

# A tribute to Professor Jock McCulloch in the time of the South African gold mining settlement

*Dr Sophia Kisting's address to participants at an educational seminar held in honour of Jock McCulloch on 17 May 2018 at the University of Cape Town (UCT)*

**A**t the outset, I would like us to observe a minute of silence in memory of the many men and women who have lost their health and lost their lives in the course of duty and in the course of earning a living.

My sincere appreciation to Professor Mohamed Jeebhay and his team, including Mary Miller, at UCT for helping to honour, remember and pay tribute to one of the most significant supporters of social justice within the occupational and environmental health field, Prof Jock McCulloch. Amazingly, he was an historian and not a medical professional as many may have expected. Prof. Jock McCulloch was a writer and emeritus professor of history in the School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University), Melbourne, Australia. He was a great friend of the people and especially of the workers and communities of South Africa.

Jock was a son of the soil from Australia, who died on 18 January 2018 of mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the lungs caused by asbestos. He was diagnosed with mesothelioma in April 2017 and indicated very clearly, before his death, that the most likely source of exposure to asbestos was in South Africa, about 20 years earlier when he was doing research in the Northern Cape province for his book *Asbestos Blues*. What an agonising irony of history that the blue or crocidolite asbestos Jock was doing historic research on, to improve the lives of communities and workers, was the asbestos responsible for his death.

Jock's PhD thesis, most remarkably, was on Frantz Fanon, a medical doctor from Martinique in the West Indies who specialised in psychiatry in France. He subsequently worked in Algeria during the Algerian liberation war against French occupation. During the struggles of our students in various institutes of learning over many years, we so often heard reference being made to Frantz Fanon. Two of his books, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, remain much-treasured sources of intellectual inspiration and deep analysis of our common human condition. His work still inspires and sustains the quest among especially young people to find meaning in the world around them, as it sustained many of us during the darkest days of apartheid.

Jock's PhD on Frantz Fanon explains to me so much about the deep understanding Jock had of the South African psyche: the economic, social and political landscapes shaped by colonialism, legalised racial segregation, enforced division, inequality and how all of us have been negatively affected by it. However, it can also spur us on to find inclusive and enabling ways to overcome the legacy of our past, and many have done so. Jock, as a young researcher in the Australian Parliament, notably worked for a time amongst the aboriginal people in his country,

and he wrote about the devastating physical and psychological effects of Agent Orange on Australian veterans of the Vietnam war.

*Asbestos Blues*, which is about South Africa's crocidolite asbestos mines, was published in 2002, and Jock dedicated the book to Dr Pavla Miller in Melbourne, Australia, and Prof. Tony Davies in South Africa. Pavla was Jock's long-standing partner and Tony Davies is a former Executive Director of the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH). Tony Davies has made a significant contribution to furthering our understanding of the legacy of asbestos use but, in particular, he tried to shine a light on the importance of lowering silica dust levels in the gold mines of South Africa.

Jock met Geoffrey Tweedale in 2000 at the World Asbestos Conference in Osasco, Brazil, organised by Fernanda Gianassi and Laurie Kazan-Allen. Jock and Geoffrey wrote the award-winning book about the asbestos industry, *Defending the Indefensible*, which was informed very much by the realisation that most of the world's asbestos was mined after 1960, when the world already knew about the link between asbestos exposure and mesothelioma. Their book set out to try and explore why this happened and, in the process, they explored the sophisticated and often non-transparent ways in which the asbestos industry distorted facts to continue to make profits.

Jock was honoured posthumously with the 2018 Dr Irving Selikoff Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedication to increasing awareness about asbestos, and for his outstanding contributions to exposing the psychosocial, political, and labour abuses of the asbestos trade. Pavla said: "Jock recognised that the key to ridding the world of asbestos involved an international effort...against a ruthless global industry. If Jock could be with us his message would be simple: asbestos products are used in settings where consumers expect to be protected. They are not. What has been shown to make the biggest difference in controlling health risks is banning asbestos mining and the use of new products."

## WOMEN AND ASBESTOS RISK WORK

Part of the tragedy for women who worked in the asbestos mines is that most cannot prove they engaged in risk work, as required for compensation purposes. Many are therefore not entitled to compensation. In addition, there is currently no compensation under the statutory compensation system for environmental mesothelioma. Given that asbestos is the only known cause of this deadly cancer, all cases of mesothelioma should be considered for compensation. This is part of the quest for social justice for those who are suffering, having been exposed to asbestos in the environment contaminated by asbestos mining, and its many uses in the past.



**At the the World Asbestos Conference in Osasco, Brazil in 2000:**  
**Back: Daniel Berman**  
**Middle row: left to right: Jock McCulloch, Sophie Kisting, Fernanda Giannasi, Vilton Raile, Laurie Kazan-Allen, Kyla Sentes, and Jerrold Abraham**  
**Front: Barry Castleman**

*Photographer unknown*

## RESEARCHING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN THE GOLD MINING INDUSTRY

In 2012 *South African Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis* was published. In this well-researched book Jock revealed how the gold mining industry, in collusion with a minority apartheid state, was hiding the true epidemic of silicosis and tuberculosis related to silica dust exposure for the better part of a century.

In his 2016 Journal article, *Sleights of hand: South Africa's gold mines and occupational disease*, Jock provides a detailed account of how the South African mining industry, in the past, tried to minimise the risk of both silicosis and tuberculosis among black mineworkers. His research indicates that South Africa's gold mines were the first to compensate silicosis and tuberculosis as occupational diseases. Jock further indicates that the gold mines were also the first to introduce statutory medical surveillance. He found that, in spite of these innovations, the health of gold mineworkers was not protected, as is evidenced from many studies indicating a high burden of respiratory diseases which are often uncompensated. Workers sick from these diseases were almost routinely sent back to their rural homes once they were too ill to work, where they often died in poverty.

## THE LAST BOOK JOCK WAS WORKING ON

Pavla wrote the following about the book Jock was working on when he became ill: "Until late November (2017) Jock was able to work on the manuscript of [a book dealing with] gold mining, migrant labour and corruption of scientific knowledge in South Africa." Pavla worked on this manuscript with Jock and described it as "another lasting testament to his remarkable contribution to historical scholarship and the fight of workers and communities for justice."

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOLD MINE CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT

It is only fitting that we have this memorial service at a time when a settlement was reached within the gold mining industry. On 3 May 2018, an historic event took place in Johannesburg, in Egoli, in that city of gold. There was an announcement of a settlement agreement between six gold mining houses and lawyers representing workers sick from silicosis and tuberculosis. Our Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, was present, as

well as Richard Spoor and his team, Janet Love from the Legal Resources Centre, and her team, who worked on silicosis. Charles Abrahams and his team who worked on tuberculosis were present as well. The inclusion of tuberculosis is historic and very significant, and we need to thank Charles Abrahams and his team for their absolute determination and dedication to the cause of workers suffering from tuberculosis, following exposure to silica dust.

The most important step forward will be to get the money into the hands of mineworkers and their families. That will require determination, courage and an inclusive approach, where we need to live the words of one of the great leaders of Africa, Amílcar Cabral, who said: "Tell no lies and claim no easy victories." Should South Africans fail to get the money to the workers in South and southern Africa, whom history has disadvantaged in such a cruel manner, then history will most certainly not absolve us.

## THE FUTURE

It is incumbent on us who have learnt from Jock and others, and who know the suffering of workers and their families, to continue to research, to organise and to build unity of purpose across all barriers to prevent current mineworkers from getting sick as we move forward. This means concerted efforts are needed to reduce silica dust. Let us, this generation and generations to come, learn from this dark history and prevent a repetition. It can only be done if we work in a transparent, inclusive manner with unity of purpose, to protect the human rights of every man and woman within the world of work and in society.

The work of bringing a measure of justice to those already suffering from asbestos-related diseases, silica-related diseases and tuberculosis requires an inclusive approach, and many very good people contribute to that. We salute the workers and their organisations, the dedicated NGOs, the community members, the lawyers, the epidemiologists, the internationalists, the medical professionals, and the men and women in the mining houses who are prepared to be part of a lasting solution. The complimentary role played by so many different people of goodwill makes it possible to hope that we are standing on the threshold of a dream that a silica-free and an asbestos-free work environment is possible.

Here, I want to remember Mr Stephen Kotoloane who is a humble son of Gamopedi village near Kuruman. He was the Chairperson of the Asbestos

Interest Group (AIG). Together, we presented to Parliament in 2000 on the problems faced by asbestos-exposed communities. He tirelessly worked to share information with villagers on protecting themselves from asbestos exposure, especially school children. Stephen died two years ago, soon after he presented at a mesothelioma conference. The AIG continues to operate and Stephen's daughter, Prudence Kotoloane, assists in taking the asbestos work forward.

Jock has left us a gift of immense proportions. The very reason for the existence of a university is, in part, to create and share knowledge in an accessible and equitable manner: "To follow knowledge like a sinking star beyond the outmost bound of human thought" in the words of the poet, Tennyson. Who better to emulate than those who live for the ideal that our common humanity can be strengthened, through shining a spotlight on toxic substances that harm the health and safety of workers and communities?

What do we do with the legacy of Jock McCullough, as it pertains to the historic documentation of a greater truth? How do we change the way history is recorded and shine a spotlight on the conditions under which workers have to work, often to fulfil the profit motive? In 2015, I listened in amazement how a South Korean poet opened a global conference on occupational health by lamenting the manner in which the profit motive overtook our common humanity. In a sense, he was describing the spirit

of Ubuntu we know so well in many of our countries in Africa. Dare we allow that spirit of interdependence and respect to imbue our workplaces, as part of our African reality?

We thank Jock and other good men and women for having selected to share their research and love of documents to help us understand our own history better, and help create a gentler, more just and more equal world of work and society. In a recent visit to Dublin, I noted this quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu on international solidarity: "Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value."

Thank you, Pavla, and thank you, Australia, for having shared Jock with us in South Africa. As they will say in the asbestos-contaminated villages within the blue asbestos belt that inspired Jock to write *Asbestos Blues...* *Kelibogile Jock. Hamba kahle.*

Please see link below for the recording of this seminar:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7FOyqrTEQZN/S7MEWphqCOA/videos>

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## Phiroshaw Camay Virtual Asbestos Library to be launched

In remembrance of Mr Phiroshaw Camay's contribution to the fight against asbestos and diseases associated with exposure, the Kgalagadi Relief Trust (KRT) and the Asbestos Relief Trust (ART), in collaboration with the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), is setting up a virtual library in his name. This is fitting in that Mr Camay started his working career as a librarian. Phiroshaw Camay (or PC) passed away on 1 October 2016, and was featured in an obituary in the Nov/Dec 2016 issue of this Journal.

The Phiroshaw Camay Virtual Asbestos Library (PC-VAL) will be comprised of literature concerned with asbestos in southern Africa. The topics will include asbestos-related disease; mining, milling and production of asbestos; manufacture of asbestos products; the geology of asbestos in the environment and the workplace; legislation; regulations; and best practice recommendations. The PC-VAL will be in the public domain and searchable to allow easy and quick access to the materials.

PC started his working life as a librarian in the Johannesburg City Council, where he became involved in the trade union movement. As General Secretary of the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), he famously recruited Cyril Ramaphosa into their legal department.<sup>1</sup> CUSA was later renamed the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). His lifelong friend, Ebrahim Harvey, recalls that he played a leading role in the trade union unity talks: "But, influenced more by the thinking of the Pan Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement, CUSA did not join the largely ANC- and Freedom Charter-aligned unions that constituted

COSATU at its birth in 1985." PC resigned from NACTU in 1989, after failing to get the federation to support the Harare Declaration, in which the ANC set the terms for negotiations with the, then, Nationalist Party. He formed the Co-operative for Research and Education (Core) in 1990, a non-governmental organisation that facilitated the publication of progressive materials to strengthen his great passion, civil society. He then served as Chairman of the Rand Water Board for some years, an experience he remembered with little affection.

PC served as a Trustee of the KRT from its inception in 2006, and as Chair from 2012 to 2016. He was also a Trustee of the KRT's sister organisation, the Asbestos Relief Trust (ART), from 2005, and served as Chair from 2006 to 2008.

Colleagues will remember his incisive analytical mind. Intensely private about his own life, PC was a man of the public, who never lost sight of the poor and under-resourced members of our society.

### REFERENCE

1. Butler A. Cyril Ramaphosa. Johannesburg: Jacana; 2007.

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