedom. Remember the dead And be glad

I am certainly glad to have traveled with him intermittently as we launched the hybrid humanitarian agency/solidarity committee project we named Grassroots International in 1983—beginning with programs in Eritrea and Lebanon, which I knew from my work, and committing to expand into South Africa as soon as we were able, which as it turned out was at the start of 1986, at the front end of the prolonged "State of Emergency" that for all its horrors signaled the death knell of apartheid. Dennis's contribution to us then and later was the depth and breadth of his political vision and personal commitment, never separable, always inspiring. It was just so last year when he visited my class in African politics at Simmons College, where I now teach. I remember Dennis and am glad.

---

Ernestine Tewah: May his Soul rest in perfect peace. He will fondly be remembered always.

---

Mariette Liefferink: Dennis Brutus was held in the highest esteem by all who knew him. His example will continue to be an inspiration to all of us. In expressing our sorrow we wish to assure you of our solidarity in your struggles.

---

Larry Hildes: Dennis was a wonderful poet, amazing organizer, and a great human being. I feel very privileged to have known him. I first met Dennis at Northwestern back in 1984 when the anti-Apartheid struggle in the US began to pick up steam. During the many weeks we occupied the plaza of the Administration Building trying to force the university to withdraw its investments from companies doing business in Apartheid South Africa. Dennis, who was the in the English Department would come out after his classes were over for the day, and talk about his struggle and the struggle overall, and read poetry as the sun went down. It was an amazing gift. I followed his career as Dennis went on to the University of Pittsburgh to chair the African-American Studies Department, and then returned to South Africa. It was an incredible joy to see him again in Nairobi at the World Social Forum and to hear him speak and read poetry again, and to see him, still embracing the

struggle for justice and freedom, radical as ever. I treasure the now 25 year old copies of "A Simple Lust" and "A Stubborn Hope" and mourn for the loss of a great artist, visionary, organizer and revolutionary. Dennis, where ever you are, may you be at peace, and yet in struggle still. A Luta Continua!

---

David van Wyk: Dennis Brutus has passed and left an indelible mark on our national consciousness. He will always be remembered.

---

Sandy Gauntlett: From someone who was very active in the Halt All Racist Tours campaigns here and especially in the 1981 Springbok Tour campaign, let me express my deep sorrow at the passing of Dennis. There are so few people who manage to maintain their activism beyond the immediate campaign and even less from the 1960s who are still around that every loss is felt around the world. During 1981, I was on the planning committee for the opposition to the tour and I was a marshall on all but one of the marches for a devoted group named after Steve Biko. At the Auckland game, one of the people in my squad suffered a heart attack and later died because the police did not let the ambulance through. There was one game left in the tour and for that game I was inside the game as an infiltrator because I did not want to have another death on my hands. Many of the people here also suffered horrific beatings during the tour. John Minto (the then leader of the movement) was badly beaten during the Hamilton protest and my own lover was thrown through a plate glass window and had more than twenty stitches in his face. I spent the entire three months of the tour being more scared than I had ever been in my life but we all kept going back twice a week. Most of the leaders from that time are still active in various protests and even though now I dont march a lot (I have a heart condition and arthritis) I still do what I can. People like Dennis were an inspiration for so many people to fight back around the world that it is impossible to truly judge the impacts of their lives. Kia Kaha (be strong)

---

Lawrence Africa: I was in his English Class at Paterson High school in 1959 an 1960, and owe him much. I was recently, and I say it very humbly, given a prestige award by NMMU for my contribution to social/educational upliftment in our the Eastern Cape. Inspired by the passion for poetry and social justice of Dennis Brutus. I could not understand it fully then, but to quote lyrics from VINCENT : "now I understand what he tried to say to me, how he suffered for his sanity..."

---

Wed, 12/30/2009 - 10:45 — Jade McClune

**To a Life well Lived**

The life and work of Dennis Brutus will be celebrated. He has stood like a beacon on the shore, casting a light of freedom through so many storms, so many perilous threats to the dream, to the very idea that things can and will be so very different. Dennis inspired great hopes and new possibilities in us as young readers when we were just learning to read the books we were not supposed to see. We will continue to read your poems dear Dennis, through which you showed a little of the magic of poetry, that man can squeeze from mere words, little droplets of love.

Dennis Brutus will be remembered for many things, principally the long-standing struggle; so many pains, burdens of conscience, the nightmarish reality of oppression and the hauntingly beautiful dreams of humanity echo in his poetry and his biography. Though he is not with us anymore to guide the youth with wide gestures and a joke, like a painter with a huge canvass, his spirit is strong and now he oblivious to death. The resonating message that we hear, the central theme of his life work is clear. We pick it up as the theme of our own generation: that without a profound and thorough and deep-going social transformation of the existing social relations, we face our own destruction at the hands of capital.

That he expressed this historical social crisis in art and in deed distinguished Brutus from mediocre word-smiths who stand aside from the day-to-day struggle of the masses. Dennis took sides with the poor and the oppressed, with the lonely and downtrodden. Brutus chose his side, not because it was easy, but because it was good and fine and noble to side with fragile humanity, even in the hour of deepest despair, our Brutus did not abandon his line of march. That is why we will remember him fondly and continue to read his poems and discuss his ideas. Through a life of a persistent rebellion against injustice and oppression, the poet proves that man defines himself and refuses to be what he is forced to, but seeks always to overcome his limitations and insodoing must redefine himself.

Therefore our children and their children will learn the name of the freedom-loving poet Brutus with his rebellious locks and hopefully they will realise the power of the poetry within us all. Of this man we can truly say: 'Comrade Dennis has been a Good Guide to us and will be remembered as one of the Good Ancestors, as a representative of the future society.'

Thank you Comrade Dennis

---

Wed, 12/30/2009 - 19:43 — Paul Geswindt (not verified)

### **Remembering Dennis Brutus**

Paul Geswindt: May the life of Dennis Brutus be remembered and celebrated. As an activist he was an inspiration to many. He was committed and made personal sacrifices. He stood the test of time, remaining focused on the ideal of a better world for all. He did not seem to be pre-occupied by the opportunity cost of being an activist or waiting to be rewarded for his effort when so much still needs to be done. May much good continue to flow from his efforts.

---

Thu, 12/31/2009 - 10:30 —

## ***Against the Current: Remembering Dennis Brutus***

**Steve Bloom** on December 28, 2009

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/current/node/2601>

On December 26, Dennis Brutus, world-renowned South African poet and anti-Apartheid fighter, who spent time in Robben Island prison with Nelson Mandela, died at the age of 85.

Early in this decade, when he was a professor in the Black Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, Dennis Brutus and I were attending the same political conference in that city. We had never met. I approached him, somewhat hesitantly, to share a poem I had written referencing the struggle in South Africa. He read it immediately, and eagerly. Then, to my surprise, he began a conversation as if we were long-time comrades and collaborators.

That, in my experience, was Dennis Brutus summed up: a man who had achieved greatness by any ordinary standard. But the esteem in which he was held by others seemed unimportant to him. He felt, and acted, like an ordinary human being simply doing what needs to be done. He treated others, even strangers, as if that were true as well.

Over the next few years, every time our paths crossed—mostly on his frequent visits to New York City—Dennis would ask me what poetry event was being organized that he might participate in. It was, in part, as a result of his urging that I organized the very first “Activist Poets’ Roundtable” at the US Social Forum in Atlanta in 2007. He also helped launch the Roundtable in New York City in March 2008, after the annual “Left Forum” where Dennis appeared on several panels.

It was at this time that I really got to know him well. He had injured his foot, somehow, on the eve of the Left Forum and was having difficulty walking. I spent that weekend driving him back and forth between his hotel and the conference site, also making sure he had the help he needed getting around at the conference itself (and in his hotel). Then, when his foot did not improve, he accepted an offer of a place to stay for a few days in Brooklyn, where he wouldn’t have to manage on his own.

He and I spent a lot of time together during those few days, in particular waiting for medical attention at the Kings County Hospital emergency room. And he told me stories about his life in the struggle against Apartheid. I will never forget the chuckle in his voice as he talked about the time he was shot in the back while attempting to escape from the police. He could laugh, too, about the absurdity of breaking rocks at Robben Island prison, the lengths to which the Apartheid regime had gone to suppress dissent. And yet it was all for naught (the source, I assume, of his mirth). The regime could not survive, no matter what brutal measures it resorted to. The people of South Africa were too strong.

During this entire time, as his foot at first got worse then gradually began to feel better, the biggest concern he expressed to me was that he shouldn’t become too much of a burden.

In that same month we drove together to Washington, DC, for the first “Split This Rock” poetry festival. Dennis found it impossible to attend such an event without making it an opportunity for a little political organizing. He decided, on the way down, that we should use the festival as the occasion for a declaration of poets calling for peace and social justice in the world. And so an “Appeal to Poets, Writers, and All Creative Artists” from the festival, for actions in March 2009 which would “Speak Art to Power,” was born. In the end it was signed by a majority of those in attendance at the festival.

The overwhelming majority of young activists in the struggle for a better world believe that they are committed for life. Very few, however, actually fulfill this promise which they make to themselves. How many who were Dennis Brutus's comrades in the anti-Apartheid struggle, for example, ended up compromising their commitment to human liberation once the overthrow of Apartheid was achieved and power transferred into their hands? Dennis, however, remained committed to the poor and oppressed of South Africa and of the world until his final days. He was constitutionally incapable of doing otherwise.

It has always struck me as one of the sad ironies of our existence that we can never, truly, count anyone in the ranks of the very special few who fulfill their youthful pledge—to themselves and to their own humanity—until they are no longer with us. Dennis fulfilled his pledge. He is no longer with us. The world will miss him.

I will miss him, too.

Steve Bloom  
December 2009

---

## **Dennis Brutus, 1924-2009: The Man Who Would Reclaim Sports**

Thu, 12/31/2009

Dave Zirin's tribute to Dennis Brutus

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-zirin/this-is-no-time-for-rest\\_b\\_407292.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-zirin/this-is-no-time-for-rest_b_407292.html)

December 30, 200

It was 1976, and the Summer Olympics in Montreal had improbably become ground zero in the struggle against apartheid. Several dozen African nations threatened to boycott if the International Olympic Committee dared allow South Africa to be a part of the games. Montreal's athletic jamboree was in jeopardy and the cause of all the tumult, according to Sports Illustrated, was a diminutive South African poet the magazine called "the Dark Genius of Dissent." His name was Dennis Brutus. Brutus organized entire blocks of the world around a simple question: how can the Olympics say they stand for "brotherhood" and fair play if apartheid nations could join the festivities? It worked. The "Dark Genius" shamed the shameless and changed international sports forever. Over the course of decades, as a dissident, refugee, and political prisoner, Brutus advanced this simple athletic argument. The organizations he founded, the South African Sports Association (SASA) in 1958 and its successor, the South African Nonracial Olympic Committee, (SANROC) used it to hammer critical nails in apartheid's coffin.

For Brutus, this work in the sports world was merely an extension of a lifetime organizing for racial and economic justice. His death on December 26<sup>th</sup> after a long bout with cancer has created an incalculable void. Not merely because he was beloved as the "singing voice of the South African Liberation Movement"; not merely because Brutus held a reservoir of political lessons; but because he remained a tireless agitator for justice. Days before the recent international climate talks in Copenhagen, the ailing Brutus called the proceedings a sham, saying, "We are in serious difficulty all over the planet. We are going to say to the world: There's too much of profit, too much of greed,

too much of suffering by the poor. ... The people of the planet must be in action.”

He also never stopped holding up the dreamy ideals of sport against reality’s harsh light. Up until the final days of his life, while the leaders of South Africa celebrated the coming arrival of the 2010 World Cup, Brutus was in the streets, protesting the demolition of low income housing to make way for soccer’s international party. In December 2007, he publicly rejected induction in the South African Sports Hall of Fame, saying to 1,000 onlookers,

Being inducted to a sports hall of fame is an honor under most circumstances. In my case the honor is for helping rid South African sport of racism, making it open to all. So I cannot be party to an event where unapologetic racists are also honored, or to join a hall of fame alongside those who flourished under racist sport. Their inclusion is a deception because of their unfair advantage, as so many talented black athletes were excluded from sport opportunities. Moreover, this hall ignores the fact that some sportspersons and administrators defended, supported and legitimized apartheid. There are indeed some famous South Africans who still belong in a sports hall of infamy. They still think they are sports heroes, without understanding and making amends for the context in which they became so heroic, namely a crime against humanity. So, case closed. It is incompatible to have those who championed racist sport alongside its genuine victims. It’s time—indeed long past time—for sports truth, apologies and reconciliation.

I had the privilege to interview Brutus extensively three years ago about why he came to see sports as an arena to fight for justice. His answer was, I have come to learn, typical Dennis Brutus: refusing to be anything less than blunt and provocative. I asked him whether he agreed with me that sports could still be a lever to change the world. Instead of cheerleading the notion, he said to me,

“My own sense is that sports has less capacity now to change society than it had before. For instance, the degree that sports has become commercialized. The degree that your loyalty is no longer to a club like it used to be because guys are bought and sold like so many slaves....The other thing that really scares me is the way that sport is used to divert people’s attention. Critical political issues in their own lives. Their living conditions. The Romans used to say this is the way to run an empire. Give them bread give them circuses. Now they don’t even give you bread and the circuses are lousy...”

But amidst his critiques, Brutus was never a pessimist, only a “critical optimist.” How else to explain that in his next breath, he also said to me,

“We must however realize that the power and reach of sports is undeniable...It’s kind of a megaphone. People will hear [political athletes] because their voices are amplified. Not always in a very informed way. Of course when there are exceptions, it can produce magic: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for instance or Muhammad Ali. So it does help and they do have that megaphone: but all-important is content. All-important is politics. That is decisive.”

There are ways to honor Dennis Brutus and his memory. Read aloud his poetry at the first opportunity. Keep his words alive to “produce magic” for a new generation. Keep fighting for a global justice. And keep fighting to reclaim sports. As people are criminalized in Vancouver to make way for the 2010 Olympics, as the poor are dispossessed in the name of the 2010 World Cup, we should proudly claim Dennis’s well-worn place at the march, never allowing those in power the comfort of indifference. As Dennis said to me when I asked him how he could stay so active into his 80s, “This is no time for laurels. This is no time for rest.”

---

[To purchase Dennis's brilliant collection, Poetry and Protest, go to the below link.  
<http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Poetry-and-Protest-A-Dennis-Brutus-Reader>]

---

---

**P.S.**

\* As collected on Links:

<http://links.org.au/node/1432>