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FM CAPE TOWN EMBASSY 010815Z APR 1990
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NO 263 OF 1 APRIL

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South Africa

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LORD HUNT'S VISIT

1. THIS TELEGRAM IS INTENDED TO SET THE SCENE FOR LORD HUNT'S VISIT. IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE A SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS BRIEF AND HAS MORE TO DO WITH THE MOOD HE WILL ENCOUNTER HERE THAN WITH THE TACTICS OF HIS DISCUSSIONS. WE CAN TALK ABOUT THE LATTER WHEN HE ARRIVES.
2. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER SEES THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHITES AND NON-WHITES IN THIS COUNTRY. SO FAR THIS HAS BEEN REFLECTED MORE IN WHAT HE HAS SAID THAN IN WHAT HE HAS DONE, ALTHOUGH TO HAVE COMMITTED HIMSELF SO FIRMLY TO THE PRINCIPLE OF CHANGE IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. SOME EXTERNAL SIGNS OF PETTY APARTHEID HAVE BEEN REMOVED BUT SO FAR THE BASIC DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION REMAINS ON THE STATUTE BOOKS. WHILE NOT WILLING TO CONTEMPLATE POWER-SHARING IN A UNITARY STATE P W BOTHA IS PERHAPS WILLING TO ENVISAGE A MORE EQUITABLE DIVISION OF POWER IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF SOUTH AFRICA THAN MOST WHITES, AND CERTAINLY MOST MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL PARTY, HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN WILLING TO CONSIDER. HOWEVER IT IS STILL NOT CLEAR WHETHER HE HAS THOUGHT THROUGH IN SPECIFIC TERMS EXACTLY WHAT HE WANTS TO ACHIEVE OR WHETHER HE SEES CHANGE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS WITHOUT A CLEAR IDEA OF HIS DESTINATION. WHITES IN GENERAL APPEAR TO ACCEPT CHANGE AS NECESSARY, PROVIDED IT IS NOT TOO MUCH AND TOO FAST.
3. THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION IN RHODESIA CAME AS AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE TO THE SAG AND TO WHITES GENERALLY. AFTER THE INITIAL SHOCK THEIR REACTION HAS BEEN CALMER AND MORE SENSIBLE THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. MUGABE HAS MADE A GOOD INITIAL IMPRESSION AND MOST PEOPLE ARE PREPARED TO WAIT AND SEE HOW HE GETS ON IN PRACTICE BEFORE DRAWING CONCLUSIONS. BLACKS HAVE BEEN GENERALLY PLEASED BY THE RESULT AND THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS HAVE TAKEN ENCOURAGEMENT FROM IT. FAR FROM STIMULATING A RETURN TO THE LAAGER THE ELECTION RESULT APPEARS ON THE FACE OF IT TO HAVE CONFIRMED THE PRIME MINISTER AND LIKE-MINDED GOVERNMENT COLLEAGUES (KOORNHOF AND PIK BOTHA) IN THINKING THAT CHANGE HAS TO COME ABOUT HERE SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. IF THE AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPERS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THEY MUST NOW REALISE TOO THAT FOR THIS TO HAPPEN SUCCESSFULLY THERE HAS TO BE GENUINE CONSULTATION WITH GENUINE BLACK REPRESENTATIVES. THIS IS ENCOURAGING. THE ATMOSPHERE COULD, OF COURSE, DETERIORATE IF IN THE NEAR FUTURE MUGABE IS SEEN TO CONFORM MORE CLOSELY TO THE FORK-TAILED MARXIST IMAGE WHICH UP TO A FEW WEEKS AGO HE WAS SO FREELY CREDITED WITH HERE.

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/ 4. NAMIBIA

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4. NAMIBIA IS A DIFFERENT MATTER. IN THIS CONTEXT THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF THE RHODESIAN ELECTION IS DISTINCTLY UNFAVOURABLE: FEW PEOPLE HERE SERIOUSLY BELIEVE THAT AFTER WHAT HAS HAPPENED THE SAG CAN READILY AGREE TO RUN THE RISK OF ALLOWING SWAPO TO COME TO POWER IN A "FREE AND FAIR" ELECTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE ATTITUDE MIGHT, HOWEVER, CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IF IN A FEW MONTHS TIME IT BECOMES APPARENT THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT IN RHODESIA ARE TURNING OUT ALL RIGHT. IF, IN THE MEANTIME, INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON NAMIBIA BUILDS UP TO A POINT WHERE ONCE AGAIN THE THREAT OF SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA LOOMS LARGE, IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE A BRAKING EFFECT ON THE PRIME MINISTER'S PLANS FOR INTERNAL CHANGE HERE. INDEED IT COULD HALT THEM ALTOGETHER. IN SUM NAMIBIA COULD PROVOKE THE SORT OF BACK TO THE LAAGER MOVE WHICH RECENT EVENTS IN RHODESIA HAVE SO FAR FAILED TO BRING ABOUT. OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES OUGHT TO BEAR THAT IN MIND, BUT FROM HERE THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHANCE OF THEIR DOING SO.

5. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND WHAT DOES P W BOTHA WANT OUT OF THIS MEETING? THERE ARE PROBABLY VARIOUS REASONS WHY HE SUGGESTED IT, INCLUDING A STRONG FEELING THAT THE PRESENT BRITISH GOVERNMENT ARE MORE SYMPATHETIC TO SOUTH AFRICA THAN ANY BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN FOR SOME TIME AND UNDERSTAND BETTER THAN ANY OTHER WESTERN GOVERNMENT THE THREAT OF COMMUNISM. HE PROBABLY HOPES TO PERSUADE US, AND TO GET US TO PERSUADE OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES, THAT SOUTH AFRICA IS MISUNDERSTOOD, MISJUDGED AND UNFAIRLY TREATED BECAUSE OF DOUBLE STANDARDS AND THAT HE IS WELL ON THE WAY TO PUTTING RIGHT WHAT IS WRONG IN THE SET UP HERE. IN OTHER WORDS HE WOULD LIKE US TO ACT AS SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL BROKER. AT THE SAME TIME HE MUST REALISE THAT FOR THIS PURPOSE HE CANNOT GET AWAY WITH MERE WINDOW-DRESSING. HE MAY WANT, THEREFORE, TO DRAW LORD HUNT ON WHAT MINIMUM CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICA WE SHOULD REQUIRE TO SEE IF WE ARE TO STAND UP FOR SOUTH AFRICA INTERNATIONALLY AND, BETTER STILL, BRING HER BACK INTO THE WESTERN FOLD. OUR OWN OBJECTIVE AT THE MEETING SHOULD BE THE MIRROR IMAGE OF HIS: THAT IS, WE SHOULD TRY TO FIND OUT, WITHOUT MAKING ANY FAR-REACHING COMMITMENTS, HOW FAR AND HOW FAST P W BOTHA INTENDS TO PURSUE

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INTERNAL CHANGE. IT WILL BE RELEVANT TO PROBE HIM ON WHAT HE REALLY HOPES WILL COME OF HIS MUCH TALKED OF CONSTELLATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN STATES. FOR HIS PART LORD HUNT WILL WANT TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WHILE WE SHOULD LIKE TO BE IN A POSITION TO OFFER SOUTH AFRICA ADVICE AND ENCOURAGEMENT AND MAY BE ABLE AT TIMES TO INDUCE GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THEY ARE TRYING TO DO, IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE FOR US TO COME OUT OPENLY AS THEIR INTERNATIONAL PATRON. APART FROM ANYTHING ELSE THIS WOULD MEAN DAMAGING OUR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE OTHERS TO LOOK MORE POSITIVELY AT WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE.

6. IT IS POINTLESS TO PREDICT HOW THE DISCUSSIONS WILL GO BUT THEY PROVIDE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS FUNDAMENTALS WITH THE SAG. THEY MAY TURN OUT TO BE A DAMP SQUIB. BUT SHOULD THERE BE ANY MEETING OF MINDS, IT IS NOT AN EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT THEY COULD BE OF HISTORIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AND SOUTHERN AFRICA. MOREOVER THE TIMING IS RIGHT, SINCE OUR CAPACITY TO INFLUENCE THE SOUTH AFRICANS HAS BEEN GREATLY ENHANCED BY OUR SUCCESS IN RHODESIA.

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SOUTHERN AFRICA

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