

OBITUARY

Mr Robert Sobukwe

Mr Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (53), banned leader of the outlawed Pan-African Congress and former staff member at Wits, died in Kimberley on 26 February this year.

Mr Sobukwe held the post of African Languages Assistant in the Department of Bantu Languages (now African Languages) at Wits from 1955 to 1960 and is remembered for his warmth of personality, his sense of humour and his skills as a teacher.

Professor D T Cole, head of the department, recalled this week that "Bob" Sobukwe — as he was known — was immensely popular among both staff and students.

"He was the last black student to do a BA Hons in this department before the Government's restriction on the entrance of black pupils to white universities in 1959. By fateful coincidence, in the same week he died we received information that the Minister of Education and Training has approved the admission of two black students to do the Honours degree in this department and of one to an MA — the first since 1959", said Professor Cole.

"His death has reminded us of the loss we felt when he left this department and what we have missed over the last 38 years."

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Born in Graaff-Reinet on 5 December 1924, Mr Sobukwe studied for the Native Primary Lower Education Department (First Class) at the Healdtown Training Institution. In 1949 he completed the requirements for the BA degree of the University of South Africa at the University of Fort Hare, majoring in English, Xhosa and Native Administration.

From 1950 to 1954 he taught English, Xhosa and Geography at the Jandrell Combined Senior School at Standerton. He then took up his post at Wits and completed his Honours dissertation, "A Collection of Xhosa Riddles", in 1958. This was published in African Studies by the University in 1968, with Ministerial approval.

In 1959 he was appointed chairman of the newly founded Pan-African Congress, a breakaway group of the African National Congress. The PAC regarded itself as a purist Africanist movement and rejected collaboration with white people in the struggle to bring about the aims of African Nationalism.

Because of his political involvement, Mr Sobukwe resigned from his post in March 1960. Later that year he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for leading the anti-Pass Law demonstrations. On his release he was detained without trial and sent to Robben Island. He was released in 1969 and restricted to the magisterial district of Kimberley, where he became articled to a black attorney in Galesheue village near the city.

He had been ill for some time and underwent chest surgery in Cape Town late last year.

Mr Sobukwe is survived by his wife, Veronica, and four children. ■

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