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## EDITORIAL

### EDGAR BROOKES

Drawings by Lionel Murcott.

On Sunday, April 22nd, Edgar Brookes returned from his usual visit to church, lay down for a rest, and died quietly in his sleep. It was the way in which he would have liked to die.

Edgar Brookes was 82. For fifty years his contribution to the liberal cause in South Africa had been enormous and, as the article we reprint in this REALITY testifies, he continued to work and speak out for a just order here up to the day of his death.

He was honoured in many fields during that long life. He started his academic career at Pretoria University as a young Professor in 1923 and ended it with his appointment as Professor Emeritus of the University of Natal in 1968. He was for twelve years principal of Adams College, one of South Africa's great schools, until Bantu Education destroyed it. He helped found the S.A. Institute of Race Relations and remained one of its most honoured members to the end. He represented the African voters of Natal in the Senate for fifteen years. Towards the end of his life he was ordained into the Anglican Church and his appointment to the office of Canon was one which delighted him. He received another honour late in life, one which he appeared to prize enormously, although most of his white compatriots might not have regarded it as an honour at all, and some of his erstwhile admirers might have felt his acceptance of it showed his faculties were beginning to fail. This was his election as National Chairman of the Liberal



Party of South Africa in 1963, when he was already in his late sixties. It was in this capacity that many readers of REALITY will remember him best.

When the Liberal Party was formed in 1953 Edgar Brookes did not join it. There were probably several reasons for this. He was still at that time the representative of the African people of Natal and Zululand in the Senate and he almost certainly felt that he could represent them best if he maintained his independence and was not encumbered by having a party political label attached to him. Another reason, probably, was that the Liberal Party soon adopted a policy of universal suffrage. This was something which, at that time, he could not yet accept. He still hoped, one suspects, that by proposing a less dramatic extension of the franchise to black South Africans, one might persuade white South Africans to break out of their paralysed rejection of any proposal for increasing the black political stake in the country, and to start moving along a road of continuing political concessions while there was still time.

So, for seven years, the relationship between Edgar Brookes and the Liberal Party was friendly, but a little distant.

It was typical of him that he should decide to join the Party at a time when it was becoming an increasingly dangerous thing to do, and that he should accept its chairmanship when that was a very dangerous thing to do. Such dangers didn't worry him a bit. But he was not only a courageous person, in that self-deprecating and humorous way of his, he was also a man of extraordinary steadfastness. When he became its National Chairman, the Liberal Party was already under immense pressure. In the months that followed these pressures rose dramatically. Not only were more and more leading members banned but numbers of others were detained — and nobody knew why. As the weeks passed the Party and its new Chairman were confronted by the fact that some of these people had been involved in an underground sabotage organisation and that one of them had planted the bomb that had gone off on the Johannesburg station. One could have excused the new Chairman, as one unexpected revelation followed another, if he had felt that he had accepted the Chairmanship under false pretences, and given it and the Liberal Party up there and then. But the thought didn't even seem to enter his mind. He remained unwavering to the end and even beyond the end, for even after the Party had had to disband his commitment to what it had stood for was unswerving.

This was no blind loyalty. He had travelled a long road, from his support for the policies of General Hertzog in the 1920's to his acceptance of the Liberal ideal of a common society in the 1960s. One's impression is that each step was taken after careful thought and a good deal of soul-searching but that, once taken, he was not likely to be persuaded to turn back again. He was one of those rare people whose political views became less and less conservative as they grew older. Would that there were more of them.

Edgar Brookes was a convinced and committed Christian. He tried to practice what he preached, and succeeded better than most. His first love was his God, his second his fellow-men. He had a profound faith in both. He believed passionately that men should be free, but that freedom carried with it the obligation to serve. That he did throughout his life. Fanatics, Left and Right, black and white, had no time for the position he occupied. Yet, if the West is to leave any worthwhile legacy to Africa it is the legacy of that position — Where every man is seen as an end in himself and not as a means to somebody else's ends; where the only lasting insurance against tyranny is seen to be the freedom of ordinary men to be governed by those they want to govern them, and the freedom to get rid of them when they no longer want them.

It is in defence of that position that we must now stand without the steady flame of Edgar Brookes' support. □

