

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH LORD BARBER

Lord Barber has returned from South Africa and is anxious to see you as soon as possible. I have therefore put him in the diary for Monday morning.

You read the telegrams (enclosed) about the outcome of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group's visit to South Africa. There is now an additional telegram giving the text of the paper which they left with the South African Government.

The two points which Lord Barber will wish to put to you are:

- (i) He will ask you to send a message to President Botha urging him to be receptive and flexible over the suggestions in the Eminent Persons' Group's paper.
- (ii) He will ~~also~~ ask you to send a message to President Reagan encouraging him to intervene with President Botha also.

You will want to respond positively to both requests, though a message to President Botha will require very careful drafting indeed, so that it does not look as though you are simply parroting the Eminent Persons' Group. You will probably be most effective if you can distance yourself a bit from some of their recommendations while urging him to accept others. You may wish to discuss with Lord Barber which points in the Group's paper he considers the most vital.

Incidentally, you should be aware that the fact that members of the Group saw Mandela in prison has become public knowledge.

CPD

Charles Powell
14 March 1986

RAMAFD



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 March 1986

Prime Minister
 CDP
 14/3

Dear Charles,

Commonwealth Group on Eminent Persons

Lord Barber is to call on the Prime Minister on 17 March to report on the outcome of the Group's visit to South Africa.

After two weeks of extensive discussions in which they spoke to all sides of opinion in South Africa, the Group have left with the South African Government a paper setting out "a possible negotiating concept" to which they await the South African Government's considered response.

Lord Barber has told us that he will wish to brief the Prime Minister fully on the discussions the Group had and to give his personal assessment of the prospects for further progress. At the request of the Group as a whole, Lord Barber will urge the Prime Minister to send a personal message to President Botha not to reject the Group's proposals but to respond in a way that will then enable further discussions to take place. The Group's work has now reached a potentially critical stage. The South African Government's response to the Group will determine whether or not further progress can be made. The Group clearly attach importance to the Prime Minister's ability to exert some influence on President Botha. Depending on how the discussion with Lord Barber goes, the Foreign Secretary's instinct is that a message from the Prime Minister would be timely, and would also be a valuable indication of our interest in the success of the Group.

/Lord Barber



Lord Barber will also ask the Prime Minister to brief President Reagan on the progress that the Group has made and to encourage him to use his influence in support of the Group's proposals. The United States, while being generally supportive, has played no part in the Group's mission. The Foreign Secretary believes that the time may well now be opportune to seek to involve the Americans in support of the Commonwealth initiative, but we can see how the discussion goes with Lord Barber.

Finally, Lord Barber will wish to discuss the next steps and to look ahead to the review of the Commonwealth Accord in June. If a sufficiently encouraging reply is forthcoming from the South African Government before the middle of April, the Group will be thinking in terms of another round of talks with the South African Government and leaders of other groups in the second half of April. Mr Fraser has spoken privately of the Group preparing its report by the middle of June. This timescale should allow sufficient flexibility for the intensive discussion that will be necessary if progress is being made.

The Foreign Secretary believes that it is too early to take a position on when, where and at what level the six-month review called for in the Commonwealth Accord should take place. He believes that much will depend on the outcome of the present exchanges and further negotiations over the coming weeks. We should not be drawn by our Commonwealth Partners into discussing the review in detail at this stage.

/ I enclose a copy of the brief prepared for the Foreign Secretary's meeting with Lord Barber on 16 March. This identifies some of the points on which Lord Barber's views would be of particular interest. The Background Note summarises the present situation following the Group's discussions in South Africa.

Yours ever,
Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

COMMONWEALTH GROUP OF EMINENT PERSONS (COMGEP)

LINE TO TAKE

- Welcome this opportunity for an early discussion. In circumstances, believe you and other members of Group can claim a successful conclusion to the first difficult stage of your mission.
- Impressed that, despite strains, Group has held together and avoided confrontation with SAG. Know that you have played a vital part in achieving this.
- Involving SAG in exchange of ideas - talks about dialogue - a major achievement. SAG seem to accept that COMGEP can play an effective role. Very much in our interests to keep process going.
- Note that paper avoids defining what reforms should be undertaken to end apartheid. Right that Group should have stuck to Commonwealth Accord in setting out steps it wishes SAG to take.
- How firm was SAG position and principles as set out in the paper? Note that these wisely drew on earlier public statements by President Botha and others.
- Encouraged by lifting of State of Emergency. How in your view will SAG respond to your other proposals?
- They should be able to concede point A (removal of troops from townships).
- Not impossible that they agree to release Mandela, Sisulu and Mbeki. Note: paper does not call for release of all political prisoners and detainees.

- Unbanning of the ANC and permitting it to operate within South Africa likely to be the sticking point. Is there room for flexibility (perhaps seeking prior assurances on a suspension of violence from both sides)?
- Most interested in your impressions of President Botha's attitude. How divided is South African Cabinet? How significant is Pik Botha's position; Heunis's; Viljoen's.
- What were your impressions of Mandela? How did his views compare with those of ANC/UDF?
- Ramphal is clearly committed to the COMGEP initiative. He is hopeful that SAG response will be sufficiently forthcoming to enable Group to continue and pay another visit to South Africa before the end of April. He hopes we will do what we can to keep the process moving forward.
- How do you see it evolving? Must continue to urge a constructive and flexible approach on both sides. The key for the SAG likely to be an undertaking on the suspension of violence. Will be considering carefully what we might do in this regard.
- Looking further ahead, when is the COMGEP report likely to be written. Are minds likely to be open or closed?
- Any further action we should take now? Agree that we should involve President Reagan. Americans have kept back and have not sought to use their influence up to now. Will recommend to Prime Minister that she urges President Reagan to bring his weight to bear in support of the Group's proposal. Would it be useful for us to talk again to the ANC and urge a suspension of violence?
- Very pleased to see that Group will not make statements or speak to the press before issuing its report. Visit to Mandela has already leaked. Dangers of public speculation or comment about members of the Group are obvious.

BACKGROUND

1. The first full stage of COMGEP mission has been completed. This included an initial visit by the two co-chairmen and Dame Nita Barrow to South Africa in February, visits to Lusaka (for meetings with the Zambian Government and the ANC), Harare, Gaborone, Lesotho and Luanda and finally a two-week visit to South Africa by the whole Group.

2. Despite earlier indications that Mr Fraser might be trying to force the pace with the South African Government, his briefing for the British, Australian and Canadian Ambassadors was reasonably encouraging. He recognises the delicacy of the situation and the need to give the South African Government time for a considered reply to the Group's proposals. He indicated that the Group would hope to present its report by the middle of June and was looking towards another visit by the Group in the second half of April. This would mean that the South African Government's response to the COMGEP paper should be received not later than early April.

D 3. The paper that COMGEP have left with the South African Government is an expansion of their original draft. Drawing on para 2 of the Commonwealth Accord, which sets out a series of confidence building measures, it suggests action that the South African Government should take alongside "specific and meaningful steps being taken towards ending apartheid". The paper carefully avoids specifying what reforms it would expect to see the South African Government introduce. It proposes that the opposition groups should, at the same time, undertake to suspend violence and enter negotiations.

4. The Group have suggested action under three headings:
(a) Removal of the troops from the townships and the suspension of detention without trial. Following the lifting of the state of emergency (one of the Group's original proposals) the South African Government should be able to agree to the withdrawal of the military provided the police are still available. It is likely that the Government could agree to at least a moratorium on detention without trial.

(b) The release of Mandela and other political prisoners and detainees. The South African Government has been exploring ways in which agreement on the release of Mandela could be reached. The unconditional release of Mandela and the two other "old" ANC leaders serving life sentences, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, might therefore be possible. Almost all detainees held under the emergency regulations have been released. A large number remain in detention under other legislation and a number of UDF and trades union leaders are on trial for treason. The paper does not suggest, however, that all political prisoners and detainees should be released.

(c) The unbanning of the ANC and the PAC. This is the most fundamental proposal in the paper. Against a background of sporadic ANC violence and the deaths of whites in the border areas and in Durban in recent months, it would be politically very difficult for the South African Government to allow the ANC free political rein in South Africa.

5. The paper now also includes the carefully drafted set of principles to which COMGEP believe the South African Government have agreed. This draws on statements of principle made by President Botha and other Ministers in recent months and has apparently been the subject of some discussion between the Group and the South African Government.

6. With the agreement of the two co-chairmen, Lord Barber will suggest that the Prime Minister should brief President Reagan on the progress so far, encouraging him to use his influence on the South African Government to respond favourably. Apart from making some encouraging noises, the United States has deliberately stayed out of the COMGEP initiative but this would seem the time for them to become involved.

7. When Mr Ramphal called on the Secretary of State on 13 March, he seemed reasonably hopeful that the COMGEP exercise would continue. He noted that the Group had been encouraged by the attitude of Pik Botha but discouraged by the line taken by President Botha and some other Ministers. He expressed the hope to the Secretary of State that the United Kingdom would do what it could to keep the initiative moving forward.

8. The attitude of the ANC and their willingness to co-operate may be critical to the future of COMGEP. This may be an opportune moment to reinforce what COMGEP has achieved by talking to the ANC again at official level, possibly in Lusaka. Our aim would be to impress upon the ANC leaders the need for a positive response on the question of a suspension of violence. This would clearly be the key to a more forthcoming reply from the South African Government.

9. Henri de Villiers, the Chairman of Standard Bank (SA) told our Consul-General in Johannesburg, in strict confidence, that he regarded Fraser as the main problem in the Group. He was also critical of the balance of the Group's programme and believed that too little account had been taken of the views of Afrikaner businessmen such as Fred du Plessis. They had more influence with the South African Government.