

Turnstones,
Aldeburgh,
Suffolk.

4th September 1980.

Michael Alexander, Esq,
10 Downing Street,
Whitehall,
London SW1.

Dear Michael,

It was so good to see you again after all these months and good, too, to think that I am allowed to collaborate with you with a few suggestions for the Prime Minister's speech at Bordeaux.

I think that the occasion should be viewed as one of the most important that has yet come her way. I do not think the absence of Giscard diminishes the occasion, because, in a sense, even the humblest opportunity can be transformed into something of universal significance by the way somebody of the Prime Minister's stature chooses to handle it. I think it is tremendous that she did not take Giscard's absence negatively. I meant to tell her yesterday in that connection, of a Polish proverb which she may find useful in the future, but which also is confirmation of how right she was not to be insulted. The Poles say: "Only cooks take offence."

In anycase the fact that she is going, and I would be glad if you could tell her so, will compare more than favourably with an absent President who can be whistled-up by Brezhnev and propelled like a parcel to Poland. I thought the difference in quality of behaviour so striking that I was tempted to suggest that the Prime Minister could make a positive transformation of the void and say something, for instance, to the effect: "I am sure I am speaking for all of you when I say how much we miss the presence of the President of the Republic. But even Presidents need a holiday and your President has attended so many summits this year that the rest of us lesser folk . . ." However, on reflection I have a feeling that this could be considered catty and return to my hunch that it would be better not to notice his absence at all. But I'll be happy if you disagree.

What I do think most important; speaking as someone whose grandmother was French, whose mother was of French descent and who lived and wrote his first books in France; there must be rather a long and special introduction to enable this very special audience to get the feel of the Prime Minister's worth and character and establish the "non-rational" feeling wave-length necessary between her and her audience. I say this because, without a clammy Presidential presence, Bordeaux is the ideal place for a reconfirmation of the common destination of France and Britain. It is in one of the two regions of France where the British are endemically popular (the other is the Lille-Arras zone because of WWI and trade union links dating from the forties and the fifties when communism in France threatened socialism).

I think the occasion should be viewed as one of not only the utmost importance, but also of one in which British and French can have some

innocent fun. This is the purpose of the introduction in French, which is only a very, very tentative suggestion and which I attach. I apologise that it is rather like a screenplay, because in writing it it was most important that one tried to have a visual image in mind of the audience and a guess at the audience's reactions, which the Prime Minister might find a helpful pointer. It might be too long and tiring to deliver in French, but it would be marvellous if, in her own way, the Prime Minister could translate the irony, which the French love, into the English and, perhaps, only use some quotations from it in French. For instance, I much like the quotation from Villiers de l'Isle: "On s'en souviendra de cette planète," because it has a fine French melancholy attached to it in the way that the French like their bitters.

I think that any good jokes to season the pudding of the real speech which you could possibly add to follow the hors d'oeuvres in French would be a great help. For instance, would you agree that the French, if invited to call the Prime Minister "Madame Chaumier", instead of struggling with the "th" and coming out with "T'achair" could "de-pomp" and humanise the occasion at the start. That is a matter of taste and occasion, of course, but I think handled expertly in English she could claim that she is by name, as well as by vocation, in the "construction business", in the building and not demolition of relationships and as a "builder" go on to her main theme.

I think I would not mention either of the two great wars, particularly not the last war. Much of our trouble with France is due to unconscious envy and a sense of guilt about us. There is a big fund of malice towards us because we so totally outclassed France in the Nineteenth Century and called them "semi-sub-rosa-cowards in the Second World War because they collapsed in 1940. We, with a few exceptions, have never acknowledged in public to a share of guilt over the pre-war tolerance of Hitler, however, temporary, and aided and abetted what was worst in the French by such lapses as the infamous Hoare-Laval collaboration. Our temporary tolerance proved deadly to the French. I believe that once an easy relationship is established by a somewhat lengthy introduction, I would ignore all that and go full-pelt for the Prime Minister's European philosophy. After all, there is no other valid existing religion than the Christianity which still informs the political, legal and economic institutions of France and Britain. Only the West has its traditional system more or less intact. Nor for one minute would slavonic communism survive if we really stuck to our guns.

I think this is the sort of theme I would suggest humbly, the Prime Minister should develop. In the hope that she will, I throw out the following ideas for developing her own theme.

In the heat and the dust of the frictions inevitably set up by differences of national needs and pressures, Europe may still seem to us a remarkably divided and disunited affair, despite the Common Market. But let us for a minute, take a look at Europe as if from the Great Wall of China, the slopes of Mount Fuji, or outer Patagonia, and, at once, Europe, the West, becomes a dramatic and startling reality. The East, by contrast, is an illusion. There is no Asian man and no East. In Asia there are great civilisations and nations. There are great civilisations like those of India, China and Japan but they are not oriental and do not produce a common asiatic man or culture, they merely express their own indigenous and differing cultures. But there is, Thank God! seen from without, clear and bold, a large and significant and, however unruly and turbulent, a strangely unified West and a Western Man. The West and Western Man, moreover, are not confined to Europe, but to be found everywhere in the great European projections overseas like the North Americas, Mexico,

South America, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Africa. Although this West and this Western Man are deprived as yet of adequate institutions, has not developed the organisation worthy of this union of character at the foundations of his culture, he lives and is on the world scene with a surprising tenacity, and refuses to go away, no matter what calamities overwhelm him and what horrors confront him. The fact that he is there owes an enormous amount to France and also to Britain and, of course, their great partners in Europe. But for this occasion one talks of a France and Britain because if they had not stood fast at certain critical moments in what was best in themselves in the history of the world, Europe would not be there. Where would Europe be to-day, for instance, if it had not been for what the French speak of proudly, and the English remember with gratitude and admiration as "L'Isle de France"? It is ironical and a paradox, that although part of a continent geographically, in the evolution of European history, France has played as much the role of an island as Britain has; played it as an island of light in an ocean of barbarism and darkness. In their respective ways the rugged individualism and ostensible and obstinate differences of character of our nations arise because they are both products of cultures stemming from a history as "islands" of what is best in European man. In a sense, of course, the "Island of France"; "l'Isle de France", comes first to mind. If it had not been for this fortress of the European spirit which stood fast when the ancient Roman world of great law and order and tranquility crumbled before barbaric hordes, and kept alive all that was best in the ancient classical and the new Christian man, Europe would not be what it is to-day. For this is what France proceeded to do. This fortress of "L'Isle de France" became the potting-shed of a new growth of the human spirit: the grafting of Christian-man on the stock of what was good in the vanished pagan world of Greece and Rome. Had it not withstood centuries of attack, it is doubtful if European man would have become what he is to-day. The civilisation and culture which evolved from that moment around this core, this grit of courage and resolution in the physical world, was the grit on which the great pearl of European civilisation was formed. I could orchestrate this endlessly, but it is the history which I know you take for granted but which I do not wish any of us others ever to take for granted. I could enlarge, for instance, on how, when the new Christian European civilisation was at last established in a form which is recognisable to-day, and was threatened by the invasion of an alien culture from Spain, France again stood fast and saved the West, and so on and on. The instances that crowd to one's mind are really too many for an occasion like today, but I hope these few illustrations are enough to show how deeply and ancient are the roots through France of the West. Indeed, it is a miracle, almost, that this is so and that the West is still intact, because, since the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the great scandal of the history of Europe has been, that as groupings of nations tried to re-create substitutes for it like that of the Italian Roman Empire, also crumbled and fell away, European man did not combine to put more contemporary models and re-created other institutions to take their place and serve our underlying unity. (It is important that what we call the Common Market should be seen against this background, because it is, after many random and destructive centrifuges, the first grand effort at last to do precisely this: to give Europe back what it once possessed; institutions to express the great fundamental reality of Europe and the West. We have appeared, I know, through obligations and impediments of our own history, appeared actively on this aspect of the European scene later than you who played so great a role in pioneering and bringing about a community of Europe, and, to the immense relief of all mankind, had the greatness of heart and mind to put an end to a historic feud with the Germanic peoples of Europe and convert it into a dynamic element of the wider European partnership of us all.

But late as we may be on the political scene, I assure you that in our vision of Europe, too, the Common Market is the most significant experiment begun in Europe since the Renaissance. There are people who say that the name Common Market is not sufficiently idealistic to express what its founding spirits and what we should have had in view; I do not think so. The name itself invests the importance of what each one of us does in our ordinary lives, on our farms, in our factories, offices and homes with great objective purpose. What we are going through in the West at the moment is not only a political crisis caused by external threat. It is a crisis of meaning. Human beings can endure anything except a state of meaninglessness. They can suffer, as your history and ours show, the horrors of hell, provided it is suffering with purpose and meaning. To call what we are attempting "a common market" is to invest everything in this dreary market place of the world where we have to haggle over prices and goods and do the best we can for ourselves and our bread and butter, not to mention lamb and apples, with a meaning: a meaning of the wider purpose in which the market is our day-to-day instrument of ^{meeting} ~~bringing~~ ^{alive} ~~infusing~~ these great spiritual fundamentals of the West. Of course, we are bound often to find disagreement in the marketplace irksome, but let us always remember that they are disagreements not between enemies, but the only disagreements worthwhile, because they are within the family, and, insignificant in terms of what we share and what we envisage for the future. Let us remember, too, that these disagreements, which may look so divisive over negotiating tables, have an objective aspect to them insofar as they arise out of differences of culture and nationhood. One of the dangers that threatens us, is the danger of collectivism as expounded and practised culturally and politically in the totalitarian states beyond the Iron-curtain, and is politically and psychologically preached by the dilectical materialists of to-day. Here they challenge the essential of what it is to be Western man in the sense of the new-man created and defended in these "Isle de France" moments of the long European history behind us: an individual free to be himself and to live his differences without fear provided he does so without injury to his neighbours. As with this individual, so with the nation and the culture that encloses him, likewise free to be without threat or injury to neighbours. But this does not suit the new, grey, impersonal, abstract collectivism which puts us in deadly peril, and these joyless, dreary clerks of the spirit who serve it and betray the freedom the West gives them. The danger stems from this defamation of the classical European spirit, you with your genius for wisdom in proverbs, have labelled so accurately as "Trahison des Clercs." There is confusion in the minds of all these "hangers-on" of the totalitarian creeds. They confuse "conformity" and "unity". A unity based on conformity, which is what the egalitarians preach, is a source of weakness and ultimately of death, just as the conformity promoted by the proliferation of one and the same cell in the human body produces what we call terminal cancer. How different the unity which regards our diversities and differences of nations and cultures not as causes of division, but as sources of enriching one another. Conformity is death, the unity of diversity an increase of life, and the only source of strength. That is the unity we seek. That is why, I, as a British Prime-Minister, can say to you with a certain passion of spirit because it is what I preach and practice at home; it is the love of freedom of the individual to be his own eccentric self without injury to his neighbours that has and always will unite us to you, whatever our differences, and no matter what pressures may be exercised to divide us, they will not succeed because we seek and defend in our different ways the same values and our histories have taught us for good, how we have enriched each others spirit.

It is not for me to say what the British achievements in politics, art and philosophy have done to enrich the spirit of France, I can only speak of our debt to a spirit so profound and searching, ^{that} it joined the two great poles of reality, symbolised, for instance, by what I call the Descartes

incentive

and Pascal in yourself, ^{and so} has been a constant source of enrichment to us ^{and} to make men see life steadily, in the round and transcendent whole. They still inspire us as they do you. So I submit that this new vision of Europe, which I have outlined so briefly and simplistically, this process of cross-pollination and enrichment ^{get across} in Britain and France are central to the survival of Europe. We live in, perhaps, the gravest moment of peril for centuries, not merely because of physical threat to national integrity, but because of this subtle collectivist attack on our faith and our individual freedom of mind and expression. So, don't let us be dismayed by the words and the issues of the market place that appear to divide us and remember the purpose, values and spirit that make us. ^{what we are} Allow me, in this regard, to leave the last word to one of the authentic voices of France: It is the voice of someone who significantly enough was called "France" himself, ^{Hege} and I think of Anatole France, and his words, I quote from memory: ^{have} "Human beings kill one another over words, whereas if they would only ^{have} paused to consider what the words were trying to say they would have embraced one another."

"Finish.

I have deliberately chosen this quotation from Anatole France if not for the ending then for an inclusion somewhere in the Prime Minister's speech, because I think it comes best from a woman and establishes the essential femininity of our Prime Minister and demolishes those who would accuse her, as they do all women of genius these days, of a "phoney masculinity".

Yours ever,

J.

Laurens van der Post.

P.S. Please stress to the Prime Minister that except for the carefully considered introduction this was dictated in a rush, not as a presumption of a speech for her, but merely as some yeast for her own thinking. It is most important that she should speak more out of her heart than mind and speak only of what she believes, and she could make more than I did, perhaps, of how the new seeking after Christian unity and the political unity are one, and testify to our underlying and potential one-ness in a world without comparable spiritual direction, that reaches far beyond the Iron-curtain.

No acknowledgement is necessary if you should want me on the telephone about one o'clock, when I return from my place of work, is a good time - telephone number: 072885 2260. Could you also please tell the Prime-Minister I did not thank her adequately ^{with} all the immense gratitude I felt for letting me see her again the other day, because I knew it would add only another pressure to the reading she has to do.

By letter

Intro :

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Monsieur le Maire ,

On m'a dit qu'aujourd'hui c'est la première fois qu'un premier ministre britannique prononce un discours dans la ville de Bordeaux. Je suis très sensible d'un tel honneur et ^{je} vous offre mes remerciements les plus profonds. Toutefois il me semble un peu surprenant que je suis la première, étant donné les liens bien connus qui joignent votre magnifique ville à la capitale anglaise et britannique: liens historiques que vous connaissez tous, ainsi que les liens qui se dérivent d'un commerce très amical. L'écrivain polonais, Joseph Conrad, a déclaré que " London is the largest, and ~~the~~ the greatest city in the world ". ^{peut-être} Mais Bordeaux jouit d'une distinction plus grande: son nom ^{même} indique un produit magique (**silvery laughter**). Ce produit célèbre inculque le plaisir à l'être humain, en l'amenant au sommet du bonheur. Je passe sur les nuances de cette grande expérience dans le domaine des sens, dont ^{si} des personnes ^{plus} douées ont témoigné la qualité incomparable. Je salue tout simplement, en tant que chef de gouvernement, tous les viticulteurs, tous les œnologues et tous les marchands de vin qui, une année dans l'autre, qui rendent les banquets intergouvernementaux plus ou moins supportables. Ils nous rendent vraiment un très grand service (**loud laughter and slight clapping**)

Vous avez eu la gentillesse, chers citoyens de Bordeaux, de m'inviter à vous parler. Certes, il y a beaucoup que nous pourrions tous dire au sujet de ce monde confus et tourmenté ou nous sommes obligés à mener tant bien que mal nos vies quotidiennes. On est tenté parfois de se faire l'écho de votre Villiers de l'Isle qui, dans le temps, a lancé ce soupir: " on se souviendra de ce planète " (**pause: the citizens are now solemn again**) Mais en fin de compte il ne nous faut pas se livrer ni au désespoir ni aux prémonitions voluptueuses. Il nous faut, n'est-ce pas, voir les choses avec de la hardiesse et à l'œil froid; et puis travailler dans le calme pour atteindre les buts que nous avons choisis.

On a beaucoup parlé autrefois du flegme britannique: qualité peut-être moins prononcée dans mon pays à l'époque actuelle (**quiet laughter**) Et pour cause, parce que nous les britanniques, toujours enclins à nous féliciter d'une stabilité inébranlable, nous sommes trouvés tout d'un coup rudement déstabilisés; autrement dit nous expérimentons le désarroi. Mon propre nom, Thatcher, signifie en anglais celui qui couvre les maisons avec les toits de chaume: image un peu rustique, je crois, ^{à quel soir} pour être attachée aux ^{problèmes} tâches auxquelles je dois faire face. Néanmoins je voudrais bien que mes amis bordelais et français me regardent un peu comme Madame Chaumier parce que j'espère être constructrice; j'espère avoir l'honneur d'aider mon pays à renouveler quelques-unes de ses structures, pour qu'il puisse regagner son efficacité dans la communauté mondiale. De toute façon 'Chaumier' est nettement plus facile à prononcer. (**Loud laughter**). Les vraies renaissances ne se passent pas du jour au lendemain, comme vous le savez bien. ^{en France} Je suis très consciente de l'étendue et de la lourdeur des tâches qui confrontent mon gouvernement et mon pays. (**Les bordelais are by now mildly enjoying the sad recital**)

Je n'ai malheureusement pas eu le bonheur de bien connaître la France pendant toute ma vie personnelle ou politique par la suite de multiples

voyages et contacts. Mais cela ne^m a nullement empêché^{vivement} de m'intéresser^s au destin français, ni de rendre compte de l'immense renaissance française qui a lieu depuis trente ans; et que chaque britannique reconnaît d'une manière très claire. Le phénomène du redressement français est aussi définitif que celui de l'Allemagne Fédérale ou bien du Japon. Mais il me paraît même plus impressionnant. Car en France certaines faiblesses et insuffisances, ^{traditionnelles} ont été tout simplement éliminées. La France a déjà renouvelé ses structures, de sorte qu'elle peut maintenant s'attribuer de grandes conquêtes dans tous les domaines de la vie économique et sociale; (pause); et cela sans avoir en aucune manière sacrifié son caractère foncier qui exprime, comme auparavant, un humanisme très différent. (there should be purring by now) à Corcé, and

Je n'ai pas besoin, de ma part, de souligner l'influence mondiale de vos analyses ironiques (pour prendre un exemple parmi tant d'autres) Elles sont effectivement imitées avec beaucoup de talent par quelques satiriques londoniens qui font beaucoup de peine au Tout Londres, y compris ses personnages politiques. C'est un signe sans doute que la Reine Victoria a trouvé son repos final et que les britanniques sont prêts à commenter plus aprement la comédie humaine. (lauphr)

Vous me direz, mes chers hôtes, qu'il est grand temps que je fasse allusion aux actualités brûlantes: à l'Affaire des moutons que nous destinons à vos tables; à l'Affaire de la Pêche; à l'Affaire des Pommes Dorées dites Délicieuses; et aux autres grandes questions de la Haute Politique qui touchent à nos deux pays. (l'and, some of the malicians) (lauphr)