

PC/119/4/37/1

PETER BROWN



Peter Brown was born in Durban on December 24, 1924, and was therefore a kind of Christmas gift to the nation. He went to school at Michaelhouse, and from school into the army, serving in both Egypt and Italy during the Second World War.

After the war was over he went to Cambridge to study agriculture, but he soon decided this was not his line. He therefore returned to South Africa, choosing the then unusual route through the Sahara Desert. He went to Cape Town and took a B.A. degree in *Native Law & Administration*, and then worked in Pietermaritzburg for the Local Health Commission.

He was not compelled, like most of us, to work for a living. It must therefore be regarded as a feature of his character that he submitted himself to a self-chosen discipline. And it must be added that later, when he had no employer at all and worked more or less full-time for the Liberal Party, he adhered strictly to a worker's routine.

While with the Health Commission he started the YMCA in Edendale. Another achievement was when he proposed to Phoebe Barlow and was accepted; the laws of the land do not permit us to reveal what he said on that occasion. He and his wife have three children, Vanessa, Christopher, and Anton, fawn-like creatures who share in varying combinations the beauty, intelligence, and idiosyncrasies of their parents.

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In 1952 he formed the Pietermaritzburg Liberal Association, innocent of the nature of the road on which he was setting his feet. In the following year when the Liberal Party was founded, he became the secretary of the Natal Provincial division, and later its chairman.

Later, when Alan Paton began to decline, which he did with grace ( in actual fact he wanted to write the Life of Jan.H. Hofmeyr) Peter Brown became National Chairman of the Party. The Party's debt to him is incalculable. He brought to this task not only the self-discipline mentioned above, but considerable gifts of clarity in the use of both the spoken and the written word, and ability to organise and lead. Still greater were his gifts of character, his honesty, his strength of purpose, his gift of being able to encourage and sustain others when things were bad. Perhaps his most striking characteristic is the combination of high ethical standards with a complete absence of blah, a zeal that burns with a quiet and steady flame, in other words a kind of ordinary extraordinary sanity. And one other thing should be mentioned also, his natural gift of communicating with people whose circumstances in life are very different from his own.

Because this is an honest account, one should note that he has a criminal record. On one occasion he was found guilty of speaking at a meeting of more than ten Africans at Kokstad, and on another of entering a reserve without a permit. He shows no shame over these offences, nor over his three-month detention during the emergency of

1960. That <sup>shows what</sup> ~~is the~~ kind of man he is.

On July 31, 1964 he was banned from participating in political activity. What his future is, what our future is, no one can say. But one thing can be said with certainty, that if the future is the one for which we hope and plan, our banned National Chairman will play an important part in it. What is more, it will be a future which he as much as any person has helped to create.

If one were to make a list of true South Africans, his name would be near the top. As for Big Brother, his name wouldn't even be there.