

Ben Turok biography

Ben Turok (26 June 1927 - 9 December 2019) was an anti-apartheid activist, Economics Professor and former South African Member of Parliament as a member of the African National Congress. He was instrumental in helping draw up the Freedom Charter and also served time in jail under apartheid

He was born in Latvia in 1927 and came with his family to South Africa in 1934. After graduating from the University of Cape Town in 1950, he worked as a surveyor and a lecturer at a London Polytechnic Institute. Returning to South Africa in 1953, he joined the South African Congress of Democrats and in 1955 became its secretary for the Cape western region, acting as a full-time organiser for the Congress of the People. He was arrested for treason in 1956 and stood trial until charges against him were withdrawn in 1958. Although served with a banning order in 1955, he remained active as a trade union organiser and was elected unopposed to represent Africans of the Western Cape on the Cape Provincial Council in 1957.

He became national secretary of the COD in 1958, and served for a period as secretary of the consultative committee of the congress alliance. His wife, the former Mary Butcher, was also prominent member of the COD and later served a six months' sentence for aiding the illegal ANC. During the 1960 emergency, Ben Turok evaded arrest and went underground to help re-establish Congress organisation. In 1962 he was convicted under the Explosives Act and sentenced to three years in prison.

After his release he was placed under house arrest but escaped via Botswana. After three years in Tanzania he moved with his family to Britain, where he was editor of *Sechaba* until 1972. Subsequently he joined the faculty of London's Open University, for which he wrote a lengthy study in 1975: "Inequality as State Policy: The South African Case." His writings also include "South Africa: The Search for a Strategy," in *The Socialist Register* 1973 and a booklet, *Strategic Problems in South Africa's Liberation Struggle: A Critical Analysis* (1974). Before the unbanning of the ANC and the dismantling of apartheid, he lived in Barnet in North London and was a member of the British Labour Party.

He faced disciplinary proceedings by the ANC after publicly explaining why he broke party ranks and did not vote for the controversial Protection of Information Bill, aka the Secrecy Bill, on 22 November 2011.

He is the father of Neil Turok, a cosmologist, and founder of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences in Muizenberg, South Africa.

He was the Director of the Institute for African Alternatives and leaves behind his wife Mary, 3 sons and grand children.

