



**APDUSA VIEWS**

**Special Issue**

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**A TRIBUTE  
TO  
TIM PILLAY**

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## **THE PASSING OF DHARMASEELAN<sup>1</sup> PILLAY KNOWN AS TIM OR TIMS PILLAY**

(Based on tributes delivered by Kader Hassim at the residence of the late Tim Pillay and at the Pietermaritzburg Crematorium on 24 August 2004)

Friends,

The act of being born and that of dying is the universal law. It is a process which applies to everything. Nothing is static or remains constant. We are all part of a process of coming into being and passing away. Marx and Engels called it dialectics. We can also call it the process of life. There are people dying every day and that death is dealt with according to the religious and cultural practice of the deceased and his/her family. We learn of its occurrence; we pay due respect if we know that person and we get on with our lives.

Yet every now and then a death occurs which strikes a loud blow, which affects the whole community. We sit up and take serious note of it and assess the loss suffered.

The death of Comrade Tim Pillay is one such occasion. I can vouch for it because I have known and worked with Tim Pillay for the entire period of over 40 years, although for the last few years illness prevented him from doing all the things that he loved doing.

Tim was part of a large family of 14 children. For a long time, his father, Mr. Bakium Pillay, was the sole supporter of the family. When he was no longer able to manage on his own, Tim had to leave school after completing Standard 8. He went to work at the Victoria Club with his father as a page. At that time, Tim's two brothers and a sister were studying to become teachers. Tim's modest earnings helped to make it possible for his siblings to complete their studies. It was only thereafter that the family was able to afford beds, decent food and "luxuries" like a radio.

Tim pursued his studies through correspondence and went up to Matric. He obtained better employment and was valued for his dedication to his work, his honesty and a high sense of responsibility.

Throughout his life, he remembered the poorness endured by the family. He always respected people less well-off than him. He judged people for what they were and never for the wealth they had acquired.

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning a charitable, kind and giving person

My wife, Nina and I met Tim Pillay within a month of our arrival in Pietermaritzburg in early 1963. This city was still vibrating from the great Eddels Strike. There was an air of militancy and excitement among the Indian people. It was at that time when we formed a branch of APDUSA in Pietermaritzburg. Tim was one its foundation members together with people like Nithia Naicker, the late Shaik Hassan, the late Vahed Ally, Charlie Ball, Mahomed Habib, Freddy Everton, John Damonse, the late Prem Bheek, the late brothers Amdhi and Essop Hassim.

They together with Tim gave a large part of their adult lives for the cause of liberation.

But of them all, none was more dedicated and committed than Tim Pillay.

Tim was par excellence the disciplined freedom fighter. He was available to the organisation 24 hours a day. I cannot recall a single occasion when Tim said in response to a request that he was not available.

From the time Tim joined APDUSA in 1963, he was unstinting in his contribution to the organisation. He was its secretary for decades. Most of his after-work time was at the disposal of the organisation. His activities included:

- Attending various types of meetings including house meetings
- Assisting in the printing our news letter, APDUSA VIEWS, leaflets, pamphlets and even books
- The collation and stapling of printed matter
- The distribution of our political literature
- The sale of books printed by us
- Fund raising
- Conveying members to meetings and from there to their homes

Although his formal studies ended at matric, Tim by his own efforts through serious reading, discussions and regular attendance at study group meetings, Tim developed and became a worker intellectual. He was quite at home discussing the politics of this country and the world with the young white intellectuals from Natal University who purchased petrol from Grey's Service Station in Commercial Road. Many of them later became prominent in their professions. They remembered Tim with fondness and respect as that politically conscious and trusted employee of Grey's Service Station.

There was no task in the organisation which was too menial and demeaning for Tim. Although he was APDUSA's secretary for many years, he never asked people to do tasks which he himself was not prepared to do. He spent long hours after work on many nights with comrades like Essop Haffejee, Dees Govender, Nithia Naicker, Sailor Chetty, Jerry Singh, Selva Padayachee and other APDUSA members bringing out a steady stream of political literature which was distributed to the public. This meant that everything had to be in place for the printing machines to work. Tim attended to that. When the printing machines gave trouble Tim would arrange for Prithi Moodley (formerly of "Ace Printers" and now of "First Print"), Jerry Singh and Selva Padyachee, all knowledgeable about printing machines, to come and effect necessary repairs.

At times when books had to be printed it meant working seven days a week. Tim would be there every time without fail. I must record that I have not come across a person as dedicated to political work as Tim.

Doing this kind of work was not without its dangers. During the "DON'T VOTE" campaign, pamphlets and posters carried Tim's name and address. On one occasion, one of the sell-outs threatened Tim with violence. For Tim an unrepentant sell-out remained a sellout. He or she never became a comrade. On another occasion, while distributing leaflets in Woodlands, he was attacked by a rotweiler. On yet another occasion, when he was conveying a comrade to a venue late in the night after they had been printing, he and that comrade were savagely beaten up by thugs parading as security guards. Yet none of these ugly incidents diminished his love and dedication for the freedom that we all cherished.

Although never a well-off person, Tim always gave generously. His house was open to the organisation. He was always ready to provide transport to convey comrades to and from meetings and to and from places where field work had to be done. In fact a Nissan bakkie and later the familiar flat bed truck, both owned by his employers, Outdoor Marine Centre, became famous for transporting the furniture and goods or whatever else needed transporting, of family and friend from one place to another. On not a single occasion, did he ever ask for money, nor would he ever have accepted money for his time and work. His reward lay in doing a service.

For all the things he did in his active and very often hectic life, he did it for the cause, he did for his family and friends. In all this, he stood at the end of the queue. His needs and requirements were always considered last.

He was a loving husband and a devoted father. He spared nothing to ensure that his children got the best that he and his wife could afford. It gave Tim great pleasure to see his children do well in life. In their success, he found pride and justification for all the sacrifice he and his wife had made.

Over the ages, the great teachers of humanity have taught and urged people to live simply – simplicity in dress, in food, living quarters and life style in general. They did this in response to a propensity on part of people to flaunt their material wealth and to feed their vanity. Pride and vanity have been and still are among the worst vices in human beings.

Without studying the writings and teachings of these great men, Tim by nature was simplicity in the truest sense of the word. He lived simply; he dressed simply; he ate little and what he did eat, led to no craving that makes the glutton. From the time I knew him, he spent a large part of his life conveying himself from one place to another either by the use of his legs or by public transport. He then bought that famous old red Mazda which served him, his family and friends well beyond all expectations and predictions. Not once did I hear Tim wish that he had a better car. Nor did I ever hear him show the slightest envy towards the good fortune of some other person.

The twin sisters of simplicity are humility and modesty. All three are great virtues. Tim had plenty of these. Tim's life stands in sharp contrast to those who crave for publicity, honour and public acclaim. The other day, "The Natal Witness", our regional newspaper, reported that one of the many virtues of the late Peter Brown was his lack of craving for acclaim and praise. He had assisted many people without revealing that he was the source of that assistance. As against this, there is the obscene vice of the personality cult or the glorification of the individual. The craving for praise and acclaim assumes proportions of insanity. It becomes an addiction. There is never enough praise. The good work is done provided there is a rust proof plaque recording the name of the person, the good deed and the television camera for the widest coverage and publicity for the individual addicted.

Tim did what he did because he believed it to be correct. He asked for no praise. He sought no glory for himself. In this regard, he followed the great teachers referred to earlier and the great revolutionaries of the world.

These days we read and hear every day about statues and memorials for persons regarded as great freedom fighters. It is not the case of an individual being honoured for his/her contribution to the struggle and leaving it at that. There seems to be no end to the number of honours bestowed on a single individual. Yet there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, who in their own way, contributed to the freedom struggle and without whose contribution we might still be oppressed. These are your unsung heroes and heroines. They are to be found in every city, town, dorp, village, township and settlement. If a statue were to be erected for every such person, South Africa would be doing nothing else except sculpting statues. Apart from creating an acute shortage of material for the building of roads, this nation will starve to death.

Yet there are many other ways to honour heroes and heroines - biographies, songs, poems, and plays.

Tim remained true to his principles and beliefs until the very end. While many persons who considered themselves as freedom fighters fell by the wayside through fatigue, faintheartedness, cowardice or plain desertion, Tim never lost faith in the struggle for freedom, justice and an equitable distribution of wealth of society.

Tim did what he did during his life because he was a caring person. He cared for people, for their suffering and their needs. That is why he went out of his way to help people in need. Even where a person was beyond need, like his late mother, Tim visited her grave on a regular basis notwithstanding the fact that she had died decades ago. It is sad but touching to learn that mother and son are soon to be reunited – in death. Tim's ashes are to be interred in his mother's grave.

Though a person coming to the end of his life, his caring for his friends remained undiminished. The other day Tim was rushed to St Anne's Hospital as an emergency case. While there, he instructed his wife Maliga not to forget to telephone and ascertain how I (down with flu ) was faring. It was the same sense of caring which made him solicitous about the health and well being his friend and comrade Mahomed Habib (formerly of Adam's Supply Store) who had suffered kidney failure.

When Tim married Maliga, he was already set in his views on most matters. But he was able to continue doing all the things he did because Maliga did not obstruct him. She could have made life difficult for him if she was opposed to his views on life and his activities. On the contrary, she was fully supportive. Not only did she not show anger and hostility to his late home coming night

after night because of his APDUSA work, but where she could, she participated in the activities with him. She attended meetings, conferences, took part in workshops, played an active role in the fundraising efforts, especially the annual braai and social function organised by APDUSA.

Maliga's support and sympathy was crucial for Tim to have achieved so much. Not only was she wife and mother, she kept the home fires burning when Tim went through hard times. She worked long hours in their Heel Bar to ensure that the household did not run short of necessities.

When Tim's employment was terminated because of his crippling illness, Maliga, as soon as she could, stopped working in the Heel Bar so as to be full time with Tim. What a fortunate decision! She was always at his side during his remaining living days, giving him all the love and attention that this very brave but very sick man, needed.

Tim's passing will be felt the most by Maliga.

His children, Kavi and Thamaray, will keenly mourn the loss of their father.

Tim's last days were not easy. For a strong willed and active man to be confined to bed for long hours must have been most painful. Yet he bore his condition with dignity and fortitude. He never did complain about the burden his condition imposed on him.

He had his grandchildren all about him. There was a special bond between him and them. Their adoration for him was undisguised.

They will miss him terribly.

When a person of Tim's character and personality dies, many will grieve his death. While he was alive, he touched many of us in a large variety of ways. There can only be memories of goodness and decency.

Shakespeare, playwright to some and poet to others, has appropriate words for an occasion like this and which we adopt in bidding Comrade Tim Pillay our final farewell:

“Fear no more the heat of the sun  
Nor the furious winter’s rages  
Thou thy earthly task hast done  
Home art gone and taken thy wages.”

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## **REMEMBERING TIM**

**By**

**Nina Hassim**

We live in very trying times these days. The way in which society is evolving under the juggernaut of ANC policy and propaganda together with the rampant racialism, the low level of discourse and the simplifications that abound makes for unease. There is also the consumerism that has taken hold. There is also the glorification of the individual and the myths surrounding certain persons. All these things were so alien to Tim’s nature.

For those of us as we grow older there is the loss and pain of seeing people that we hold dear departing this earth. When Tim died in August last year (2004) a little part of all of us died too. Apdusa could never be the same.

I cast my mind back in time and the first real memory of Tim that I have is 1963: Kamala Court where we first stayed, cramped and sometimes noisy, was where the Pietermaritzburg comrades came to welcome us and take us into their fold. In Tims case it was a fold that never wavered through good times and bad. Pietermaritzburg at that time had just come out of the leather workers strike and political consciousness was high. Many people came and joined or were sympathisers, but later left because of the repression that came soon



after. When we started the campaign of giving pamphlets out door to door in 1963 in the various areas, it soon became a game of hide and seek between the police and us, but the police picked us up time and time again and confiscated our pamphlets. We would split up and do different areas and be happy if one group was able to give out more pamphlets before they took us to the police station. In retrospect when I think of that time I realise how much Tim had to loose. Kader and some of the others were self- employed, I was unemployed for much of that time and Tim was working. He had the most to loose. And yet through it all he remained steadfast. It was the pattern of his life.

Tim was for many years the Secretary of APDUSA and he fulfilled his duties above and beyond the call of duty. He came into the movement because he understood the need for a principled approach to struggle, and took part fully in the organisation. He was a matriculant who was also self taught and trained politically in the organisation. He was the shining example of a worker-intellectual. A man who never forgot his roots and transcended them and understood the way society worked and what was needed to change it. I can never recall a day when Tim refused, or did not make time for some pressing business of the organisation. He spent hours and hours of his time doing the work that needed to be done. Whether at the beginning giving out pamphlets, going to meetings and later when the press was started printing or collating books, sometimes for days and weeks on end. His dedication to the cause was unabated until illness struck him low. There was nothing he would not do whether it was cleaning the machine or putting up 'don't vote' placards or fetching and carrying other comrades who had no transport. When the fund raising braai time came Tim was with us from the beginning to the end and afterwards as well, when the cleaning up had to be done. As far as the organisation was concerned work was work; there wasn't womens' or mens' work. Tim's loyalty is a lesson and beacon to all those who remain. There was no glory, no name in lights and on T-shirts.

However that was not all he did. Tim was a devoted husband, father and friend. He was able to do these things because his wife Maliga stood by him through thick and thin. He was a proud father and sacrificed a lot for his children. He did his rounds of visiting people that he felt he should see. When Kader was in prison he would check up on us regularly. He worked with me in the Pharmacy for a short time while he was between jobs. It was a strange sight to see Tim between the bottles and jars of the front shop. He was so meticulous that he nearly drove me and the others who helped to distraction when

he would insist on banking even a few cents. That was Tim – absolutely honest and careful. He came to stay in Belmont Crescent- and uprooted his family- a few times when I went to see Kader on Robben Island.

He made sure he kept in contact with others as well. Tim had a brother who had married a non-Hindu and I knew two of the children through work. It did not occur to me that they were related to Tim until Phillip proudly told me that Tim was his uncle. When I asked Tim he told me how he used to check up on them as well. He really cared about people. His relationship with Nithia was another case in point. He always cared for him especially when it came to doing things for Nithia. He could tease him as well as when he told him to put on the hearing aid when he had not heard or misheard something. Tim often called the women he was with “girl” even when we were quite old and it is a mark of the way he used this expression that never made one feel he was sexist or that he demeaned us it was an affectionate way of addressing women. He also always remembered to ask about absent children.

Tim also taught us about the way the people of the old Indian Village remembered each other by using the number of the houses to identify the family. Tim literally knew most of the people in Pietermaritzburg, when he would say he knew some-one at first one would wonder at it, until it became more and more apparent that he really did know many people and many people likewise knew Tim. He was loved and respected by all who came into contact with him. He knew a lot about Pietermaritzburg and its people.

Tim lived simply and dressed simply, there was no conspicuous consumption in his life. I do not think he could ever conceive of such a thing. The only vice, if one can call it a vice was his love for lots and lots of sugar in his tea. It seems not to be a vice at all because he was not diabetic thankfully. What a man is that whose only vice was a love for a little extra sugar especially when we reflect on our own small or large vices, or the vices of those others who wallow in self glory.

Tim was not just a political figure. He was a loyal friend who did things for all of us. Whether it was transporting comrades or helping us personally to get rid of our garden refuse. He knew all of us so well that when something was a problem he almost instinctively knew and automatically helped or showed concern for one’s problems That was his nature: he always thought and cared about friends and comrades.

Tim will always be remembered by those whose lives he touched. When I look around these days and I see the naked avarice, self interest and self promotion that is so prevalent I think back on the austere life of a man who gave his all for the cause of liberation and comradeship, together with his undying loyalty and friendship and I see so clearly how much greater and better Tim's way was. I hope that one day our country will produce the Tims that we need so that a better future will be possible for the succeeding generations.

(Delivered at a meeting of APDUSA on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2005)

