Michael Cardo (1977 - ) is a Durban-born writer and politician. He grew up in Botha’s Hill, and matriculated from Kearsney College in 1994. Cardo holds a BA (Summa Cum Laude) in English, French and History from the University of Natal, as well as an MPhil and PhD in History from the University of Cambridge, where he attended Trinity College on a Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholarship. His PhD thesis, awarded in 2003, explores the relationship between white “South Africanism” and liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Cardo has been involved in politics since 2003, when he joined the political staff of the DA and served as a director of research for Tony Leon. He continued serving as the party’s national Director of Research between 2004 and 2006. He also worked as Helen Zille’s speechwriter on the 2009 election campaign. Between 2011 and 2014, Cardo worked in the Policy and Strategy Unit at the Department of Premier in the Western Cape Government, specialising in social policy and serving as the Director of Policy Research and Analysis.

In 2006, he was awarded a Visiting Research Fellowship at the Helen Suzman Foundation. It was during this time that he began writing a biography of the former SA Liberal Party leader, Peter Brown. The biography, *Opening Men’s Eyes: Peter Brown and the Liberal Struggle for South Africa*, was an attempt by Cardo to memorialize the activist and expose people to the important role he played in South African history.
Opening Men’s Eyes has received a positive reception with particular praise directed at the effort Cardo has made to capture his subject matter accurately. J.E. Spence described it as a “well written and closely argued biography” which provides “a splendid version of Brown’s life” (2010:76). On Cardo’s coverage of the friendship shared between Alan Paton and Brown, Spence lauded the “intelligently and sensitively” done account of their relationship (77). Steve Hayes awarded Opening Men’s Eyes four out of five stars with the assessment that “the character of Peter Brown that Michael Cardo captures is indeed the Peter Brown that I knew” (2011). Colin Gardner also appreciated the authenticity of Brown’s characterisation and lauded the “vivid and gripping detail” and rigorous research that went into the making of the biography (2011:121-122).

Cardo remains active in politics. He was elected to Parliament in 2014 and is the Shadow Minister of Economic Development. He is also the DA’s Constituency Head of the Overstrand Municipality, centred on Hermanus. In terms of his literary endeavors, Cardo would like to tackle the biographies of Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert and Helen Zille in future.

References

Brown's style of leadership is clearly illustrated by David Evans, who became Secretary of the Natal division in the 1960s, and who was a friend and research assistant to Paton. He remembers the 'calmness' which Brown brought to coping with 'often stormy disagreements in the party':

Excerpt from *Opening Men's Eyes: Peter Brown and the Liberal Struggle for South Africa* (2010:113):
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.

Paton and Brown complemented one another, and their friendship was at once personal and political. Together, they were the public face of a particular strand of South African liberalism in the 1950s and 1960s, one which Albert Luthuli, in his autobiography, said took its stand on 'principles and not on expediency - a new thing indeed in white politics'. And the way that strand was woven had as much to do with their personal chemistry as it did their political like-mindedness.

Bibliography

