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10BRITISH EMBASSY
PRETORIA

reply at 214

6 October 1980

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Foreign & Commonwealth Office
London SW1

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24 OCT 1980		
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Dear Derek,

SOUTH AFRICA: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

1. The National Party Congress season has now ended; the names of the members of the President's Council have just been announced; Parliament, in Special Session, is this very day electing the first Vice-State President (ex-officio Chairman of the President's Council); and the recent Cabinet changes come into effect at midnight tonight. This seems a suitable moment therefore to take stock of P W Botha's plans and prospects.

Confederation of Southern African States

2. Although P W Botha has, since he became Prime Minister almost exactly two years ago, been committed to a policy of constitutional reform, he has seemed not to know exactly where he was heading. He has, however, now given, indirectly but authoritatively, a clearer picture of his objective. I cannot of course guarantee that his ideas will not evolve and new ideas and formulations have a habit of being taken up by the Government for a time and almost as quickly discarded. At any rate the key concept now is "Confederation". We have already emphasised the importance of a recent newspaper article, clearly inspired by P W Botha, which sketches out the concept of a Confederation of Southern African States (for a summary, see our telegram No 375, copy attached). The notion of a common nationality is designed to overcome the hesitations of leaders of the non-independent homelands about agreeing to previous South African plans which would have meant the loss of their South African nationality. The principle that economic development should proceed on natural lines - which sounds innocent enough, even obvious - means that P W Botha has in effect abandoned "the meaningful consolidation of the homelands". There will no doubt still be some territorial

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adjustments, especially those required to discharge existing commitments, but they will not be of the radical kind that aroused such excitement a year ago. No attempt is now going to be made to give the homelands large additional tracts of land to make them into viable economic units. The Confederation is to be managed as a single economic unit. This marks a radical departure from the Verwoedean concept that the homelands should be not only independent politically but should be independent economic entities as well. To overcome the disappointment of homeland leaders who wanted more territory as a condition for seeking independence, new growth areas are to be developed in such a way as to bring economic benefits to the homelands. It is in essence this deal (common nationality and regional development) which has apparently persuaded Chief Sebe to accept the principle of independence for Ciskei without major territorial changes and on the basis of a commitment to develop the whole East London hinterland on a regional basis. Sebe is reported over the weekend to have qualified his acceptance and may be trying to extract some final concessions. But I do not believe he will draw back from his commitment in principle. When it was first reported, the South African Government were jubilant about Sebe's decision. They clearly hope that it will not be long before Lebowa and Gazankulu follow suit. But even if some homelands continue to hold out against "independence" - KwaZulu is the obvious case - the Confederation in any case reduces the differences between independent and non-independent homelands. Both can be accommodated in the Confederation.

3. Little is heard any more of the Constellation of States, meaning an association between South Africa and the BLS countries and larger neighbours to the north. The South Africans recognise the political obstacles and they are furious with the nine black African states of the region for ganging up against South Africa in their "counter-constellation". They regard this as deeply inimical to their interests and also a sham because South Africa's neighbours know full well that they need her more in the economic field than she needs them. The Constellation is now seen as

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something which may evolve in time if economic and other links develop to the point at which it would be mutually acceptable to give them some institutional structure. P W Botha has recently confirmed his commitment to set up a Southern African Development Bank. This will be chiefly directed at the homelands but the neighbouring states, especially the BLS, will probably be eligible to join and may find the prospect too tempting to decline, in spite of the political association with South Africa.

President's Council

4. Since it is the purpose of the President's Council to bypass the National Party Congresses and to provide advice acceptable to the Government on a new constitution, we can expect that P W Botha will steer the President's Council to make proposals on the Confederation on the lines that he now envisages. Above all he may have calculated that the new and most controversial feature of his thinking, a single Parliament for the whites, coloureds, Indians and Chinese, will appeal to the President's Council, which has the same racial composition.

The Official Opposition

5. The official PFP Opposition are no threat to P W Botha's plans. They have in any case been going through a bad patch. Their failure to win the Simonstown by-election was a setback. They could perhaps lose the East London North by-election, where the National Party have shrewdly not fielded a candidate in order to help the NRP candidate in a bilateral contest. The party has not been solid in refusing to serve on the President's Council. There has been a quarrel over the PFP leadership in the Transvaal. And van Zyl Slabbert has been abroad for rather a long time. But, whatever their current, probably temporary problems, the PFP have succeeded in hammering home the key point that P W Botha's plans, however radical in National Party terms, are still based on separate development. The blacks are to be treated as fundamentally different from the other racial groups: they are to exercise their political rights only in the homelands; a single multiracial South Africa is ruled out; and the blacks are not to be consulted about the future constitution except



through the homeland governments. That is why the blacks have been excluded from the President's Council.

The Blacks

6. Can any solution along these lines succeed in providing a unique (and lasting) answer to South Africa's admittedly unique problems, despite the fact that it will still be based on separate development and the homeland concept? The odds must be heavily against. But the prospects for P W Botha have, I believe, improved somewhat. With the support of Dr Koornhof, P W Botha has gained a good deal of ground with the homeland leaders. The independence of Ciskei, if it comes off, will be a major step towards the consummation of the whole homelands policy. And I have been assured by people who should know that good progress has been made in negotiating a "declaration of intent" which could bring on board the other homeland leaders, except Buthelezi. The mood is better. There can of course be no doubt that black South Africans, if freely consulted, would opt overwhelmingly for a unitary state with one man one vote. But this is not negotiable and I have the impression - in the nature of things it is no more than this - that many blacks would acquiesce in a second best arrangement of the kind which P W Botha envisages provided that it brings some tangible benefits. And the standard of living of urban black South Africans is certainly improving.

7. There are of course large numbers of blacks who will have nothing to do with P W Botha's plans, which they regard as fundamentally unacceptable. There is undoubtedly a strongly militant element especially among young blacks. The Cape Town riots have shown that the coloured community are deeply alienated. The schools boycott has now led to the large scale closure of schools especially in the Cape Province, thus sowing the seeds of bitterness for the future.

8. The most important of all black South Africans, Chief Buthelezi, is becoming increasingly difficult for P W Botha to deal with. He will not conform to any Government plan; his own initiative,



the Buthelezi Commission, points to a form of integration which is also not negotiable. He cannot be ignored, but P W Botha may calculate that Buthelezi cannot obstruct his (P W Botha's) plans. Another troublesome customer, President Kaiser Matanzima of the Transkei, has made some sort of public statement that appears to oppose the Confederation by saying he could not allow a common Southern African nationality to dilute Transkei's complete independence.

The National Party

9. If P W Botha faces difficulties in getting his ideas accepted by the other racial groups, these are matched by his problems within his own party. Although the new thinking has been formulated only tentatively, Treurnicht has already publicly repudiated as contrary to National Party policy the concept of a Parliament in which whites would sit on equal terms with coloureds, Indians and Chinese. Nationalists as a whole are probably sympathetic to the idea of a closer association with (non-black) racial groupings because they sense the need for allies if any future conflict should develop with blacks. But there must be a great many Nationalists who could not swallow a multiracial Parliament of the kind proposed (even with separate voting rolls). Dr Carel Boshoff, the new head of the Broederbond, has made it clear that he still holds to the Verwoedian tradition and cannot accept that the Confederation should be managed as a single economic entity. He has even reverted to the outdated idea of a "whitestan". P W Botha must feel that his gain in having Dr Gerrit Viljoen in the Cabinet is diminished by his loss as head of the Broederbond!

10. All in all, the divisions within the National Party are becoming wider, deeper and more public. I will not rehearse the reasons which inhibit P W Botha from precipitating a break with his right wing which could split the party. But I detect a greater determination of P W Botha's part not to be held in check by opposition within his own party. He must have been heartened by the evidence of the Simonstown by-election that

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more English-speaking South Africans are prepared to support him. The series of by-elections which will be required in the New Year as a result of nominations to the President's Council may serve as a more accurate weather-vane of prevailing opinion in the white community at large and more particularly in the Afrikaner part of it. P W Botha's instinct will be to find ingenious ways round obstacles which he cannot flatten by frontal assault. Magnus Malan and Gerrit Viljoen will be powerful reinforcements in the Cabinet. Meanwhile Treurnicht is not quite so much in evidence and he could be losing some support to the HNP. P W Botha would be delighted if opposition to his policies were concentrated in the HNP, provided that did not mean large losses of NP voters, because he could then attack the HNP as hard as he liked without damaging National Party unity.

11. I realise that much of this is atmospheric. Moreover attitudes and trends can change quickly. We will try to keep you in the picture as developments unfold in the months ahead.

Yours ever,

John

J H G Leahy

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