

## OBITUARY: JOHN DANIEL

John Daniel, former professor of Political Science at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), died at his home on 25 July 2014 after a brave struggle with cancer. He will be remembered for the major contribution to political science in South Africa, his activism in the struggle against *apartheid*, for his inspirational teaching, his work as a progressive editor, and for his important research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

John was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1944 and grew up in Nottingham Road. His father taught at Kearsney College in Natal, this enabling him to attend the school as a scholarship boy. Although in later years he retained a strong affection for the school, his being a relatively poor pupil in a highly privileged environment was to awaken his sense of injustice. He acquired an initial interest in politics through his father, a United Party committee man, and was to carry this through to his university career, which started at the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal in 1962. Studying politics and history, he joined the student representative council (SRC), and became active in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). In 1965 NUSAS had invited Robert Kennedy to visit South Africa to deliver the Annual Academic and Freedom Lecture which had been established by the open universities. Much to the government's discomfort and NUSAS' delighted surprise, Kennedy accepted, and Vorster took his revenge by banning Ian Robertson, the NUSAS president. John was thereupon catapulted into his place as Acting President, in which role he delivered an inspirational speech in thanks to Kennedy after the latter had spoken in June 1966 in Jameson Hall at the University of Cape Town. Subsequently John was elected again as President of NUSAS in 1968, during which time he played a key role in containing a move by right wing students, notably in Pietermaritzburg and at Rhodes, to disaffiliate their SRCs from the national organisation. Eddie Webster tells the tale (with much laughter) how on one occasion, the NUSAS team locked one of the right wing leaders in a toilet, so that he would not be present to influence the vote on disaffiliation when it was taken!

Almost inevitably, John's radical activities earned him official displeasure, and the government confiscated his passport. He then obtained a British passport, and left for the USA for graduate work, thereby becoming a prohibited immigrant. Over the next six years, he acquired an MA in International and Area (African) Studies at Western Michigan University (1970), before obtaining another MA, in Political Science, at the State University of New York (1972) and proceeding to his PhD, awarded by the same institu-

tion, in 1975. His thesis was on 'Radical Resistance to Minority Rule in South Africa, 1906-65'.

In late 1974, with his first wife Judy and his young son Jeremy, John relocated to Swaziland. Initially he taught at Waterford College, famous for its role in pioneering non-racial education. But in 1975, he accepted an invitation to establish a politics department at the Manzini College of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS). Shortly before his death, John was to write an important memoir on 'Teaching Politics in Exile' in *Politikon*, making a major contribution to the history of an institution which was to play a major role in educating the region's future political elite. Suffice it to say here that John threw himself enthusiastically into a project which spanned the three campuses of devising a curriculum which, versed in the radical political economy of the day, was appropriate to the teaching of a politics of liberation. It was in Swaziland, too, where John was to develop his gifts as a teacher, and to earn the long-lasting admiration and affection of his students.

While in Swaziland, John became actively involved with the underground work of the African National Congress (ANC). Although not openly aligned, he was one of those who provided clandestine support. In part, this was facilitated by his chairing the Swaziland scholarship committee for South African refugees, which involved his working closely with the Geneva-based World University Service. Such activities attracted the unwelcome attentions of the Swaziland government, which in 1981 had entered a secret security agreement with South Africa. When in turn, Mozambique signed the Nkomati Accord, more ANC cadres were relocated to Swaziland, where the government was by now acutely disturbed by the influx of students from South Africa. A clampdown upon South African students and activists followed, and in 1985 John was expelled from the country.

Initially he moved with his second wife, Cathy Connolly, whom he had met in Swaziland, to a research post at the Free University of Amsterdam. However, shortly afterwards, John accepted an invitation to become an African editor of the independent radical publishing house, Zed Books, whose guiding spirit was Rob Molteno, one of his former colleagues in NUSAS. John had all the qualities an academic publisher and editor needs — passion combined with sympathy for writers and commitment to quality. Looking back on the years he spent at Zed, Molteno recalled that John brought two principles to bear on what books should be published. The first was that Zed should be open to all writers who were involved in the struggle for liberation, regardless of their political affiliation; the second, was that Zed should reach out to audiences wider than the normal academic and student communities. Under his tutelage, Zed proceeded to produce numerous im-

portant texts — many of them highly controversial — by a remarkable array of authors drawn from a wide variety of progressive persuasions. These contributed forcefully to debates about the character that the liberation struggle was assuming and the sort of society that a free South Africa should be.

In January 1990, De Klerk was to make his famous speech, unbanning the ANC and a host of other organisations. Within a year, John returned to South Africa. Initially, he took up a Senior Lectureship in Politics and International Relations at Rhodes University. In 1993 he became Professor at UDW, subsequently playing a principled and steadying role in turbulent campus politics. It was from UDW that he was seconded to become a Senior Researcher with the TRC, work to which he brought his characteristic passion and commitment. Indeed, he was later to regard the period he spent at the TRC as in many ways the culmination of his career. Fittingly, given his time in Swaziland, he chose to focus upon the human rights violations committed by the *apartheid* state outside South Africa, and his particular contribution was to highlight the fact that the regime wreaked more damage outside South Africa than inside. He was to go on to write important sections of the TRC's Final Report, notably the Historical Introduction, that on 'Gross Human Rights Violations outside South Africa, 1960-94' and the Findings and Conclusion in Volume 5. These are major contributions which will be commented upon by scholars for many years to come. Yet although his work at the TRC allowed him to express his passion for recording the brutalities of the *apartheid* regime, it was also to lead to his embrace of reconciliation as the basis for nation-building and democracy. Subsequently, John was to make further important contributions to the study of transitional justice, locating the experiences of the TRC into a wider international context.

After returning to UDW, John joined the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) as Research Director in Democracy and Governance and Director of Publications at HSRC Press. In the latter capacity, he was charged by the CEO, Mark Orkin, with transforming HSRC Press, hitherto a profoundly dreary enterprise devoted to internal publication, into a genuine academic press. Working closely with Gary Rosenberg, Karen Bruns and others, John did just that. Bringing all the experience he had learnt at Zed to bear on this new project, he rapidly opened up the press to the publication of books by all comers, not just those from HSRC. Today, the HSRC remains a major academic publisher, and a lasting testament to his passions, enthusiasm and academic commitment to furthering debates about the making of a better South Africa.

It was at the HSRC also that John became a founding editor of the *State of the Nation* series of volumes of original essays on contemporary South Africa. This series caught the imagination of not only academics but a

wider interested public, and rapidly became the best-selling title in the HSRC's catalogue. While contributing to issues more widely, John was to earn a particular reputation for leading research upon South Africa's post-*apartheid* corporate expansion into Africa. Typically, in each of these volumes, he worked closely with junior colleagues, providing for some of them their first publishing experience. Alas, the strident critical analysis of the *State of the Nation* series all became a bit too much for the post-Orkin leadership of the HSRC, and after four volumes, the editorial team was summarily dismissed. However, after a decent interval during which publication of successive issues of *State of the Nation* faltered, John joined a new editorial team in launching the *New South African Review*, spearheaded from within the Sociology Department at the University of the Witwatersrand, and now published annually by Wits University Press. Again the intention was to publish committed but high quality scholarship devoted to charting and furthering the course of a socially inclusive democracy in South Africa.

Upon being compulsorily retired by the HSRC, John became Academic Director of the US-based School for International Training's programme in Reconciliation and Development. This was a last post which he filled with enormous zest. Successive cohorts of American students were to benefit, not merely from John's brilliant teaching and mentorship, but by his enthusiasm for leading them down the byways of South African history, politics and society. In particular, it allowed him to share his passion for KwaZulu-Natal: from the markets of Durban through to the famous Inanda College for Girls, the Gandhi settlement and to the prison in Eshowe.

John leaves a remarkable legacy behind him: as teacher, scholar and activist. But he will also be remembered for the person he was. Kind, funny, and supportive to all those who knew him; always active and engaged; totally without pomp; always enthusiastic about whatever he was doing — not to mention his mischievous love for scurrilous gossip! Political Science in South Africa and well beyond remains in his debt: not merely for his extensive publication record, but for his wider role as variously, a member of editorial boards (notably of *Transformation*), external examiner, and commentator upon current affairs. Sad though it is that he has gone, let us remember John as one who lived his life to the full, with much fun and laughter.

John leaves his wife, Cathy, his daughter Lesley, his son Jay, and Jeremy, his son by his first marriage, and two grandchildren.

**Roger Southall**