

A tribute to Comrade Barbara Hogan

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Barbara Hogan, our comrade, is retiring from government ending a very important chapter in SA history. When Barbara was appointed Minister of Health in 2008, most people did not know her. This tribute is written because she is a remarkable (almost anonymous) leader, a White person from a working-class background in the liberation movement and a woman in a male-dominated environment.

Barbara Hogan's political work inspired many generations of activists who knew her and those who learnt of her contribution to our struggle for freedom. Today, her knowledge and experience remains an important asset for activists and public servants.

Barbara grew up in the East Rand in an ordinary non-political working class family and community that had few economic privileges. She enrolled at Wits University to pursue a development studies qualification. There she joined a group of students who were actively opposed to the apartheid government including those who showed their opposition to apartheid by becoming conscientious objectors. Many of her comrades were to become instrumental ECC campaigners, opinion makers and public officials in a new democratic South Africa.

A newspaper clipping of 17 June 1976 shows Barbara defiantly marching with other activists protesting at Wits University the day before, leading her to join a banned ANC. She became active in the trade union movement in Johannesburg. Her underground ANC work resulted in harassment, arrest, and torture by the Security Police. In 1982, Barbara Hogan was detained and held in solitary confinement for a year on the grounds of 'furthering the aims of a banned organisation'. Her close friend Neil Aggett, organiser for the Food and Canning Workers' Union was also detained and murdered in detention.

Barbara was prosecuted for high treason. Particularly egregious was the prosecutor's spiteful insistence on a longer prison term to actually avoid her being able to bear children and have a family. Barbara Hogan was the first woman in SA sentenced to ten years imprisonment for high treason. Ironically, this first sentencing of a white woman for high treason was an affirmation of the ANC's non-racial struggle, and it was of particular concern to the apartheid government.

Barbara played a significant role in mobilising progressive White support against apartheid. Her public work was based on the patient rebuilding of union organisation among African workers. While in prison, Hogan pursued her studies further and obtained qualifications in Accounting and Economics.

During her prison years, she spent time in the Fort women's jail, now the site of Constitutional Hill and then Pretoria Central, separated from other African women prisoners ? so often it was a lonely and isolated term. Her battles with the prison authorities assisted by renowned human rights lawyers and international aid NGOs and remarkable attention to detail on challenging the rules of prolonged incarceration are legendary. Joined sporadically by various other women political prisoners who were serving shorter terms over the years, Barbara was the mainstay and here she led other prisoners ? often a beacon of hope for them.

In 1990, Barbara was released along with many other political prisoners. She was thrust into organising the ANC in Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) now Gauteng. This was the most difficult time for the ANC in

Johannesburg, East Rand, Alexandra and Soweto ? it was the time of Inkatha's brutal civil war against the democratic movement. Barbara Hogan was elected the first regional secretary of the ANC in the PWV region and played a significant role in building the newly unbanned organisation. She also served on the ANC NEC in this period.

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