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## **EDITORIAL**

### **PETER BROWN**

The news that the Minister of Justice will not impose a third five-year restriction on Mr Peter Brown has been received by his friends in the outlawed Liberal Party, and by many other people, with emotions of joy, gratitude, and relief.

The restriction, often called a ban, is provided for in the Suppression of Communism Act. It meant that Mr Brown could not attend any gathering, social or otherwise, or enter any court (unless ordered to do so), or any factory, or any educational institution, nor could he leave the magisterial district of Pietermaritzburg. Nor could he be quoted on any subject whatsoever.

In other words the intention of the ban was to cut Mr Brown off from the life of society and the community,

and particularly from the political life of South Africa. Thus a man who spoke with such clarity and honesty and commonsense on the theme of the reconstruction of our society, both as a moral necessity and a political expediency, and who was the chosen National Chairman of a legally constituted political party, was silenced for ten years. And it is not yet known for certain whether certain restrictions remain automatically in force even after the ban itself has lapsed.

Why was Mr Brown banned in the first place? The official reasons were never revealed. To reveal reasons has been officially declared to be "not in the public interest," though Mr Vorster astonished us all by telling an American audience that there was nothing to prevent a banned person from asking for the reasons for his ban, and from appealing

against it if the reasons were not factually true. This astonished us because we had without exception been under the impression, officially given, that the Minister of Justice was under no legal obligation whatsoever to give any reasons at all, except of course the blanket reason that the banned person was, in the opinion of the Minister, "furthering the aims of Communism".

We are not prevented—legally—and as yet—from guessing the reasons for Mr Brown's ban. One reason was that the Minister, and that means in this instance the head of the Security Police in Pietermaritzburg, was of the opinion that Mr Brown was by his political activities endangering the safety of the State. He had a gift of communicating with and winning the confidence of people of all kinds and conditions, and particularly black people, who constituted the majority of the Liberal Party membership. Furthermore the Liberal Party stood for absolute political equality, irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, and creed. It stood for the repeal of the Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act, the Separate Amenities Act, and especially of the Act which was used to silence opposition, namely the Suppression of Communism Act. It was totally opposed to racial classification, to job reservation, to restrictions on trade union organisation. It stood for a common society with a universal suffrage. Mr Brown was the National Chairman of this Party that opposed so fundamentally, and in many individual cases so courageously, the policies and dogmas of the ruling Nationalist Party, which undoubtedly believed, then if not now, that it had been given some kind of divine mission—and to that end some kind of divine omniscience—to rule the destinies of others.

What made the Liberal Party still more unacceptable was that it completely ignored the colour-bar in its own activities. It rejected totally the idea that to be a member of a race was the greatest human duty and privilege. It was devoted to a new nationalism, that of South Africa itself. Its ideal was to create a common society, and to be a member of that common society was far more fundamental and important than to be an Afrikaner or a Zulu or an Englishman.

To many of its enemies it deliberately flouted the noble traditions of South Africa, and it deliberately flaunted its disregard for them. At some of its meetings its speakers were met by the palpable hatred of some of the white members of the audience, notably in a city like Pretoria. Its stand on the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act was met by an intensity of loathing and contempt.

The Party was subject to the untiring surveillance of the Security Police. Its leaders were met at every airport and railway station. Their movements were known to the last detail. Yet if their cars were smashed up and shots fired through their windows, the offender was never apprehended. It was an ugly time to live through.

Mr Brown's leadership in those years was quiet and resolute. One by one the most important and influential members of the Party were banned. He himself was banned in 1964. More than forty of the Party's leading members were silenced.

In the Party were to be found men and women of intelligence and courage. They fought elections without success. The Party never remotely approached in size or power the status of the two senior Parties. It could hardly be regarded as a danger to the State, which means—make no bones about it—a danger to the Nationalist Party and the Government. Yet it was so regarded. It was subjected to incessant attack. The task of the Security Police was not only surveillance; it was outright intimidation. Finally the Party was outlawed in 1968, when it was made a criminal offence to belong to a racially-mixed political organisation. The Party had the choice of continuing as a group of non-racial bodies not allowed to communicate with each other, or of disbanding. It decided to disband.

That was six years ago, but the name of Peter Brown lived on in the minds of the one-time members of the Party. The imposing of a second ban in 1969 came as a shock to them. The Party no longer existed. Interracial political work was a serious criminal offence. Why was the second ban thought necessary? No one was able to discover.

Was the second ban merely meant as a reminder of the power and might and unswerving purpose of the Nationalist Party? Or was Mr Brown banned again because he had been the National Chairman? Or was it the caprice of the Security Police? No one knew the answers.

The outlawing of the Liberal Party left a vacuum in the political life of South Africa. But it also left a vacuum in the moral life. It meant that other people who were convinced of the need for change, and of the need to reconstruct the social order, had to assume new obligations. And they did so. The Christian Institute, SPROCAS, the students of the universities, all committed themselves more vigorously to a non-racial ideal for South African society. The Institute of Race Relations, which had kept its distance from the Liberal Party, became more outspoken.

It would not be wise to write boastfully about the part played by the Liberal Party, nor to encourage arguments as to who did what and as to who did it first. The times are too urgent for that. St. Paul wrote of a society in which there was neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Scythian nor Barbarian, bond nor free. It was a vision that may be cherished only in the heart. But in the Liberal Party it was made flesh and blood. It was, we hope, a forerunner of what is to come. The part played by Mr Brown in this creation cannot be exaggerated.

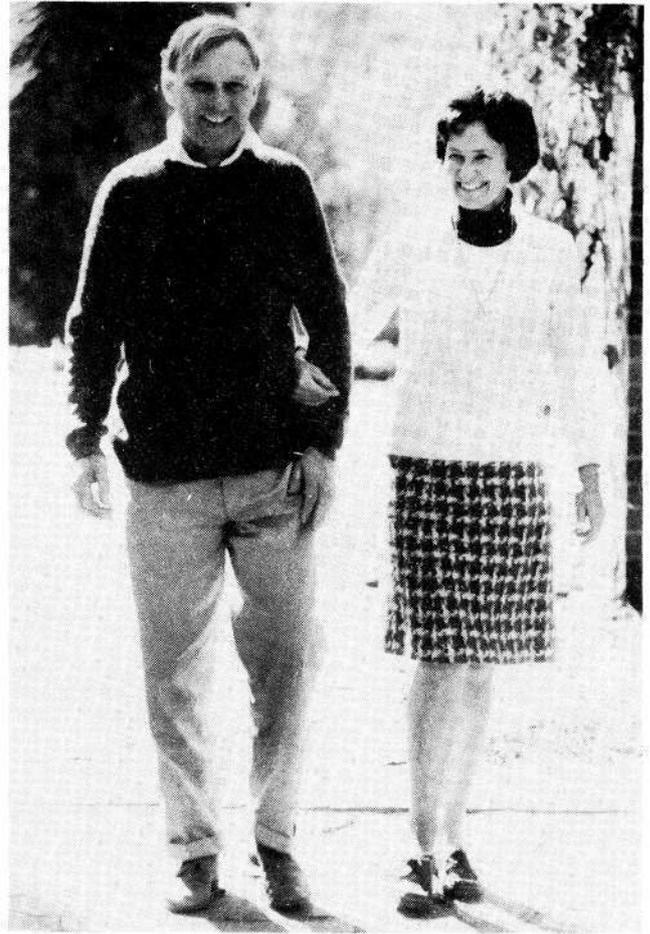
We all feel gratitude that the ban has not been reimposed. Why? To whom should we be grateful? To the Minister for not repeating an action which in 1964 was repugnant to all liberals and understandable only from the point of view of a government that dreaded any challenge to the status quo? To the Minister for not repeating the ban of 1969 which was not only repugnant but was also mean and incomprehensible? Why should one feel gratitude to a government that acted with such ferocity towards a group of people who believed in and worked for a common South African nationalism because they could not believe in or work for any lesser kind?

Yet one does feel gratitude nevertheless, and that is because Mr and Mrs Brown can return to the life of a society, which though far from perfect, is their own, and has been the recipient of their love and service. Strange that it should be a criminal offence to love and serve it in certain ways!

Mr Brown is now returning to this imperfect society. It has changed much since he left it, but the outside world has changed more. All of us know—except those extreme Afrikaner Nationalists and those United Party diehards who neither think nor read, and do not wish to do either—that unless greater efforts are made to create a just order of society in our country, the future—and not just for white people—will be one of grief and desolation.

To what extent Mr Brown will participate in the life of this society, and that means—he being what he is—the political life, we would not presume to say. We do not even know whether such participation would be gravely restricted by the powers that be. It would indeed be calamitous if this were so. At no time in our history have we stood in greater need of the kind of courage and the kind of resolution and the kind of commonsense too, which are exemplified in him. At no time in our history has our country needed them more. But the record of our government in the last quarter of a century does not exactly fill us with hope.

Yet whatever the outcome may be, REALITY extends a welcome to Mr and Mrs Brown, and expresses its joy that they will now be able to live a more human and natural kind of life. This is a good time to remember those for whom this is not yet so. □



Peter and Phoebe Brown after the ban expired.

*The Natal Witness*

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