Bram Fischer
S. A. Communist Party
Leader
—
1975

Death and Memorial
(AKM Docrat Collection)
Kruger to negotiate over Bram's ashes

Political Correspondent

CAPE TOWN, Friday.

THE GOVERNMENT will consider the wishes of Bram Fischer's family on what should be done with the ashes of the former leader of the Communist Party in South Africa, the Minister of Justice and of Prisons, Mr Jimmy Kruger, said today.

Mr Kruger revealed in an interview today that there would be negotiations between the Prisons Department and the family over the disposal of the ashes of Fischer, who died of cancer in Bloemfontein yesterday.

One of the conditions laid down for the disposal of Fischer's ashes was that he be buried at the request of his family. The request was made by the family after his cremation on Monday.

However, the Commissioner of Prisons could, at his discretion, allow the ashes to be buried after consultation with the family.

Mr Kruger said the ashes would be buried at the request of the family. The ashes will be taken to the family in Bloemfontein, he said.

The leader of the Reform Party, Mr Harry Schwarz, said that he disagreed with Fischer's approach to South African politics and that the man was a political figure.

"I cannot see any logical reason why a political figure should not be buried in the country where he died," he said.

Mrs Ruth Eversdorff, the widow of Bram Fischer, said that Fischer's body was taken to Bloemfontein today and that the family would hold a private ceremony.

"We have not decided if we will have a public ceremony," she said.

A spokesman for the Fischer family said that they had received the official announcement of Fischer's death.

See pages 4, 13.
CLIMAXING his criticism of the bar councils for commenting on the State Security Bill, Mr Kruger, the Minister of Justice, reminded Parliament that the chairman of the Johannesburg council had last year attended the funeral of Mr Bram Fischer. Mr Kruger was at pains to make it clear it was not he himself who was pointing this out; it was the "public outside" that had done so.

Mrs Helen Suzman called this "a disgraceful smear". And so it was, a smear fit to keep company with a disgraceful Bill.
Many mourn Fischer

Scores of messages mourning the death of Bram Fischer have been received by his family from all parts of South Africa and from overseas.

They have come from leading members of the community and from banned and house-arrested people who cannot travel to Bloemfontein for the cremation tomorrow.

General J. C. Steyn, Commissioner of Prisons, said from Cape Town yesterday that the Prisons Department would take possession of the ashes after the cremation and that their disposal would be negotiated with the family, if they so wished. Mr Fischer’s family said they had no comment to make.

The Human Rights Committee in Johannesburg is discussing plans for a memorial service. Demonstrators will picket South Africa House in London tomorrow to mourn his death and to protest against his treatment by the South African Government.
Stop Press
Daily News Editorial
Telephone 313838

Fischer's funeral 'an instruction'

Dr Tim Wilson, Bram Fischer's son-in-law, said today that it was not family's wish that Bram should be cremated or buried in Bloemfontein.

"This not our wish. It was instruction issued by Minister of Justice, Mr Kruger. He instructed that Bram be buried or cremated within week in Bloemfontein", Dr Wilson said.

Both Mr Fischer's daughters, Isle Wilson and Ruth Eastwood, were in Bloemfontein when Mr Fischer died.

Mr Fischer is to be cremated in Bloemfontein on Monday.

His ashes must be handed to Department of Prisons.

(See Page 1.)
Ashes are handed over

Staff Reporter

BLOEMFONTEIN. — The ashes of Bram Fisher, who was cremated in Bloemfontein on Monday afternoon, have been handed over to the prison authorities.

Dr. Paul Fisher, at whose home Fisher was nursed for the last two months of his life, said the family had not been officially informed of the statement by the Minister of Justice, Mr. Jimmy Kruger, that he would be prepared to receive representations from the family regarding his brother’s ashes. All the family knew was what they had read in the Press and been told by reporters.

The family had signed that the ashes would be returned to the Department of Prisons and that, as far as they were concerned, was where the matter rested at present.

According to Sapa, the family is not prepared to negotiate with the Minister about what should be done with the ashes.

Colonel C. J. Scheffer, chief of prisons in Bloemfontein, confirmed in a newspaper interview that the ashes were in the department’s possession, but said he was not authorised to say what would be done with them.

Mr. Kruger, told the newspaper he was not prepared to comment.

The Human Rights Committee, which campaigned for the release of the ailing Bram Fischer, are hoping to hold a memorial meeting in his honour on Sunday.

In a report on the cremation, it was said that among those present was Mr. A. I. Maisels, QC; “who defended Fischer in the treason trial.” In fact both men were advocates acting for the accused and the report should have read “who led Fischer in the treason trial.”
Blacks enter Fischer's ashes row

Daily News Reporter

THE FORMER communist leader, Mr Bram Fischer, had paid for whatever crimes he had committed against the State and should not be hounded even after death, Natal Black leaders said today.

They were commenting on a report that the Minister of Justice, Mr Jimmy Kruger, had said Mr Fischer's ashes should be handed to the Prisons Department.

South African Indian Council member, Mr Y. S. Chinsamy, said he was disappointed and disgusted at the behaviour of the Government.

"I cannot believe that the Government can stoop to such a low level. The ashes of Mr Fischer will definitely not rouse the people against the State.

"Mr Fischer belonged to a highly respected family of South Africa and I think the Government should show some sympathy by allowing the family to keep the ashes.

"Why should the family be persecuted for whatever crime Mr Fischer might have committed against the State?"

CONDITIONS

Mr Bill Hendrickse, Coloured Representative Council member for Wentworth, said the Government had laid down the conditions for Mr Fischer's funeral because it was afraid his funeral might become "a rallying point."

He said the death of Mr Fischer was a great blow.

"His death now should not be made a comedy by the Government demanding his ashes. What is the Government's aim? Does it want to hold the man behind bars even after death.

"He was a martyr to all Black people because he stuck to his principles to the last. Because of this all people should now pay him appropriate respect," he said.

SICKENING

The president of the Natal Indian Congress, Mr M. J. Naidoo, said it was sickening to note that the Government was still interested in Mr Fischer even after death.

He said Mr Fischer was one of South Africa's greatest sons and a truer man than him would be hard to find today.

"Mr Fischer was born in the real tradition of an Afrikaner and he could have taken a back seat and enjoyed his life to the full. But he saw the wrongs being committed and set himself to do justice. For this he was punished by his own people."
Quality of mercy strained—paper

The Star Bureau

LONDON — The death of Bram Fischer is extensively reported in Britain's national Press today — with particular emphasis on the fact that he ought to have died a pillar of the Afrikaner establishment.

The Times in a full obituary notice says "Fischer grew up in the strong Calvinistic Afrikaner tradition and followed the family footsteps into law."

The newspaper attributes Mr Fischer's change of views to the five years he spent at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar in the 1930s.

Reporting Mr Fischer's recent release into the custody of his brother in Bloemfontein, The Times says: "The quality of mercy was strained."

Mrs Helen Suzman, on a private visit to London, reacted strongly to reports that the South African Police had demanded Mr Fischer's ashes be returned to their custody after he has been cremated.

"If this is true, I think it's just sick," the Progressive Party MP for Houghton said.

GREAT BRAIN

"His life was a hopeless waste of a great brain," she said. "He was a man who might have been one of South Africa's greatest advocates, but he chose a political career which made this impossible."

Anti-apartheid movements in Britain have hailed the sacrifices made by Mr Fischer as the inspiration for them to carry on the struggle for "freedom" in South Africa.

"I think he was one of the most outstanding opponents of racial injustice, not only in South Africa, but all over the world," Canon John Collins, founder president of the Defence and Aid Movement, said yesterday.

He was astonished that Mr Fischer should have been treated so "hatefully" by the South African authorities.

"In any other democratic country he would have been one of the most praised and beloved of all its members."
The Department of Prisons will negotiate with the family of Bram Fischer over the disposal of his ashes.

The decision to negotiate follows criticism by prominent South Africans of the controversial order by the Minister of Prisons, Mr Jimmy Kruger, that the ashes of the 67-year-old communist who died in Bloemfontein yesterday must be handed to the Department of Prisons.

Bram Fischer is to be cremated in Bloemfontein on Monday afternoon.

Mr Kruger made the following conditions about the funeral:
- That it would have to take place in Bloemfontein.
- That it be held within one week of death.
- That Fischer's ashes must be handed to the Department of Prisons.

The Minister of Prisons said in Cape Town today: "We will look at the matter and negotiate with the family over the disposal of the ashes. We will not exclude their wishes."

Colonel G L Steytler, the department's liaison officer, said in Pretoria today that the department had not yet decided how to dispose of the ashes.

Several Black leaders are among those who have attacked the order that the ashes be handed to the department.

The Rt Rev John Carter, Anglican Suffragan Bishop of Johannesburg, said the disposal of Bram's ashes was a matter which called for sympathy and sensitivity, not for a demonstration of power over the powerless.

SHOULD RECONSIDER

"The internment of ashes after cremation is normally a matter for the family concerned and it would be an act of humanity to allow that to be applied in this case," he said.

Mr Colin Eglin, leader of the Progressive Party, said in Cape Town that the Government should reconsider its attitude, because it showed evidence "of insensitivity and unnecessary intrusion into what is a personal matter."

Black leaders said that Bram had paid for whatever crimes he had committed against the State, and should not be hounded after death.

Mr Dave Epstein, MEC

To Page 3, Col 1
So, EVEN after death, there is no release on earth for Bram Fischer. By Government decree, after the family cremation his ashes must be returned to the Department of Prisons. And only for a period of a week can newspapers legally publish photographs of him, and even then under circumscribed conditions.

The ending is a continuation of Fischer's life: a man of unusual brilliance from a distinguished family whose sensitivity to the ills of South Africa took him, tragically, along the path of communism — which, in turn, brought down upon him the unrelenting and unforgiving anger of his own Afrikaner people.

Had it all been different, he was a man who could have given much to his country.
Bram Fischer (67) dies of cancer

THE honeymooners. Pakistani squash professional Hiddy Jahan and his English wife Sue at Umhlanga. See story, page 2.

FROM PAGE 11

quality and oppression has surrounded him. Deeply committed, Mr Fischer wanted his political career to be a contribution to a Free South Africa.

He was defense advocate in the famous Rivonia trial, at which eight accused, including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, were sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1964. Two months later, Mr Fischer was arrested and charged with 13 others on three counts of hoisting a Communist flag. Allowed out on R10,000 bail, he flew to London to appeal in what was to be his last case before the highest court in the world — the Privy Council. He won the case.

Back in Johannesburg, Mr Fischer and the others stood trial. Then, on January 25, 1966, he vanished leaving a letter saying he would continue with his political work.

Police launched a massive hunt for the man who had jumped bail. He became South Africa's most wanted man.

While on the run, he was removed from the roll of advocates.

On November 11, 1966, news of Mr Fischer's arrest shocked the headlines with Sir Ian Smith's UDI.

Security police had arrested Mr Fischer in Johannesburg. He had undergone extensive plastic surgery, and had lived as a "Mr Black" in Brantclay.

On May 9 he was sentenced to life imprisonment. The judge said his sentence was a member of the Communist Party in association with the Indian National Congress (ANC). He had continued to raise money for the cause of the State.

After the judge left the bench, Mr Fischer smiled and said the ANC should oppose "a call to action" as he was led to the cells.

Overseas newspapers and organisations hailed him as an outstanding example of a man who had risked everything for what he believed to be right.

Mr Fischer then started his sentence at Pretoria Central Prison.

The man who had spoken from the dock for more than an hour, quickly became a forgotten man.

Then, several years ago, distinguished South Africans started calling for his release on humanitarian grounds.

An English-language newspaper editorially called on the Government to grant Mr Fischer clemency.

But the Government refused to set Mr Fischer free — despite the fact that it became clear that he was dying of cancer.

Earlier this year, the government decided to allow him to spend a few months with his brother in Bloemfontein.

Mr Fischer's health declined rapidly. He died in a hospital in Bloemfontein on October 5, 1985.

His wife, Molly, was killed in a car crash in 1972. She was with husband when he died.

His son, Paul, died in 1997.
The life and death of Bram Fischer

History will make many judgments on Bram Fischer. Some will say he was a traitor and got what he deserved. Others will say, and are already saying, that he was an idealist driven by convictions which wrecked his life and set him apart from his volk.

The facts are that he was a sensitive and talented man, a distinguished member of a distinguished family who at some stage in his life rejected the norms of his own society and secretly worked and plotted his way to leadership of the SA Communist Party.

He died, we believe, unrepentant, still believing in communism.

Bram Fischer was in jail for a treasonable crime which can carry the death sentence. He was held in high esteem by international communism, so much so that he was one of only six men outside Russia to receive the Lenin Prize.

Small wonder, perhaps, that the Minister of Justice rejected the pleas from many distinguished South Africans in 1973 to set him free. But whatever the man did, deplorably, in health and full faculties, he has scored a victory over the State in death. A victory won by the clumsiness of his adversaries.

When it was clear that the man was dying, he should have been promptly released, before he became a cause celebre around the world, before the London Times was able to say of his final release: “The quality of justice was strained.” And the insistence that his family must negotiate with the Prisons Department over the disposal of his ashes is grotesque. We cannot complain about international distaste for our policies when even death does not diminish our excesses.
Fischer family rejects ashes offer

By PATRICK LAURENCE

THE FAMILY of the dead communist leader, Bram Fischer, yesterday rejected an offer to negotiate for his ashes.

Their rejection came after a statement by the Minister of Prisons, Mr Jimmy Kruger, that he was prepared to relax an earlier ruling that Fischer's ashes should be handed over to the Prisons Department after his cremation.

Fischer will be cremated at 4.30 pm on Monday in Bloemfontein. His family have asked that it should be an intimate family affair but friends who wish to attend may do so.

Mr Kruger explained yesterday that in terms of the law the ashes of a prisoner remained under the control of the Prisons Department.

"In this particular case, however, we are quite prepared to receive representations from the family in connection with the deceased's ashes—and we are prepared, in cooperation with the family, to arrange with them what should be done with the ashes to the satisfaction of the provisions of the Act and the family."

ATTITUDE

But Mrs Ruth Eastwood, elder daughter of Fischer, said: "We think it is neither an opportune time nor a proper matter for negotiation. We find the Minister's attitude distasteful."

Mr Kruger said: "It is not a matter of bargaining or negotiating. It is a matter of discussing what to do with the remains. But if that is their attitude, then that is that. The Prisons Department will keep the ashes."

It is understood the Fischer family will not physically hand over the ashes to the prison authorities. The ashes will be left at the crematorium and then collected by prison officials.

* Demonstrators will picket South Africa House in London on Monday to mourn Fischer's death and his "inhuman treatment" by the South African Government.

A spokesman for the anti-apartheid movement said they intended complaining about the Government's refusal to allow his family to have his ashes.
Lawyers pay tribute to Bram Fischer

Staff Reporters

OPPOSITION politicians and former legal colleagues yesterday paid tribute to the outstanding legal ability of Bram Fischer and welcomed the fact that he was able to spend his last days with his family.

The Progressive Party leader, Mr Colin Eglin, said the Government had acted with compassion in allowing him to spend the last month of his life with his family in Bloemfontein, writes the Rand Daily Mail's Cape Town correspondent.

He said: "The death of Bram Fischer severs a unique link with the history of South Africa. His life story reflects the conflict and the contradiction that is the reality of South Africa.

"A grandson of a distinguished Prime Minister of the Orange Free State, he became the head of the Communist Party of South Africa.

"There will be fiercely divergent views on Bram Fischer and the course of action he pursued. Nevertheless, his death is an occasion for South Africans to pause and reflect on the totality of the South African scene," Mr Eglin said.

The United Party's chief spokesman on Justice and Prisons, Mr Mike Mitchell, said: "I don't wish to make any comment which might aggravate the family's grief at this time."

The Reform Party leader, Mr Harry Schwarz, said: "I appeared both against Bram Fischer and with him during our period at the bar and can testify that he was an outstanding lawyer and a most courteous gentleman.

"I regret that his end came in the way it did but am pleased that he was permitted to pass away while with his family and not in prison."

Dr Percy Yutar, SC, Attorney-General of the Transvaal, and a former colleague of Mr Fischer's at the Johannesburg Bar, said yesterday he was deeply distressed to learn of his death.

Dr Yutar, who led the prosecution at the Rivonia treason trial in 1964 while Mr Fischer led the defence, said he was pleased his former colleague had died with his family.

Mr Joel Mervis, former editor of the Sunday Times, said last night: "I was at school and university with Bram Fischer and also saw him often in later years. He was one of the most remarkable men I ever met.

"Coming from a highly respected family, and himself a man of brilliant attainments, he deliberately abandoned an assured position of privilege and power in the pursuit of an ideal."

"This was an act of self-sacrifice one seldom encounters."

"I know this of him: when he joined the Communist Party, he was not in the least interested in Marxism or Leninism.

"At the time, he was spurred on by the purely humanitarian motive of seeking to help the under-privileged in South Africa.

"When he saw where his link with the Communist Party was taking him, he still had time to disengage himself. But he felt that that would be a cowardly way out and so he became more deeply committed with disastrous results for himself."

"One may disagree with his methods, but the memory of his idealism will remain after many contemporary events are forgotten."

Mrs Helen Suzman, MP, said in London last night that she was pleased that at least Fischer's last few weeks were spent with his family, reports Sapa.

"Bram Fischer was a man of great promise and alas, his life turned out to be a tragic waste."

Bishop Ambrose Reeves, former Bishop of Johannesburg, said: "He was one of the South Africans I trusted most. I could not have wished him to live in his condition."

The Rand Daily Mail's London correspondent reports that the Rev Elliot Kendall, South African authority on the British Council of Churches, said: "It is probably the unthinking act of some civil servant following the rules."

"It opens a line of unnecessary adverse criticism for what was probably an unthinking act,"
Bram Fischer Dies

The former advocate and communist Abram ("Bram") Louis Fischer died in Bloemfontein on May 8, aged 67. He had contracted cancer of the brain, hip and spine, according to reports.

Earlier Fischer, who came from a well-known Free State family, had been released from prison where he had been serving a life sentence for conspiring to overthrow the Government.

Editorial comment dwelt mainly on Fischer's personal qualities and found his to be a case of idealism gone awry.

Fischer's career was described as one of brilliant achievement both in the academic sphere and in sport.

He attended school at Grey College, Bloemfontein and then studied at two South African universities before receiving a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University in 1932.

Fischer returned to South Africa in 1937 and some years later joined the Communist Party. In June, 1964 he led the team of defence lawyers in the Rivi- nia treason trial.

Prison sentence

Shortly afterwards Fischer was detained in terms of the 90-day detention clause but subsequently released. In September, 1964, he was again arrested and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act.

He was released on bail and flew to England to defend a client, but returned to face the last part of his own trial.

In January, 1965 he disappeared and remained in hiding for some months, using disguises and several aliases. In November he was re-arrested in Johannesburg, tried and found guilty on several counts, chiefly those related to the Suppression of Communism Act, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

BEELD, Johannesburg (9.5.75), regards Fischer's death as "the end of a life which was actually a tragedy in the classical sense of the word."

THE FRIEND, Bloemfontein (10.5.75), comments that "he chose violence to achieve his aims and he paid the penalty."

Die Volksblad

Bram Fischer

There is something symbolic in the fact that Bram Fischer, who was born into a noted Free State family in Bloemfontein, died yesterday in his birthplace and will be cremated here on Monday, a stranger to his people. His life's cycle is completed, but it took him on distant ways - as far as Moscow and spiritually to the point where he gained the title of being South Africa's most active and important communist. In the eyes of South Africans a sad and futile career has finally ended.

Bram Fischer was endowed with brilliant talents, but his life became a prime example of idealism gone wrong. His surrender to communism eventually brought him into conflict with the law. But his greatest tragedy was that his revolutionary plans for South Africa and his ideological aims years ago killed him for his people and the background from which he sprung.

For his family, his career and his long illness must have been a trial and sincere sympathy is expressed for them in many circles.

A - 9.5.1975
150 honour Fischer

Staff Reporter

A MULTIRACIAL crowd of about 150 attended a lunch-hour memorial meeting for the late Bram Fischer in Johannesburg yesterday.

The meeting, organised by the Human Rights Committee, was held at the Gandhi Hall in Fox Street. The speakers included Mrs Helen Joseph, Mrs Lilian Ngoyi, a former treason trialist, and Mr W. B. Ngakane, former deputy Transvaal president of the banned African National Congress.

Fischer, the former leader of the South African Communist Party, died on May 8.

Messages to Fischer's family from many people were read to the meeting. The meeting ended with the singing of "Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika."
NOT even the most ardent anti-Communist can deny that it was his highly developed social conscience that prompted Bram Fischer to opt out of the Afrikaner ruling class and make common cause with the forces which, though they favour the poor, follow such policies and adopt such terrible practices that they are worse than most others.

And yet... and yet... there was the time when, as Mr Joel Mervis so poignantly points out, the only group which openly opposed racism in S.A. was the Communist Party. No idealist could stay aloof. Either he supported racism or he remained resigned to it... or if he had any spunk at all he tried to combat it. His self-respect demanded that he be up and doing something about it.

I know... for about the time that Bram Fischer was becoming one of the kingpin leaders of the Communist Party in S.A. I was trying to help its cause by distributing the “Guardian”, which was then the only newspaper to condemn racism. There was a political journal, The Trek, which drew its money mainly from a rich sheep farmer’s wife who lived near Mogi River, but that was an intellectual journal. Then there was Dr Wolf Sach’s magazine The Democrat but that was somewhat leftist liberal, not really Communist. And in any case, Trek was Fourth International, or Trotskyist, whom the Communists hated as much then as they do now. So the Guardian was a sort of unofficial mouthpiece of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

GROSS BETRAYAL

And yours truly supported it — not because of its Communist content but because it opposed racism. Almost the same kind of motivation that prompted Bram Fischer to resign from the ruling Afrikaner class. But despite his intellectual brilliance, Mr Fischer failed to see the gross betrayal when, upon Hitler attacking Soviet Russia, that which had until then been an “Imperialist War” to all members of the Communist Party of S.A. suddenly became a “Peoples’ War”. We who had been urging boycott, on the promptings of the higher-ups in the Party, were suddenly told to support the war effort and recruit soldiers! The youngster who then distributed the “Guardian” is now writing this column not only felt the sudden numbness of betrayal but was angered beyond the telling that he, like hundreds of others, had been taken for a ride by the Communists, been cynically and ruthlessly used as a pawn.

So, to hell with the Communist Party and thank goodness that that membership application had not gone forward...

THE DUPlicity

And yet... and yet... the brilliant mind of a Bram Fischer had not seen through the duplicity and the utter ruthlessness of the world Communist movement. It was not the workers of the world they were concerned about, nor yet the suffering non-Whites of this country, but it was what Moscow wanted that counted.

In later years, there followed the massacre of the Hungarian liberals by the Russian Army... followed by the effective curtailment of Romanian freedom... and later still by the tyrannical subjugation of the Czechs at the point not simply of bayonets but of bazookas and massive tanks. What was it that kept men like Fischer and several other equally dedicated men and women committed to Communism? Was it just loyalty to comrades; as Mervis suggests. Or was it perhaps an amalgam of many things — loyalty, pride, vanity, conceit, fanaticism; refusal to admit earlier misjudgment; brainwashing; cynical ruthlessness in an extremity of urbanity; a conviction that concepts like freedom and liberty and spiritual comfort counted for nought when compared to material prosperity; a rejection of the norms and values of religion in favour of dialectical materialism; a zealot’s commitment to the new religion created by Marx and Engels — or was it all just a simple bloody-minded desire to belong to the elite of the Communist Party who would rule over the proletariat?

ON THE RUN

Whatever it was with Mr Bram Fischer, it was strong enough to persuade him to pretend that he was keeping his word as a lawyer and a gentleman to return from his trip to London and then, quite uncharacteristically, for he was indeed a lawyer and a gentleman, to jump bail and go into hiding. The belief among many is that since many of those who had been his followers were ‘on the run’ from the police, he owed it to them to join them to organise the ‘underground’.

What an awful waste of a good man! Meanwhile, it is surprising that there are at present certain S.A. Indians who still support the Communist Party and that these have admirers among certain extreme Left elements in the so-called non-racial Natal Indian Congress. These people forget that it was the Chinese Communists who so viciously and so treacherously attacked India in 1962 and that it is the Russian as well as the Chinese Communists who gave and give much material and moral support to Abdul Karume and Idi Amin, both notorious for their anti-Indian pogroms. Communists condone racism when it suits their purpose.
Fischer

funeral
today

People from many parts of South Africa are in Bloemfontein today for the funeral of Braam Fischer, the former communist leader who died last week.

Many of them are prominent people from Johannesburg. They were close friends of Fischer, who died after serving nearly nine years of his life sentence for plotting sabotage.

Fischer, who died of cancer, is to be cremated in Bloemfontein this afternoon.

The Fischer family have asked friends and relatives not to send flowers.

DONATIONS

Instead, they have suggested that donations should be sent to the Dependants' Conference, a major division of the South African Council of Churches which cares for, and provides, financial assistance for the families of political prisoners in SA.

It is still not known if the Fischer family will ask the Department of Prisons for Fischer's ashes.

It is also understood that the Human Rights Committee, which recently had two of its "Free Fischer" meetings banned, might hold a memorial service for Fischer later this week in Johannesburg.
Fischer’s aid to warders

STAR 13.5.75

Own Correspondent

BLOEMFONTEIN — Bram Fischer helped his warders with their legal problems. This was claimed at his funeral service here yesterday.

The former South African Communist Party leader was cremated. At the service, attended by about 80 Indian, African and White people — and with security police parked outside the crematorium — the only speaker was Mr A Chaskalson, a Johannesburg advocate.

In his oration Mr Chaskalson said Bram Fischer engaged in a struggle for an end to racialism.

Mr Hugh Lewin, who was in prison with Fisher and is now living in London, wrote that there were numerous occasions where Fisher spent long, careful and patient hours consulting with warders of varying ranks about problems ranging from traffic offences to tax returns, from rent arrears to farm boundary disputes.

TELEGRAM

Mr Chaskalson also read from some of the telegrams that were sent to the Fisher family, including one from a former prisoner on Robben Island, and another from students of the University of Durban-Westville.

Among the messages read out was a tribute by the South African writer and poet, Andre P Brink, yesterday.—Sapa.
ADVOCATE SAYS FISCHER FOUGHT FOR 'FREEDOMS'

Daily News Correspondent

BLOEMFONTEIN, Tuesday.

BRAM Fischer, former South African Communist Party leader, was cremated in Bloemfontein yesterday. At the service, attended by about 80 Indians, Africans and White people — and with security police parked outside the crematorium — the only speaker was Mr. A. Chaskalson, a Johannesburg advocate.

Mr. Chaskalson said Bram engaged in a struggle for equality, for freedom from domination, freedom from control by imperial powers, for an end to racialism and for the building of socialism.

After a brief resume of Fischer's life in the South African Communist Party, he said Fischer had the opportunity to leave the country after he had the opportunity to gone underground to continue with the aims and objectives of the national high command.

His decision to remain was made in the full knowledge that few of his comrades remained, who were not in prison, and there was little hope of
Security police at Bram Fischer memorial

Daily News Reporter

THE HEAD of the Security Police in Durban, Colonel F. Steenkamp, and "about 43 Special Branch policemen" were among a multiracial gathering of more than 400 people who attended the memorial prayer meeting for Bram Fischer, the former Communist leader, in Durban last night, the secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, Mr R. Ramesar, claimed today.

Mr Ramesar said he personally counted 45 Special Branch policemen but other executive officials of the NIC had counted 43 policemen.

He said Colonel Steenkamp approached him on the stage and introduced himself to him. He wanted to know who organised the meeting and who some of the speakers were.

"After giving the information he was quite satisfied," he said.

Colonel Steenkamp would not confirm that he had attended the meeting when approached by The Daily News.

He said he was not obliged to account to anyone for his movements.

"It was a public meeting and I am a member of the public," he said.
BRAAM FISCHER

MASS PRAYER MEETING

Speakers

1. Mrs Fatima Meer
   (Sociologist: Natal University)

2. Mrs Luthuli
   (Wife of Nobel Peace Prize Winner: Chief Albert Luthuli)

3. Mr Karel Tip
   (President: NUSAS)

4. Mrs Sushila Gandhi
   (Daughter in law of Mahatma Gandhi)

5. 

6. 

AT THE

KAJEE MEMORIAL HALL
LEOPOLD STREET, DURBAN

at 5.30 p.m.

Tuesday 13th May 1975

ALL WELCOME

(AUSPICES OF NATAL INDIAN CONGRESS)

Printed by. Triple Ess 62 Dayal Road, Clairwood.)
A MULTI-RACIAL gathering turned out at the Kajee Hall on Tuesday night to pay tribute to the great South African, Bram Fisher, who died last week after a long illness, at a meeting organised by the Natal Indian Congress.

The main speakers were Mrs Fatima Meer, vicepresident of the NIC and Mr Karel Tip, President of NUSAS. More than 40 security branch policemen were present at the meeting.

In her speech Mrs Meer said that people who believed that Fisher has been a Communist were mistaken. She said that, that Fisher was a man who was a true Christian who believed in all religions.

"He was a true Hindu. He was a true Muslim. He was a true Christian. These were the qualities of the man".

Mrs Meer said that Fisher was a man who was searching for something and that was the brotherhood of man. He did not succeed because of the obstacles.

"Fisher was a non-violent and non-destructive man and he lived for everybody and he liked everyone even his enemies," Mrs Meer said.

Mrs Albert Luthuli, widow of the late Chief Luthuli was among the people present at the meeting to pay tribute to Bram Fisher.
Fischer's funeral 'is safe'

John Patten

CAPE TOWN — No special security precautions will be taken to prevent the funeral of the former communist leader, Bram Fischer, from developing into a demonstration.

The Minister of Police, Mr Kruger, said today he is not expecting any trouble.

"There is no restriction on the arrangements of the funeral," he said.

If any difficulties develop the police in Bloemfontein will be able to deal with it, he added.

But he was not starting from the assumption that there would be difficulties.

Earlier, the Department of Prisons laid down conditions which have forced Monday's funeral to be in Bloemfontein, although Fischer's family would have preferred it to take place in Johannesburg.

Fischer died of cancer after spending the last two months of his life with his brother in Bloemfontein while still technically remaining a life prisoner.

STIPULATION

Throughout protracted efforts to have him released over the past few months, the Minister steadfastly refused to allow him to go to his family in Johannesburg.

The stipulation that the funeral must take place in Bloemfontein is regarded as a step to prevent demonstrations. The Minister's remarks today that no other security arrangements are being taken suggest the venue itself is seen as adequate precaution.

Reacting to the initial refusal of the family to discuss with the prison authorities what should be done with Fischer's ashes after the funeral, Mr Kruger said the Department of Prisons would decide what to do with them.

The Fischer family have asked relatives and friends not to send flowers. Instead they want donations to go to the Dependants' Conference which gives care and financial aid to the families of political prisoners.
Prisoner to the end

PATRICK LAURENCE

BRAM FISCHER, 66, a leading member of the banned Communist Party and a former QC, lived almost all of the last eight years of his life in the maximum security section of Pretoria Central Prison.

Fischer, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of South Africa, was sentenced to life imprisonment in May 1966. He was found guilty of conspiring to commit sabotage, of contravening the Suppression of Communism Act and of forging a driver's licence and an identity card.

His trial came after a massive manhunt set in operation when he went underground in January 1963 and lived for 10 months as a fugitive. His decision to go into hiding came between his temporary arrest in September 1964 and the scheduled date for his trial under the Suppression of Communism Act some three months later.

Fischer was born in April 1908 in the Free State. His family was one of the leading Afrikaner families there. His grandfather was Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony, as the Free State was known in the years immediately after the Anglo-Boer War. His father was a Judge of the High Court of the Free State.

The young Fischer went to Grey College in Bloemfontein and afterwards to the old Grey University College, where he studied law.

As a young man he was an outstanding sportsman and a brilliant scholar. He played rugby against the All Blacks and tennis for the Free State and was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to study for two years at New College, Oxford.

His first years of manhood were years which saw the resurgence of Afrikaner nationalism under the leadership of General Hertzog, founder of the nationalistic Afrikaner Party. Fischer nationalism attracted him immediately and he was a member of the first “Prime Minister” of a student parliament.

His brilliant brain, his impeccable Afrikaner credentials — his father's home was ransacked and burnt during the Anglo-Boer War — and the rising tide of Afrikaner nationalism all contributed to point him to high office for him. His peers talked of him becoming the Prime Minister or Justice Minister.

But then, in the early 1950s, he took a decision which was to change his whole life — he joined the Communist Party of South Africa.

The Communist Party was still illegal in those days, but Fischer put him beyond the pale in the eyes of the White community — and ended all chances of rising to high office.

“I do not believe he was at the time a Marxist,” a distinguished South African newspaper editor, who was at school and university with Fischer, wrote when the Communist leader went into hiding.

“His primary motive was to assist the underprivileged Africans. He felt strongly they were not getting a fair deal and that more should be done for them. There was no White parliamentary party in South Africa which had a pro-African policy (and) the Labour Party traditionally the workers' party, was in a state of decline and about to die.

“The Communist Party appeared to offer the best opportunity for one whose purpose was to secure political rights for Africans. At the time, of course, the Communist Party was not outlawed.”

In between his political activities, Fischer continued his career as an advocate. He was to combine both interests when he helped the National African Congress (ANC) draw up a new constitution.

In 1948 the National Party came to power under Dr Malan. It banned the Communist Party in 1950. Fischer did not abandon his communist convictions. He remained a secret member of the central committee of the now illegal Communist Party, but on the surface he acquired a new image as a respected and skilled member of the legal profession.

During the 1950s he kept out of the political limelight for the most part, except perhaps as joint leader for the defence in the five-year long Treason Trial. Initially charged in 1956, the last of the treason trials were eventually acquitted in March 1960.

But by then the situation had changed radically. In March 1960, the Sharpeville shootings took place. Shortly afterwards both the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress were banned. Key members of the ANC, as well as the Communist Party went underground to plan to overthrow the State by sabotage.

That was where Fischer came in again. While living a respectable life politically he was working hand-in-glove with members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the underground arm of the ANC which was organizing sabotage as a prelude to revolution.

The first of the immediate steps which were to lead to Fischer's arrest came in July 1963, when leaders of the underground High Command were arrested at their hideout in Rivonia. Fischer appeared for the defence at the Rivonia Trial. Most of the accused, including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, were sentenced to life imprisonment in July 1964.

They had barely set foot on South Africa's most maximum security prison complex on Robben Island when Fischer himself was arrested and detained under the 90-day law. He was later released but then re-arrested in September and charged under the Suppression of Communism Act.

He was granted R100 000 bail to attend the final hearing in London of a long-drawn-out legal battle between two British pharmaceutical firms The Privy Council, the highest court in the land, decided in favour of Fischer's client.

He returned to South Africa in November, but failed to appear in court on January 25. He had gone into hiding. For 10 months he lived as “Mr Black.” He grew a neatly tapered beard and a small moustache. His hair was shaved back to alter the appearance of his face.

Fischer was arrested by Security Police in November 1965. He was brought to trial three days later. During the trial in Pretoria he addressed his views for three hours. The address was a political statement of faith.

He concluded by quoting the words of a great Afrikaner, President Paul Kruger, of the old South African Republic. On the eve of the Anglo-Boer War, President Kruger told his burgers: "With confidence we place our case before the entire world. Whether we are victorious or whether we die, freedom will arise in Africa, like the sun in the morning cloud."

When the court adjourned after he had been sentenced to life imprisonment, Fischer gave the ANC salute to the public gallery.

He turned 65 in April last year, calls for his release were made by several prominent people, including Professor Chris Barnard and Archbishop Denis Hurley.

They were ignored by the then Minister of Justice and repudiated by the United Party shadow Minister of Justice Mr Mike Mitchell. According to Mr Mitchell Fischer had been convicted of a crime “more heinous than rape or murder.”

Against Mr Mitchell's assessment is that of Afrikaans novelist Andre Brink who history will acclaim Fischer as one of South Africa's greatest sons.

In May last year Fischer was taken to the H. F. Verwoerd Hospital for observation. In August it was learnt that he had undergone an operation. In December he was re-admitted to hospital, when it was discovered that he had cancer.

During his last days the Minister of Justice, Mr Jimmy Kruger, eased the restrictions on visits from his family.

But Mr Kruger refused to heed worldwide appeals for clemency — on the grounds that Fischer had not changed his views and might still use his cover to constitute a political danger to the State.
Bram's life not wasted — Brink

By MARSHALL LEE

BRAM FISCHER was cremated at 5 pm yesterday and his ashes will be returned to custody.

About 80 people — family, friends, former Bar and political colleagues and the local prisons chief — attended the simple ceremony in Bloemfontein.

They included Bram Fischer's daughters Ruth and Ilse, his son-in-law Dr Tim Wilson, his three brothers, Mrs Helen Joseph, Mr A. I. Maisels, QC who defended Fischer in the treason trial, the Rev Douglas Thompson, one of the treason trial accused, and others Black and White.

Completely non-religious, the ceremony consisted of a statement about the man and his career, eulogies written by Mr Andre Brink, the Afrikaans academic and writer and Mr Hugh Lewin who was with Fischer in prison.

These and several telegram messages were read out by Mr Arthur Chaskelson, a Johannesburg advocate.

In his eulogy Andre Brink said that far from being a stranger to and a deviant from Afrikanerdom, Bram Fischer "enlarged and deepened the concept of Afrikanerdom".

The Afrikaner academic and writer, who was unable to attend the ceremony, said Fischer had proved that "Afrikaner" meant infinitely more than someone identified with a narrow ideology.

"If Afrikanerdom is to survive," he went on, "it may well be as a result of the broadening and liberating influence of men like Bram Fischer."

Mr Brink, quoting Hamlet's request to Horatio that he should "report me and my cause aright," said it was important to do this for Bram Fischer because there was already an attempt to deny the meaning of his life — to discount it, distort it and doubt it.

As an example, to say Fischer's life was "a tragic waste" was a facile distortion. It was only tragic in the sense that tragedy requires a sacrifice before sanity and progress can be restored to a corrupt destructive society.

Mr Brink made it clear he was not paying homage to Bram Fischer as a communist. He did not regard communism "as the 'cause' he has left us to report".

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500 in London protest

Own Correspondent

LONDON. — A big squad of police lined the front of the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square yesterday as about 500 demonstrators gathered in a silent protest at the death "in captivity" of Bram Fischer.

It was one of the biggest in a series of protests aimed at focusing world attention on Fischer's imprisonment.

Pamphlets distributed to passers-by referred to the "unbelievable pettiness" of the South African prison authorities in demanding the return of Fischer's ashes after cremation.
DO NOT WEEP now for Bram. He would not have you weep on his behalf.
And do not weep for the recent long years in jail. That especially he would not like. For though they were long painful years away from his family, and his friends outside, for Bram inside they were not lost years. They meant for Bram, in a very real sense, a rounding and a completion. However full the man, who first went to jail—however distinguished the lawyer, however fine the father, husband, friend, adviser—however full the man before, jail encompassed the fullness and enlarged it.

Stripped Bare

In the beginning, prison stripped Bram bare—in a process which, for him, was even more severe and complete than it is for most: stripped him of the protection of a respected position and of privilege and esteem, and denied him what had always been so dear to him, the comfort of family and friends and familiar surroundings.

But, in so denuding him, prison in fact gave Bram something new. In seeking to stifle it, he gave it new vigour. It sought to maim, but made him strong. It sought to hide him and succeeded only in revealing the simple essential greatness of the man.

To the authorities, Bram in prison was a sort of prize exhibit, evoking a mixture of horror and respect and curiosity. It was always Bram who was picked out for inspection and nodded at, always Bram who was greeted with 'Hello, Bram!'—even 'Hello, Brampke!'—as if the chance to greet him with familiarity somehow enhanced their position, somehow gave them added status. And Bram, usually with his battered brown-felt prison hat in hand, would stand quietly, nod back and smile, always scrupulously polite and unbowed.

In those who sought to hurt him—trying too to gain something for themselves by designating and humiliating him—Bram's unbroken charm produced indignant antagonism. But more often his patient indulgence—and his constant refusal ever to let any situation seem to get him down—won him the tacit admiration of all those who guarded him and came into contact with him.

There were numerous occasions, which will sadly have to be hidden always from history, where Bram spent long careful and patient hours consulting with warders of varying ranks about problems ranging from their traffic offences to their tax returns, from rent arrears to farm boundary disputes.

One brief incident in about 1970 indicated the sort of response he was able to win. A first-year student in a university, having attended a seminar about Bram, once asked a question which could have been expected to bring a stony silence. Bram, however, turned towards him, smiled, and said, 'I happen to know him.'

HUGH LEWIN

In a world made up so much of triviality and tedium, there is scant scope for anything heroic—but Bram managed always to instil in those with him (some, like him, facing dauntingly long and seemingly endless sentences) a keen sense of purpose in their unchanging day-to-day lives inside. He especially kept alive their interest in everything around them and, though they were strenuously deprived of news of the outside world, Bram's achievement was always to maintain an eager and ever-searching awareness of that so-easily-forgotten world outside. And he never himself forgot—nor allowed others to forget—the deep-seated belief in and struggle for that justice and freedom which had always been his prime concern.

This, possibly more than anything else, was confirmation of his stature outside and was the most important manifestation of his leadership inside.

This belief was given some sort of recognition by Bram's fellow prisoners in 1967. On May Day that year one of the prisoners returned excitedly from a visit to say that he had had told that Bram had won the Lenin Peace Prize—an honour comparable in its way to the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to that other South African alongside whose name Bram's will always rightly be remembered, Albert Luthuli.

The other prisoners excitedly clustered round Bram in the exercise yard to congratulate him. He was embarrassed. He had, he admitted, known about the award for some time. He saw it as a gesture of solidarity with the overall struggle against apartheid rather than a specific award for him personally. He had been reluctant to mention it.

His Creed

But the others wanted somehow to mark the occasion and so, in one of the small ways that constitute the stripped life of prison, they prepared a hand-made greetings card which was slipped to Bram with his supper one afternoon at lock-up. The card itself was confiscated later in a cell-search. Part of what it said was:

We know your creed—
that you believe in man
in man who struggled
and fell
and struggled up again...
in man whose anger is the other part of love
who falls because he climbs
who dies
that men might live.

This is your right:
that other men might have the right to peace.
For this belief in man
we honour you.

At the time it was given that card, Bram said he could not believe the words applied to him. But the fact that they might do so clearly delighted him.

We today can assert that those words do apply—and, in remembering them and honouring Bram, let us remember and note another simple fact: that whenever the name Bram is mentioned, people everywhere will—immediately and correctly—think of Bram Fischer. And, in doing so, they will think also of a free South Africa.

Braram's dedication and his complete sacrifice for equality and justice is an inspiration and an example such as other white South African has imparted to his black compatriots. Africa has lost one of its great men.

Fikile Bam.

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