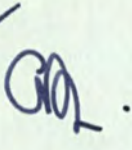


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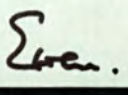
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Charles 

You may like to see
this advance copy -
all good sense.

I'm sorry the time has
been so much blood on the
floor over attacks.

It's a silly issue what
price one should pay to
avoid isolation over an
inherently futile proposition!

27.9.85 



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SUMMARY

SOUTH AFRICA: EDGING BACKWARDS INTO REFORM

1. P W Botha a reluctant reformist; he faces a daunting task (paragraphs 1 - 2).
2. Blacks are angry and increasing the pressure; their grievances are very real and cover a range of longstanding, fundamental economic and constitutional issues (paragraphs 3 - 8).
3. External financial and political pressures are also mounting (paragraphs 9 - 10).
4. P W Botha, deeply influenced by his Afrikaner background, has so far failed to meet the challenge; domestic considerations remain of overriding concern (paragraphs 11 - 14).
5. Dialogue on an open agenda the only real prospect for making progress; an eventual political arrangement on federal lines the most hopeful outcome (paragraphs 15 - 22).
6. UK interests and the principles which should guide UK policy (paragraphs 23 - 29).

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BRITISH EMBASSY
PRETORIA

11 September 1985

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
London SW1

Sir

SOUTH AFRICA: EDGING BACKWARDS INTO REFORM

1. In the House of Lords last November the Earl of Stockton observed that "once you get a doctrine, that is the end of you". President Botha has a daunting, thankless and some say impossible task: to persuade the white tribe of South Africa that the time has come for them to abandon longstanding doctrine and enter into some kind of political co-operation with the black tribes in the country whose population together already outnumbers the whites by a ratio of five to one. In return, the President has little to offer but declining living standards and an uncertain future. The advent of black majority rule would offer no guarantee of stability unless complex and conflicting regional aspirations could also be accommodated.

2. P W Botha is a reluctant reformist. He and the large majority of whites would much prefer that the status quo should be maintained indefinitely. The Soweto riots of the mid-1970s and the continuing troubles of the 1980s have, however, convinced the President and indeed most whites that change must come. But determination to ensure that change takes place in a manner and at a pace of their own choosing has led the Government into declaring the present state of emergency. Like Israel which found it far easier to invade Lebanon than to disengage, President Botha is finding it remarkably hard to bring the emergency to an end.

Internal Pressures

3. There are few black people in South Africa who do not cherish deep-seated resentment based on personal experience of disparaging

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and frequently insulting treatment meted out by white South Africans to them over the years. Some of the most bitterly felt injustices have been those that affect daily life: the requirements of pass laws, what is known as "influx control" which makes it difficult to find jobs and to establish normal family life in one place, and laws like the Group Areas and Urban Consolidation Acts which limit blacks to living in specified areas, which often means that they have to commute daily long distances to their places of work. More recently, the economic recession and high inflation have produced a range of economic grievances, including greatly increased unemployment, sharp increases in municipal rent and service charges and increases in prices over a range of basic consumer goods. More general complaints relate to social deprivation, issues such as the inadequacies of the school system, and the excesses of the police.

4. In addition to these specific grievances, blacks have been pressing for meaningful political representation. Under classical apartheid, they were told that their political rights could only be exercised through homelands. The Government now accept that blacks have a permanent place within South Africa proper, and that the problem of their political rights will have to be solved on that basis. But the advent of the tri-cameral constitution only served to accentuate the fact that blacks had been excluded from the new dispensation. Black resentment at their exclusion came to a head in August last year at the time of the elections to the coloured and Indian chambers. Attempts to persuade the blacks that they could begin to experience political involvement through the election of local black authorities utterly failed to convince them. These local bodies, elected on a small minority of eligible votes, are barely functioning. Many blacks now aspire not only to share power in central government, but to eliminate white political control. Added to this is a demand for guaranteed South African citizenship, or the restitution of citizenship where this has been lost, coupled with assurances of equal treatment and opportunity.

5. Economic factors have increased pressure for change and at the same time aggravated the situation. South Africa of the 1950s and

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1960s could support with equanimity wasteful apartheid policies because the country enjoyed unprecedented growth, averaging at least 5% throughout the two decades. The 1970s saw a slowing down in growth and the first half of the present decade has seen a measure of stagnation and recession not previously experienced. Yet the abrupt loss of confidence in South Africa's future prospects by overseas bankers, despite a healthy surplus on the current account of the balance of payments and encouraging technical indicators of economic recovery, has come as a damaging blow to Government and businessmen alike.

6. Rising economic expectations among the black population were already being disappointed. Frustrations in black townships in the industrial areas of the Eastern Cape and Vaal triangle increased markedly. The younger black generation in the townships is much more militant, articulate and organised than at any previous stage of South Africa's history. Attempts to reverse the flow of blacks from rural areas into the townships have failed hopelessly. Indeed, "influx control" has, as a policy, all but been abandoned because it is unworkable. It has been surprising in the past that blacks have generally retained such philosophical composure. But all this is changing. In the townships, many young blacks see their only hope of salvation in the destruction of the present social order. Even some of their parents are beginning to accept that a measure of violence may be necessary.

7. The white population, on the other hand, is confused, uncertain and resentful. The resources available for black education and economic advancement are generated in large measure through white enterprise and skills. Government income is mainly derived from white taxpayers; whenever a school building or administration block in a black township is gutted by arsonists, white tax-payers complain that it is they who will have to provide the necessary funds for reconstruction. The white political threat to the regime is indeed likely to come not from reformist elements in white society, but from those who feel that reforms have already gone too far and too fast.

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8. The upheavals of recent months have induced a rapid polarisation in society. There is deep anger among the eight million or more blacks who live in the urban townships near the main industrial and commercial centres. Rioting, clashes with the police and looting, are daily occurrences. Church leaders and "liberal" organisations feel that their ability to influence, let alone control, the situation in the townships is rapidly weakening. Even the United Democratic Front, a loose association of radical groups brought into being in reaction against the proposed tri-cameral constitution, has found that its sway over young black trouble-makers is now marginal. In a number of townships, local government services are under severe strain, schools are constantly disrupted and the police venture in only in strength.

External Pressures

9. These internal pressures would have been serious enough for the Government but they have been compounded by unprecedented external pressures which have taken the Government by surprise. Indeed, it would have been difficult to forecast that the modest demonstrations which began some ten months ago in front of the South African Embassy in Washington could have so caught the fickle imagination of the United States public and media that they have become an almost permanent feature of an escalating anti-apartheid crusade in the United States. In his despatch of 25 July, Sir Oliver Wright has eloquently written the obituary of the US Administration's policy of "constructive engagement". Despite his personal opposition to sanctions, President Reagan has seen no alternative but to introduce his own package of measures designed to exert more political than economic pressure on the South African Government. France, Canada, Australia and the Scandinavians had already adopted similar selective measures, and now most of the European Community have followed suit.

10. It would be difficult to say that these governmental measures are likely to have any perceptible effect on South African policy. But the overseas private sector, and especially banks, influenced no doubt by the appalling news relayed almost daily by television satellite

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from South Africa, have concluded that for the immediate future South Africa is too much of a risk. There has accordingly been, on the one hand a steady withdrawal of portfolio investment from South Africa in recent months, and on the other a decision by most overseas companies to delay plans to make new or additional investments in South Africa. A few US and other corporations, possibly influenced by the political situation, have made a virtue of economic necessity and have decided to withdraw from the South African market. The decline in the value of the Rand, now worth less than half its value in Western currencies compared with two years ago, has resulted in a corresponding decline in the value of repatriated profits. Governmental sanctions, in short, have scarcely been necessary in a situation where overseas industry, commerce and the banks have made their own minds up about risks and returns in the South African market.

Afrikaner sensitivities

11. Generation after generation of Afrikaners have struggled to make their way in history alone. This is not to say that the leadership are not deeply concerned today about the need for change. By their standards they have already come a long way compared with, say, five years ago. But their political philosophy is based on the deep-seated conviction that to share power at this stage with the blacks would be a recipe for disaster and that, whatever the pressures, even greater chaos would ensue if the Government were to weaken and give way. P W Botha and almost all his Cabinet are more at home in Afrikaans than in English. They are deeply influenced by Afrikaner traditions. Instead of meeting the challenge for reform head-on, they talk about it, drop hints, test the temperature, and only slowly and reluctantly edge backwards into it. This is the way they are made.

12. Apartheid was indeed primarily conceived as a social structure in which Afrikaners could retain their separate identity. Economic and industrial realities, notably the need for black labour, have however gradually made apartheid on the factory floor, in the mines and offices impossible to sustain. But while economic integration

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among all communities in South Africa has been gaining momentum, the Government have stoutly resisted pressures towards political integration. Although there has been increasing talk of "joint decision taking" and "co-responsibility" between blacks and whites, it remains the Government's intention to manage and control the body politic for as long as this is humanly possible.

13. There have been several explanations for the President's failure to announce significant reform measures in his much-publicised party speech last month: differences within the Cabinet; resentment at international pressures; awareness that there would be no acknowledgement from the "radical left" (some would say the urban black community in general) of any reforms offered; concern that reforms would be seen as a response to pressures and lead to more strident demands. There may be something in any or all of these plausible explanations. What is known for sure is that the President and his closest Ministers sought in the days before the speech to persuade the ten homeland governments to accept a package of principles on citizenship, but that there was such strong resistance from at least Mangope of Bophuthatswana and Matanzima of the Transkei to the granting of dual citizenship that only the most general of promises could be given. Possibly the issue of citizenship was linked with the future of the homelands themselves. At all events, there was remarkably little in the speech which had not been covered already in previous statements by the President. Even his remarks on influx control went no further than Dr Viljoen had told the House of Assembly months ago. Although there were constructive elements in the speech and here and there interesting new formulations, no new policies were in fact announced.

14. The only explanation I can offer for this sad display is the character of P W Botha himself. That he did not rise to the occasion may simply be due to the fact that he is not capable of doing so and that in any case he miscalculated the effect his speech would have. We do not know what kind of a post mortem is in progress within the upper echelons of the National Party. There is talk of serious

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divisions, of sharp criticism of the President. There are suggestions that he may wish to step down next year. This speculation may have no real basis and indeed senior members of the party have denied that there are major divisions on policy, but the fact that people are talking in these terms is symptomatic. The private sector in particular is deeply concerned with the present situation. The President's refusal to take action because he might appear to be making concessions to pressures is a vicious circle from which there is no easy escape. He is also aware, though, that displays of Afrikaner toughness ("kragdadigheid") go down well with the electorate, especially those toying with defection to the Conservative Party. As a result of his speech, he may be the despair of "verligte" supporters, but they are unlikely to desert the Party en masse. P W Botha is the Afrikaner politician par excellence: he is not a statesman and is not really all that concerned with world opinion, least of all at the present time. The South Africans may overdo it; but they are not the only Government to make foreign policy decisions on the basis of what they see as overriding domestic considerations, in this case above all affecting their Afrikaner clientele.

Prospects

15. The current wave of violence can be contained. The whites have the guns and armoured cars, the blacks only stones and home-made petrol bombs. Blacks in townships, mostly quite separate from white residential areas, cannot push matters too far against the forces of law and order. But so long as there are those who believe that all that is needed is a final push for the whole edifice of apartheid to come tumbling down, sporadic violence in the townships seems bound to continue. Incidents will continue to be unpredictable and vicious.

16. Concessions over influx control, pass laws, and citizenship are unlikely by themselves to make all that much difference to black attitudes, unless the nettle of political rights is also grasped. A nadir would be reached if the Government concluded that no foreseeable reform they could bring themselves to offer would meet with black approval; in which case why continue to try?

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17. Although in 1980 P W Botha was daring enough to refer to "healthy power-sharing" between blacks and whites, the use of the phrase "power-sharing" even in a qualified context has been taboo since the defection of Dr Treurnicht in 1981 and the establishment of the Conservative Party. He has made it clear that the Government cannot accept a system of universal franchise in a unitary system which would leave the blacks in an unassailable majority. He has ruled out a "fourth chamber" for blacks, without giving any good reason for doing so, though we may safely assume that the notion of a black chamber would not fit in with the 4:2:1 population ratio of the tri-cameral dispensation, since the blacks would have a commanding 20:4:2:1 influence. There has been no mention yet of the need for a new or radically revised constitution to accommodate blacks.

18. Whichever way one looks at it, however, I find it hard to escape the conclusion that **an eventual political arrangement involving blacks will have to be on federal lines.** Publicly the Government deny this, but in private some of their more forward-looking advisers are beginning to concede it.

19. The Government are now offering a dialogue with blacks on an almost open agenda. Their one stated condition (in the declaration made during the recent Troika visit) is that anyone who wished to negotiate with them should first renounce violence. This, of course, is not the only reason why dialogue has not started. Some blacks are intimidated from coming forward, others feel the Government has yet to put enough cards on the table to make a dialogue worthwhile. Those leaders whom most blacks regard as their natural representatives are debarred or in prison because they belong to the ANC or UDF. There is also the question by what right any black representative is entitled to speak for his fellow blacks. Homeland leaders were elected but are discounted as being contaminated by the system. One thing the Government will not concede is to permit black popular elections to choose leaders before the process of negotiation has even started.

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20. Nevertheless the way forward must still be through dialogue and consultation. In these circumstances the most useful contribution we can make may be to try to persuade both Government and blacks to agree to talk without any pre-conditions on either side.

21. P W Botha may not have the necessary flexibility to carry through to its end the reform programme which he has started. It is not clear that any likely successor within his party would be more successful. Dr Gerrit Viljoen, for example, probably the leading "liberal" in the Cabinet though a former Chairman of the Broederbond, has style and would make a considerably better impact on the domestic and international stage. On the other hand Mr F W de Klerk has wider grass-roots support and would be less likely to take risks for the sake of reform.

22. In quoting the example of Zimbabwe South Africans seek to demonstrate the perils of handing over a country to black majority rule. Yet they have scarcely woken up to a much more significant comparison: namely Ian Smith's repeated refusal to settle for compromises which could have been conclusive at the time, only to end by having to accept much less advantageous terms later on.

UK Policy

23. Our attitude throughout has been consistent and clear. Apartheid in our view is unacceptable and unworkable. We want to see change swiftly but peaceably. Discriminatory legislation must go. The political aspirations of blacks must be met. We do not claim to prescribe solutions but would be satisfied with any arrangements acceptable to the people of South Africa as a whole. Even if the South African Government are saying some of the right things, we urge them to move much further and faster and above all to translate good intentions into specific action.

24. This line of argument gains some attention. But South Africans hear what they want to hear. For their part the Government resent being told what to do by outsiders and are determined not to be seen

/as



as making concessions under pressure from abroad. They are more concerned with pressures on their own doorstep from black protest, from liberal Afrikaners, from the white business community, from the inexorable upward graph of black population increase, from the international money-lenders.

25. Britain has a bigger stake in South Africa than has any other country, taking trade, investment, jobs and personal ties together. Incidentally it is not always remembered that our earnings from invisibles here are worth even more than our visible exports. Such links work both ways: we have more reason to take up a position on South Africa's problems, but greater understanding is expected of us. Our voice ought to count. Nevertheless for reasons of history and present day politics I cannot pretend we exert other than marginal influence. I doubt if any markedly different approach would count for more. We may get some credit from the South African Government for standing out against sanctions, but judging from past experience they are unlikely to pay much greater heed to our advice as a result of it.

26. In rejecting external pressures the South African Government advance two arguments which deserve respect. First, the situation is far more complicated than sometimes realised by outsiders, not least as regards the profusion of minorities in South Africa. It is not just a case of a minority and a majority, nor of white versus black, but of two white tribes and a dozen or more black ones having to work out how to live together. Secondly, it has been put to me that blacks may begin to count on foreign governments adopting ever more stringent measures, so that blacks no longer see any need to sit down and negotiate with the Government which is doomed by the rest of the world. This may be exaggerated but I believe there is a real point here. It would be tragic if outside pressures were to overshoot and thus contribute to the very result we dread: further polarisation and an ever deepening descent into violence.

27. Where does this leave us? We share with South Africans a tendency to defend ourselves by talking about worst-case economic

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sanctions (which we argue would be not only misconceived but counter-productive). Each of us may be harder-pressed to explain our opposition to symbolic measures which by definition are likely to have less practical effect. Yet even these are questionable on the ground that they will lead inexorably to sterner measures which seem bound to do more harm than good - the slippery slope argument. Let such gestures be recognised for what they are: primarily a reaction by governments to satisfy domestic requirements or to demonstrate international solidarity. In any case symbolic measures are likely to remain largely irrelevant to the key question whether the regime can bring itself to admit blacks to any real degree of power-sharing and, no less important, whether black representatives can bring themselves to work out a compromise with the whites.

28. I believe we would be right to continue broadly as now, guided by the following principles:

- (a) Aim to keep our lines open to both whites and blacks, the latter requiring as much of our attention as the former.
- (b) Call more firmly than ever for urgent moves towards reform in the area of political and civil rights.
- (c) Concentrate at any one time on a few specific issues and flagrant abuses of human rights. (Forced removals are an example where British concern may have helped to influence South African policy.)
- (d) Counsel both sides against violence, and equally urge both sides to get down to the business of dialogue, a dialogue which we consider should be started without prior conditions on either side.

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(e) Take every opportunity of putting our views across to the South African Government not only in public but in private contacts, including giving them credit for whatever steps they take in the right direction.

(f) As a positive contribution, do what we can to:

- (i) Encourage British firms to play as constructive a role as possible through the European Code and firms' own programmes for black improvement.
- (ii) Increase official aid directed through the British Council to South African blacks.
- (iii) Support the idea that minority rights should be guaranteed in any future political statement.
- (iv) Urge that all communities in South Africa should be free to engage in peaceful political activity without restriction. (If in consequence of taking this line and of advocating Mandela's release we consider relaxing our own attitude towards dealings with the ANC, I could not object.)

29. To carry this through will be far from easy, nor is it a recipe for sure success. But I believe it would put such leverage as we have to best use. Other courses look even less attractive. An approach of this kind would in my view be responsible, respectable and above all realistic.

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30. I am copying this despatch to HM Representatives at all European Community posts, to the UK Permanent Representative at the United Nations, to HM Representatives at Washington, Ottawa, Canberra, Wellington, Maseru, Mbabane, Gaborone, Maputo, Harare, Luanda, Lusaka, Dar es Salaam, Lagos, New Delhi, Berne, Moscow and Stockholm.

I am Sir

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. D. Roberts', with a long, sweeping tail extending to the right. Below the signature are two small dots.

South Africa Pets.