



Denis Goldberg: Freedom Fighter and Humanist

David Kenvyn (ed.), Pat Turnbull (trans.)

Community HEART: Manchester, 2014. 209 pp

Reviewed by Howard Smith

This collection of essays was first published in German in 2012 to honour Denis Goldberg on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

Denis Goldberg was isolated for over twenty years in Pretoria Local Prison, under conditions that were designed to break his spirit and commitment. That they failed to do so is demonstrated in this record of his lifelong contribution to a better South Africa. The contributors – who knew him before, during and since that most difficult period of his life – all pay tribute to the commitment, values and hope that make Denis the *mensch* that he is.

The opening essay is a summary of South Africa's history to contextualise the personal accounts that follow. Essays by Pallo Jordan, who knew Denis as a political activist in the Modern Youth Movement in Cape Town in the 1950s, and Sandile Njake,

who was an Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) trainee at the Mamre camp outside Cape Town where Denis was a trainer, provide useful information on lesser-known aspects of our struggle. Jeremy Cronin writes of the Denis he knew as a fellow prisoner. Hillary Hamburger writes of her many visits to him in prison and contributes to a better understanding of Denis's negotiated release in 1985. Those for whom this episode still arouses feelings of bitterness would benefit from her balanced perspective on the multiple dimensions of struggle and how new avenues for struggle and commitment can always be opened up. Denis's role after 1985 demonstrates Gramsci's idea of a "war of position" so well.

The majority of the essays are by people who came to respect and love Denis after he resumed active work for the movement. English, Scottish, Dutch, Swedish and German friends write of his influence on their lives and

activities in the anti-apartheid struggle. Denis was an ambassador-at-large for the ANC, speaking to organisations across Europe and developing the practical commitment of those who wished to do "something to help the struggle". Their rich accounts of Denis's values and commitment, creativity and imagination, warmth and humour, and affinity with and influence on young people, affirm the lasting value of Denis's work then and since.

The book concludes with a few tributes from people working in South Africa on projects that benefit from Denis's personal commitment. Central to this is Community H.E.A.R.T., which was founded after 1994 to contribute to South African society's post-apartheid development. Anyone wanting to feel the pulse of support for development should read this book. It pays tribute not just to Denis but to what is best in humanity: its solidarity. In these pages, they merge into one. [NA](#)