

Phiroshaw Camay - Obituary

Phiroshaw Camay died in Johannesburg on 1 October 2016, aged 69. He lived a life full of compassion and touched many along the way. Jim teWaterNaude remembers him, and tells us more about his remarkable achievements.

"I'm sitting alone here at Mike's Kitchen in Parktown as I write this, reminiscing about PC and regretful that he and I will never meet here again to discuss pressing issues. Those pressing issues were many, from pride in our children, to low-flying en route to Kuruman, to asbestos and silicosis.

I showed one of the waitron staff a picture I had of him. Yes, he hadn't been here for some time, why did I ask? He was a dear friend of mine and had died recently. Hawu! One by one, the huddled group checking out the handsome bearded face on my cellphone grew. Yes, he used to come in the afternoons, after the lunchtime rush. Sorry. Shock! He would sit at table 4 or 7, over there in the garden, and order green tea, always healthy. He was a good man.

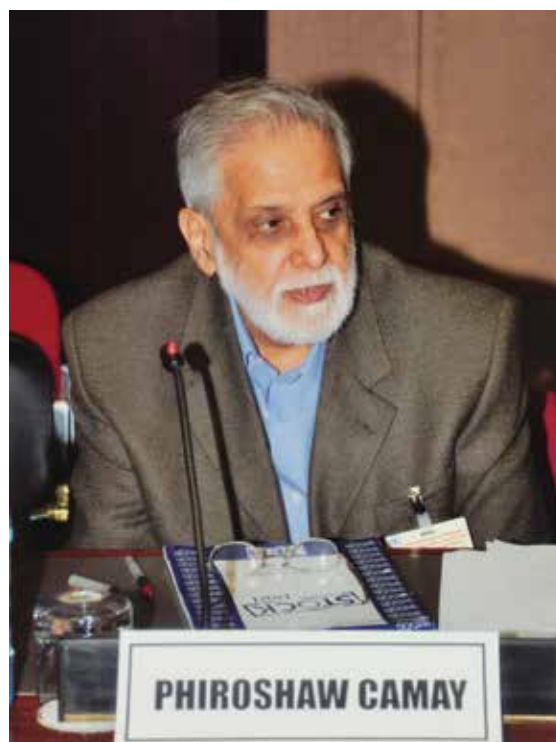
He must have been a professor from Wits they said. The group held the phone gingerly as they stood awkwardly together wondering what had happened and relating their own truths about him. Sadly, I repeated what little I knew, that he had not recovered from a heart operation. Thanking them, I left, but somehow found myself retelling the story to the guard at the entrance who recalled him and his iconic silver Opel Corsa sedan.

Earlier this year, when we visited Kuruman to discuss establishing an asbestos memorial there, Phiroshaw and I conspired to have a blue, brown and white coloured cocktail, representing the different asbestos types and our partial victories over this deadly mineral. We never had that drink, but we now probably do have a name for it. So here's to you, my erstwhile colleague, comrade and friend:

Phiroshaw Camay was a remarkable man. Widely read, intellectual, analytical, warm, considered, private, a fierce champion of human dignity and the rights of workers, a fellow human being who one felt proud and affirmed to know.

He was author or co-author of twelve books (*The People Shall Govern, Advocacy in Southern Africa, and Race, Repression and Resistance*, among others) and eight election management manuals, as well as many journal articles.

At the time of his untimely death, he was Chair of the Community Education Computer Society, the Network Against Child Labour, Sci-Bono, and the Kgalagadi Relief Trust (KRT). He was past Chair of Operation Hunger, the South African Association of Water Utilities, the Joint Enrichment Project, Rand Water, and the Asbestos Relief Trust (ART) and a previous council member of the Engineering Council of South Africa. He was Director of Co-operative for Research and Education from 1990 until the time of his death. In the 10 years from 1980, he was



General Secretary of Council of Unions of South Africa and the National Council of Trade Unions. During this time he wrote, edited and printed trade union manuals, workbooks, and the monthly publication, *Izwilethu (Our Voice)*. In the run-up to our first democratic elections in 1993 and 1994, he established and was in charge of peace monitoring in several South African townships, and co-ordinated peace efforts through operation centres during various marches, as well as the funerals of ANC leaders, Chris Hani and Oliver Tambo.

As trustee of both the ART and KRT, the major role he played in the establishment of the Palliative Care Professional Nurse for the Kuruman area was visionary and inspiring. The Trustees recognised that sufferers of mesothelioma required more than a compensation payment, and created this new role as their largest social responsibility investment over the past decade. Phiroshaw's contributions at the Trustees meetings were eclectic, drawing on his vast experience, and always impressive in his insistence on standing up for impoverished communities and people.

We are now poorer for our loss, but much richer for having known and worked with Phiroshaw. We mourn together with his family.

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