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### OUR READERS WRITE

## A resolute man

**I** RECALL Alan Paton saying admiringly of Peter Brown that he was resolute. My dictionary glosses that as "firm in purpose or belief, steadfast, determined". It's an astute judgment.

As an active member of the Liberal Party in the late fifties and early sixties until I was banned in 1963, I remember well the calmness Brown brought not only to facing the inevitable dangers resulting from opposition to the vicious apartheid regime but to coping with the often stormy disagreements in the party over issues like the franchise (universal versus qualified), civil disobedience, relations with the Congress Alliance and the Pan Africanist Congress, and the stance on calls for boycotts within the country and from outside.

He was, I thought, an excellent chairman of the party with its diversity of race, class and ideology. Tolerant without being soft, he understood both right and left of the party rather better than they understood each other, dealing with us all with good humour and a nice dry wit, the latter qualities undoubtedly helping him through detention and banning.

He understood, too, the frustration and impatience which led some of us to break with party policy and embrace sabotage and other forms of illegal opposition in the post-Sharpeville period. He worked with great competence at building up the grassroots organisation of the Liberal Party.

It's easy now to undervalue the party's many achievements, particularly in the country areas where Brown's empathy with rural workers and his knowledge of African languages played a significant role. It's easy, also, to forget that in its rejection of compartmental structures the party was a living microcosm of the non-racial South Africa which exists today.

For many of us — especially young members — the Liberal Party wasn't simply a political party but a way of life in which enduring and powerful friendships were formed in defiance of racist prescriptions. This is to the credit of people like Brown, Paton and Jordan Ngubane who didn't merely talk their liberalism but lived it also. Brown was also a good writer on politics, an unfussy style quietly reinforcing the sound sense of the opinions expressed in journals like *Contact*.

A man who knew how to keep a secret — as opponents of apartheid often needed to — Brown said little or nothing about his many personal acts of support and generosity to individuals and causes. Many lives — including mine — are the richer thanks to him. It would be a pity if his modesty and reticence prevent a proper recognition of his immense — and underrated — contribution to the emergence of a better South Africa.

This tribute would be incomplete without mention of the unswerving and essential support given to Peter by his wife, Phoebe. I hope it will be of comfort to her and the family to know how much Peter was respected and liked. A great brave generation is passing and Peter Brown is a noble member of it.

DAVID EVANS  
Wallasey, UK  
(by e-mail)

# Brown's generosity

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PC16/11/11/15

**I**N 1980 we had an idea of a Centre for Further Education at Nottingham Road which would serve all sections of the community, not easily acceptable to the majority of people in those days of apartheid. Having tried to find land in a suitable position on which to build this dream we finally decided to ask Peter Brown for a piece of land on his farm.

Two of us stood with him on the land where the Midlands Community College now stands. He immediately said, "Yes I'll give you some. How much do you want? Take as much as you want." Subsequently we met in his lawyer's office in Pietermaritzburg to sign the papers and I shall always remember his words, "I don't know what the hell we are doing but sign here", with his dry sense of humour.

"Don't worry, it will be OK, Peter," I said, and through his generosity we have been able to help thousands of people. A great man supported by a wonderful wife.

PAULINE GREENE  
Nottingham Road

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**W**ITH the passing of Peter Brown our city, our country and indeed the human race have lost a true son of the soil. He will always be remembered for his principled, steadfast and courageous stand and action against apartheid.

The Msunduzi Municipality salutes him and expresses its condolences to his family and close friends.

It is our intention to transform Pietermaritzburg's central square into a Freedom Park, in which the contributions of many local stalwarts to our liberation and the birth of our democracy, will be appropriately acknowledged.

Rest assured that the formation of the Liberal Party and the role of Peter Brown will not be forgotten as the plan for Freedom Park unfolds.

HLONI ZONDI  
Mayor, Msunduzi Municipal Council  
Pietermaritzburg