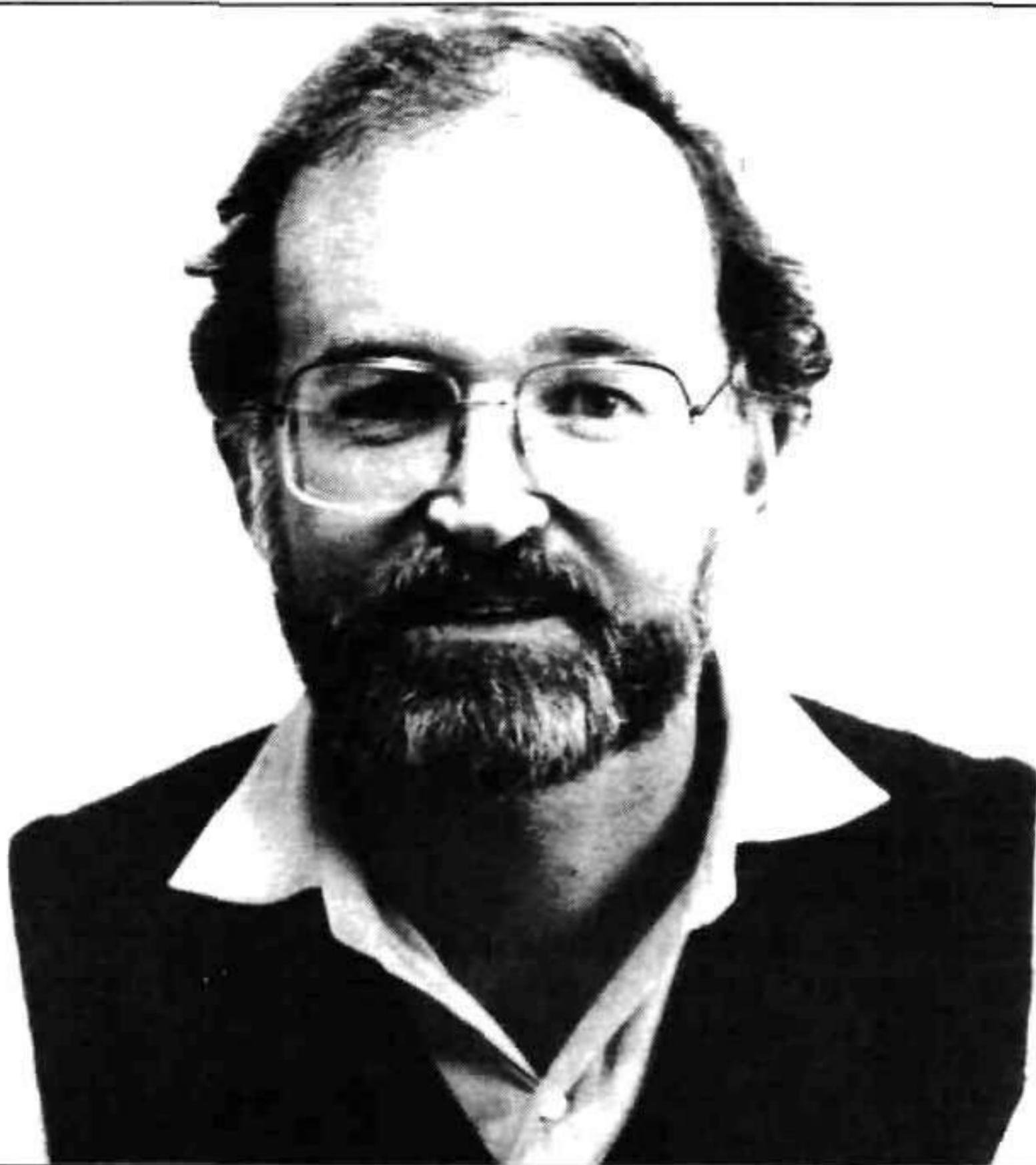


A tribute to David Webster

The death of David Webster on 1 May 1989 marks the latest in a long line of as yet unsolved assassinations of anti-apartheid activists. It is clear from the overwhelming response to his murder, that David played an important role in the struggle for a non-racial democratic South Africa, touching the lives and work of many individuals and organisations.



David Webster - tireless in his attempts to highlight the injustices of detention

His work in the DPSC and DEW

David was tireless in his work for detainees and their families. He was an active member of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) where he fought to improve the conditions under which those detained were imprisoned.

David's energy, skills and commitment helped to broaden the DPSC's original focus from a human rights group to an organisation which aligned itself with the mass democratic movement. He contributed to many anti-apartheid publications and spoke at many grass-roots meetings. His humility and common touch endeared him to all South Africans.

In 1984 and 1985 he presented written and oral evidence on human rights violations in South Africa to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Ironically, he became an expert in extra-legal repression perpetrated by vigilantes, hit squads and assassins.

In the mid-1980s, when the number of detentions rocketed from hundreds to tens of thousands a year, David helped the DPSC's Johannesburg advice office to respond to the overwhelming demands for assistance. After the DPSC was effectively banned on February 24 1988, David was among those who helped to found Detainees' Education and Welfare (DEW) which sought to provide material and moral support for those detained.

David worked hard to provide direct material aid to detainees. For example, he helped collect and distribute running shoes, tracksuits, games, shorts and T-shirts for detainees. Sports clubs were asked to request members to donate their shoes. Runners were asked to remember that while they had the freedom to move, others were confined to cells. Through such actions, David's work helped to make the white community aware of the system of detention.

He was instrumental in organising tea parties for released detainees and the relatives of those still incarcerated. At the last three parties, members of the Security Police, the South African Police and the South African Defence Force interrupted the events in large numbers. More than once David was told that he would be held responsible for anything that occurred at these parties.

An academic for society

At the time of his death, David was a senior lecturer in social anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. David was an example of how academics could use their skills for society at large. He was unanimously elected honorary vice-president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) at every congress since 1982 and was a well known political figure on many campuses. David told students:

"We must recognise that the university is an integral part of South African society ... we must fight for the university to serve the needs of the poor, the illiterate and the powerless" (NUSAS July Conference 1981).

David saw the importance of organising academics in support of the democratic movement. He was the key figure behind the formation of the Conference Academics for a Democratic Society (CADS) which aimed to build unity with students in fighting apartheid and raising debate about the role of the university in a transitional society.

His role as a white democrat

Although he was a widely respected academic, David devoted much of his time to anti-apartheid work. He believed that the Freedom Charter provides the framework for a just and democratic future in South Africa and saw the democratic movement of mass-based community, youth, student and worker organisations as the key force for making such a future a reality.

In his work in the white community he was committed to building people's understanding of the mass struggles taking place in the townships and showed that a future without apartheid was not to be feared, but to be fought for. To this end David was involved in numerous support campaigns for workers on strike and was a founder member of the United Democratic Front - affiliate, the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC). He was also active in the UDF's Call to Whites Campaign. In 1985 he was involved in the formation of the Concerned Citizens Group which sought to bring together a broad range of white organisations to protest the violation of human rights under the state of emergency. Two years later he was elected to the first executive of the Five Freedoms Forum, a coalition of white liberal and left organisations.

Press statement

The Editorial Collective of *Critical Health* joins those individuals and organisations who experienced the political resolve and humanity of this fallen comrade in condemning his senseless assassination.

The following statement was released to the press: "As members of the Editorial Collective of *Critical Health* journal, we condemn the murder of David Webster. We see this murder as part and parcel of the repression and violence perpetrated against the oppressed on a large scale.

We would like to pay tribute to David as a democrat who taught us a great deal about

the causes of ill health, and about the diseases of inequality and oppression in South Africa. His work in campaigning for detainees' rights and health, and for the abolition of the apartheid system as a whole, has focussed health workers' attention and action on these issues.

In David we are losing a respected adviser, contributor, supporter and friend. We will honour his contribution by attempting to take it further. Hamba Kahle David!



A mother holds a photo of her detained child - David spent much of his time helping detainees and their families