



cc Mr. Sample
Mr. Ballon
I think key numbers
do the Reagan expectations and
needs membership of perhaps
of sanctions. Only to state
please prepare a draft reply in
consultation with Mr. Ballon

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BRITISH EMBASSY
PRETORIA

15 December 1980

Sounds a slow & very
difficult process

Sir H. Allister
M. Bosh

D M Day Esq CMG
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1

Dear Derek,

JSS014/2(210) 17/2 1980

reply at ③

for ans obs.

P W BOTHA'S REFERENDUM: A PROGRESS REPORT AND THE COMING CRUNCH

1. In my letter to you of 6 October, I explained that P W Botha had given a clear, though indirect, indication of the objective to which he is working - that South Africa and the homelands, independent and self-governing, should join in a confederation, which would be developed as a single economic entity; that a determined effort would be made to end hurtful discrimination; and (very tentatively) that the existing white Parliament might be enlarged to include representatives of the coloured, Indian and Chinese communities. Since then all the signs indicate that the last of these elements will be the issue on which P W Botha's long-running quarrel with the right-wing opposition in the National Party will come to a head.

A Parliament for non-blacks

2. It is widely expected that the President's Council will recommend a single Parliament for non-black South Africans. Indeed Dr Dennis Worrall, the Chairman of the Council's Constitutional Sub-Committee, has been reported as saying that it would. The President's Council will no doubt need time to go into the details: eg. will the different races vote on separate rolls? Will all MPs represent constituencies? How many members will there be for each race-group?

3. The President's Council will address its recommendations to the Government, who, if they agree them, will then have to introduce a Bill in Parliament to give effect to them. But on a contentious issue of this kind the National Party Congresses would want their say. In a recent major speech at Ladysmith P W Botha appeared to be saying that since the National Party Congresses had approved constitutional proposals containing comparable (but not identical) provisions in 1977 it followed that they accepted the principle of a single Parliament for the non-black racial groups. Few Nationalists would accept this argument. P W Botha went on to say that if the President's Council made recommendations which would have a fundamental effect on the constitution the National Party Congresses would have to give their approval. He also said that the Government might call for a referendum on such an issue.

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4. There is some uncertainty in people's minds whether in speaking as he did the Prime Minister was actually thinking in terms of a referendum or a plebiscite. Nor, I confess, am I completely sure what the difference is, except that one is decisive and the other advisory. If the choice were for a decisive popular consultation the Prime Minister would presumably have to seek Parliamentary approval for it to be set in motion, since there is no provision in the Constitution for it. He might well prefer not to do this. As against this, by going for a decisive popular consultation he would be taking the matter more demonstrably out of the hands of the National Party Congresses (see below).
5. The timing of any move in this direction is uncertain, and a number of questions remain unanswered. The President's Council does not start work until it formally comes into being in the New Year. It may take a few months to formulate its recommendations. The Parliamentary Session ends in June. The National Party Congresses take place in August/September. If there is to be a referendum/plebiscite at what stage would it take place? Will whites only have a vote?
6. Forecasting is always hazardous but I would expect that the President's Council will formally recommend a single Parliament for non-blacks by, say April, and that the Government will in, say, May, take note of the recommendations and decide that the Congresses will first have to be consulted and that there will thereafter be a referendum/plebiscite. Since everyone knows - and this has recently been confirmed in a poll published in the Johannesburg Sunday Times - that a referendum/plebiscite of all whites will come out in favour of a single Parliament for non-blacks, this will operate as a very powerful level of pressure on the NP Congresses. They will not want to be put in the position of rejecting the proposal and then find that the referendum/plebiscite endorses it overwhelmingly, because that would show that the Congresses were out of touch with white opinion. Even some moderate Nationalists, however, are complaining that what P W Botha seems to have in mind is to ally himself with the anti-Nationalist whites to prevail over his opponents within the party. This is of course what would happen if the Nationalists were divided and the other whites were solidly in favour: but the Sunday Times poll actually gives a 62.4% favourable vote for Afrikaans speakers.
7. If this timing is roughly correct, the crunch may not come soon, and may be less painful for being taken in stages over a period in which people will have time to adjust to the idea. But a crunch it will be. Treurnicht has committed himself irrevocably to oppose any but an all white Parliament. Tension within the National Party has grown to unprecedented levels. There is talk on all sides of the dreaded "Broedertwis" - serious quarrelling within the volk. We have reported separately on the eruption within the Pretoria National Party which has revealed a bitterness which few would have believed possible, and on the saga surrounding the leak

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of drafts of the Erasmus Commission report and the thinly disguised accusation by P W Botha that Vorster has been plotting against him. Treurnicht would have to go if the Transvaal National Party Congress accepted, or acquiesced in, a proposal for a single Parliament for non-blacks. And P W Botha would have to go if it did not. But the crunch could also come at an earlier stage eg. on the Cabinet's initial stand on the Presidential Council's recommendations. Treurnicht's position is of course weakened by his membership of a Cabinet which is stacked with P W Botha's supporters. He does not want to deny himself the position and prestige of membership of the Cabinet but his supporters are increasingly reproaching him for not standing up for his point of view. A good example is the Cabinet's decision, to which Treurnicht was a party, to give prior endorsement to P W Botha's statement about a referendum: it was a decision aimed primarily against Treurnicht.

8. Some journalists and opposition MPs to whom I have spoken are inclined to think that the Prime Minister's talk of a referendum is really nothing more than a threat and that he hopes this will have the desired effect on his opponents in the Party without the necessity of going through with it. The same people are also beginning to speculate again on the possibility or, as they would see it, likelihood that P W Botha will call a general election next Spring. We have of course, heard that before and I am still not persuaded that the Prime Minister will want to go for an early election. But he might do and if he did there would presumably be no need for a referendum/plebiscite.

He has -
29 April.
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9. The Nationalists have been concentrating so much on their internal differences that little attention has been given to the reactions of the coloured and Indian communities to the proposal that they should send representatives to a single Parliament. By no means all reactions however are favourable. Alienation in the Coloured community in particular has gone so far that - at a guess - half of them would be opposed; so would a substantive percentage (I hesitate to give a figure) of the Indian community. But Hendrickse, leader of the Coloured Labour Party, recently said in private that the offer of even a small number of seats for coloureds in Parliament would put him in a dilemma.

The Confederation

10. The Government have had their hands full in negotiations with Chief Sebe on independence for Ciskei. Sebe was committed to holding a referendum and has now done so. The result will almost certainly be favourable but it looks as if the issue has been fiddled by making voting easy for yes voters and difficult for no voters. Until the terms of Ciskei's independence are known it is difficult to see whether they provide a pattern which other homeland leaders will follow. Sebe has not consulted them (though there is an established machinery for doing so) and they suspect he has settled

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for too little. But once Ciskeian independence is sewn up the South African Government are likely to turn their attention to Lebowa and Gazankulu and they have powerful means of bringing pressure to bear, especially finance.

Legislation affecting blacks

11. Complicated new legislation affecting urban blacks is coming forward and we have reported separately and in detail. Suffice it to say here that the South African Government claim to accept that the South African economy is going to need many more millions of skilled and semi-skilled black workers in the years ahead and that these people will want better conditions and wider trade union rights. But Dr Koornhof's new legislation, though well intentioned, does not in practice change the essentials of influx control, which is the heart of the matter; and "Fanie" Botha's new legislation on trade unions, while making several concessions, is designed to direct trade union development into acceptable channels rather than to allow it to develop on natural lines to a position of real economic, still less of political, power.

12. The new political season beginning next month looks like being a busy one. But the crucial question remains the same - is P W Botha any nearer to solving the problem that matters more than all the rest - how to find a lasting and mutually acceptable accommodation between blacks and whites? If I had to answer that question myself I would say that while the propellor is rotating quite fast and churning up the water the ship of state does not seem to be making much headway.

Yours wr,

John

J H G Leahy

cc: A R Titchener Esq, Johannesburg
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