



# Food and Allied Workers Union

**(FAWU)**

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**OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

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## **FAWU WELCOMES THE JUDGEMENT ON THE DEATH OF DR. NEIL AGGETT**

**04<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022**

Honourable Judge J. M. Makume issued a judgment on the re-opened inquest on the death of Dr. Neil Aggett. This judgement set aside the initial judgement which was issued by the apartheid Judge Pieter Kotze' who concluded that Cde Dr. Neil Aggett committed suicide by hanging himself. Judge Makume issued a judgement that Cde Dr Neil Aggett did not hang himself but was killed by the Johannesburg security branch.

Cde Dr Neil Aggett was arrested together with Dr. Floyd on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1982 by Captain Jacob Casper Strauss and was taken to Pretoria Prison. He spent 14 days and after, he was taken to John Vorster Squire. This is where he remained in the custody under inexcusable, extremely terrible appalling condition until the security branch officers killed him. He was hanged and found dead on the 05<sup>th</sup> February in 1982 by the brutal apartheid state machinery under the Johannesburg Security Branch in what was John Vorster Squire during apartheid. He was only 28<sup>th</sup> years old.

In the initial inquest, the lazy lying Apartheid Judge Pieter Kotze' concluded that 'no one was to blame'.

FAWU welcomes the judgement which is now contrary to that of the apartheid Judge Kotze'. This vindicates that FAWU has been correct all these years that hanging was only staged by apartheid security branch from the

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date it was announced that Dr Neil Aggett hanged himself. FAWU had an immediate strong belief that there is no way Cde Neil after having taken a conscious decision to oppose apartheid system with its massive inequalities and decided to join the struggle with the oppressed, would want to curtail his cause and kill himself, neither was it making any sense that he (as nonsensically put by the apartheid killers) that he could not bear the embarrassment of having sold his Cdes by incriminating them through a list of names and so decided to kill himself.

Cde Neil Aggett was aware that opposing the brutal apartheid system was a decision where any moment could have been his last. Therefore, he was prepared to join the masses against apartheid with no fear to die and there was no way he could have committed suicide.

It is one part and appreciated that the truth has now come out, but it is another that the re-opening of the inquest should never have taken this long as some of the apartheid killers have died. The inquest was opened on the same week just after Stephen Whitehead died and it is him who was responsible for the interrogating and who tortured Neil Aggett with other officers until he was killed.

Cde Dr. Neil Aggett was a medical Doctor who after realizing the brutality of apartheid to the oppressed, decided to join the struggle and organized workers. His profession (as a young University graduate in medicine from UCT) was also compromised as workers who were given medical attention by him could not be healed since they were forced to go back to work by employers before the date he stipulated as a Doctor.

He met a number of Cdes who worked with him such as Oscar Mpetha, Jan Theron, Frank Chikane, Barbara Hogan and many others. He joined FAWU which was at the time African Allied Food and Canning workers Union. He worked without a salary as a Union Official just to contribute to assist ordinary workers and worked part time as a medical Doctor.

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His work as an Official was immensely to the Union and the working class communities where he was working as a Doctor. He did not only organized workers to join Unions, he at one stage assisted Shopstewards to secured a wage agreement in a Fattis and Monis matter. He was also part of the Annual National Conference in Paarl in September 1980.

When was coming from working night shift from hospital, he would in the morning via Isando Station to issue pamphlets to encourage workers to join our Union. The majority of food companies in the areas of Isando, Kempton park and Elandsfontien, workers joined the Union because of his tireless work.

Killing of Cde Dr, Neil Aggett was nothing but a diabolical act on the part of the brutal, cruel, ruthless apartheid regime. Aggett family suffered a non-reparable injury which no one should experience. FAWU appreciate the Aggett family to have supported Cde Dr. Neil Aggett to work with FAWU and the working class to overthrow the apartheid system. Their support was also a contribution to the liberation struggle against the brutal apartheid system.

The cell at floor number 10 at John Vorster Squire where Cde Dr. Neil Aggett was interrogated, was the hell of the apartheid killers. Prisoners were assaulted, forced to stand for many hours, electrocuted, their testicles being squeezed, forced to do push-ups and long exercises. Cde Dr. Neil Aggett was also electrocuted, He was forced to stand long hours. His interrogation went for 12 hours a day, he was deprived to sleep by being forced to wake up as early as 3am and tortured. Major Arthur Crownright together with Stephen Whitehead repeatedly used a wet bag to suffocate Dr. Neil Aggett until he was unable to breath while his hands were tied up from behind. He was assaulted almost daily for about 3 hours. He was stripped naked and forced to do push up, jog on the spot for hours and the security would put a desk at the door so that no one would enter and witness this cruel treatment.

The ruthless principle of the apartheid system was "why keep political prisoners alive until they state their cases in court because, the system is designed to find them guilty anyway". One of the reasons why it was normal for apartheid state that some anti-apartheid activists were killed before they

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would even go to court such as Steve Biko, Ahmed Timol, Sipho Mutsi and others. Cde Neil Aggett was the 51<sup>st</sup> detainee to have died in police custody. Another standard style of the system was cover up brutal assault and all forms of physical torture against detainees. The Johannesburg security branch even had their specialist Rooi Swanepool who, with his team were masters to concoct evidence in a shortest space of time for the truth to be what they say and not what actually happened.

Another incident was when the security police illegally raided where Cde Aggett was staying in order to find any information related to suicidal tendencies so that they could use to prove that Dr. Neil Aggett killed himself. The security officers even illegally entered the office of Cde Aggett's lawyer and tapped the phone. This is how desperate they were to create an impression to the nation that Cde Neil Aggett committed suicide.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> December 1982, Magistrate van der Merwe who visited Dr. Neil Aggett recorded that Cde Neil was in good health and there were no injuries to report.

It is not surprising that the honourable Judge Makume concluded that there was an assault as they were clear marks on his body and also that Stephen Whitehead was more frustrated that he could not find any confession from Aggett and worse, Cde Neil wrote a complaint of assault and so decided to hang him.

Cde Dr. Neil Aggett was said to have hanged himself but the very same procedure of the police station is that detainees were not allowed to keep any of their possession but would be escorted by a police to their lockers and to the shower and also return to the cell without their belongings such as towels with them.

We welcome the findings that depicted many factors which could not prove that Cde Dr. Neil Aggett committed suicide. Some of them are;  
The judge could not be convinced that Cde Aggett had material that he could have used to kill himself since the detainees were not allowed their belonging into the cell. He could not be convinced that Cde Neil Aggett incriminated his

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Cdes because that list was never found. Further that if there was a list, then why not a single person was recorded to have been arrested from the same list the apartheid police claimed that Cde Dr. Neil wrote. In the event there was a list, then why the state did not keep him alive to lead evidence of the list against those who were going to be arrested. This clear shows that there was never a list or a confession of Cde Neil selling his Cdes.

On the basis that Cde Dr. Neil Aggett wrote a complaint of assault, it does not make any sense that he would write a complaint and not wait to get the result but kill himself.

When Stephen Whitehead was called to testify in the TRC, he refused with a claim that he is not responsible for Cde Dr. Neil Aggett but Paul Erasmus was. Now, how can Dr. Neil Aggett hang himself if the whole lieutenant who was leading the team that tortured Dr. Neil Aggett said Paul killed him. this again clear shows that there was never a suicide.

FAWU would like to extend and appreciate all activists such as Gavin Anderson, Dr Elisabeth Floyd who were also detainees and many Comrades such as our former GS Cde Jan Theron, Jabu Ngwenya, Cde Njikelana, Keith Coleman, Cde Israel Mokgwatlhe who was our Branch Secretary at Kempton Park and friends including formations that never took any break but continued to ague in many ways such as protests, statements, sharing of information in pursuit of the truth of how Cde Dr. Neil Aggett died. We thank, Foundation for Human's rights, Neil Aggett Support Group with its coordinator Brian Sandberg, George Bizos who despite the apartheid government suppressing the truth but placed a legal argument that made many people in South Africa to believe that there is no way Cde Dr. Neil Aggett could have hanged himself, Webber Wentzel Attorneys for their legal work and ensuring that witnesses are testifying in court. Yasmin Sooka who was in the TRC, Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.

We can never forget the masses who during extremely difficult times came out in their numbers being over 15 000 to his funeral and continued to

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support FAWU in marches of almost every year demanding the re-opening of the inquest all these years until the truth came out.

We demand that the NPA moved with speed to reflect and react to make sure that any person who still alive and had a hand in the death of Cde Dr. Neil Aggett be subjected to prosecution.

We want Cde Dr. Neil Aggett's contribution to liberation struggle to be part of the academic study in the Labour Relations and Political faculty for coming generation to know how the former generation sacrificed their lives for them.

In honour and to maintain his legacy, we want the Thembisa Hospital to be named after Dr Neil Aggett.

***For more information, please contact the General Secretary, Mayoyo Mngomezulu on 082 440 4039 or at [mngomezulu.mayoyo@fawu.org.za](mailto:mngomezulu.mayoyo@fawu.org.za) or the Deputy General Secretary, Vuka Chonco on 082 499 5854 or [vuka.chonco@fawu.org.za](mailto:vuka.chonco@fawu.org.za)***

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