

SUBJECT.



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Zimbabwe

cc. Stewart ask

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 December 1982

Dear Roger,

Zimbabwe

Mr. Denis Norman, the Zimbabwe Minister of Agriculture, called on the Prime Minister as arranged at 1545 this afternoon.

At the Prime Minister's invitation, Mr. Norman did most of the talking. He said that the balance sheet of achievement in Zimbabwe, three years after independence, showed more pluses than minuses. But the latter tended to attract the most attention.

With regard to the economic situation, the balance of payments problem was certainly serious. This was due to a marked fall in the world mineral markets (Zimbabwe being the sixth largest producer of gold in the world had suffered particularly from the fall in the price of gold) and to the trading relations with South Africa where the fall in value of the Rand had been partly responsible for Zimbabwe's recent devaluation.

Those factors apart, the economy was holding up quite well. The output of commercial farmers, who were mostly white, had increased in value by 172% in three years. The value of the peasant farmers' output had risen 700% in the same period. In three years, peasant farmers had moved from a subsistence to a cash economy. One result of this was that they were now taking more interest in Government policy - Mr. Mugabe realised that they were a new factor in the political situation.

Before 1980 the largest maize crop received from the private sector was 80,000 tons. This figure had increased to 275,000 tons in 1981 and 500,000 tons in 1982. Agriculture accounted for 52% of the total foreign exchange earnings of Zimbabwe. Maize was exported to thirteen African countries but this had to be done through outside agencies such as the World Food Programme because the African countries concerned did not have the money to finance the trade. Now, because maize stocks were so large, Zimbabwe was beginning to enter the world market outside Africa. A large maize contract had recently been signed with Japan.

Much of this achievement in the agriculture field was due to the policy of raising and guaranteeing agricultural prices.

/ The Prime Minister

HL

The Prime Minister asked where the money came from. Mr. Norman said that the Government borrowed from the banking system and at present had to pay interest of 18% for the necessary loans. The banks were now beginning to question this policy. All the Economic Ministers in the Government felt that it was time that food subsidies were lowered. Vice President Bush, who had seen Mr. Norman three times during his visit to Zimbabwe, had advised him on the basis of US experience to try to eliminate subsidies.

On political matters, Mr. Mugabe was keen to follow both the spirit and the letter of the Lancaster House agreement. With regard to the torture allegations, Mugabe took the view that if these were true, the courts would demonstrate their truth. But if he intervened at this stage, he would be told that he was interfering in the judicial process. The Prime Minister said that she found this line unconvincing. Charges as serious as this should be investigated before the cases in question came to court. There was no guarantee that the process of cross-examination at the trial of the airforce officers would demonstrate whether they had been tortured or not. Was there any risk of further incidents of torture before the trials took place? Mr. Norman said that he was reasonably sure that there was no such risk. When he had first heard the stories of torture, he had discussed the matter with Mugabe - the detainees had subsequently been moved to a new prison and had been given new guards. He recognised that the torture allegations were a blemish. But Mugabe had his difficulties. He had hot heads in his own party whom he had to try to placate. At the same time, he had to try to maintain the confidence of the whites - and he had succeeded in the case of those whites who genuinely wished to stay in Zimbabwe. There were some bright spots. He had recently persuaded the Minister for Home Affairs to proclaim a thirty-day amnesty until the end of December in order that those who still possessed arms should hand them in. His own intervention had also been instrumental in persuading Mugabe to release the two Yorke brothers.

The British military assistance training team had done a most valuable job. They had had a stabilising effect on the military and this was of the greatest importance for the future of Zimbabwe. He hoped that we would be prepared to help with the re-supply and retraining of the Zimbabwe airforce. He would hate the Government to go elsewhere for its military hardware. The presence of the North Koreans was embarrassing to some members of the Government and their performance had been unsatisfactory.

His general concern was the unfavourable atmosphere which was building up in Southern Africa in connection with Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and, most recently, the South African raid in Maseru. Incidents of the latter kind tended to exacerbate attitudes within Zimbabwe towards the white community. He believed that the white community should concentrate on maintaining its control of economic life and not concern itself too much with politics. The Prime Minister said that that might not be possible if the Government continued on its present course towards a one-party state and socialism. Mr. Norman said that he thought his own experience was illustrative of what could be done. When he had first entered the Government, the fact that he was white had made life very difficult for him. But now Mugabe, who was increasingly dependent on his Economic Ministers, frequently sought his advice. Contact with the outside world also had a good effect

on Mugabe. When he had returned from his visit to Europe last summer his attitude was notably different. Similarly the visits to Zimbabwe of Princess Anne and Vice President Bush had been very successful. The momentum should be maintained. The Duke of Edinburgh would visit the country in May next year.

It was his own belief that Zimbabwe could be a success - there was no doubt that the stability of Southern Africa depended on this. His wife had been urging him to leave politics but he was not prepared to give up at this stage. Nor were other whites - the morale of most of the white farmers remained good.

The Prime Minister said that in her view the worst features of the present situation were the torture allegations and the trend towards a one-party state. Mr. Norman said that it would be nothing like as easy to move towards a one-party state as some members of the present Government imagined. He hoped that there would be a re-shuffle in January which would get rid of the hot heads. The Prime Minister said that she believed this would have a useful influence on overseas opinion.

We are informing the press that Mr. Norman has called on the Prime Minister but we are not providing any details of the conversation.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

*Yours ever*

*John Colles.*

Roger Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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