

FROM FRASER MELBOURNE

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MALCOLM FRASER, C.B.

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Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you very much for your letter concerning Sir Geoffrey Howe's visit to South Africa. If Sir Geoffrey is able to achieve in this visit what the Commonwealth Group was unable to achieve, namely a change in heart on the part of the South African Government and a willingness to negotiate genuinely for the future against a background of the abolition of Apartheid, he will have achieved much.

It is important to understand why our own efforts to achieve a negotiation broke down. A critical stage had been reached at the end of April and early May. The Commonwealth Group, at that point, had some grounds for optimism that the South African Government would accept our negotiating concept. We also had confidence that the Black leadership would do likewise. Why, then, did the Government make a hard about-turn and set its face against negotiation? Not only that but also embark on a whole series of actions which have fouled the atmosphere for negotiations.

There are two reasons. First, there were always hard-line members of the Cabinet who believe that the South African Government could either tough it out or shoot it out with the Black population. At least one Minister indicated to us that if enough young terrorists were shot, their kind of normalcy would be restored.

It is clear that, since the bombing of three neighbouring States, the hard liners have been in the ascendancy. There is, however, another factor of great significance which probably served to tip the balance decisively against negotiation.

The South African Government has consistently stated that political rights would have to be exercised through racial groups. Its emphasis has always been on group rights and not on individual rights. That view of the future, of course, would maintain Apartheid but in another form. This view is unacceptable to the Black leadership who emphasize South African citizenship above all.

2.

It is my view that the South African Government had believed that, at a negotiation it would be able to achieve some support for their own view of the future. If the Black leadership was divided into a number of different groups, it may be that one or two of the homeland leaders would have supported the Government's concept. However, in our discussions with Nelson Mandela, Chief Buthelezi and with other African leaders, we had formed the view that a freed Mandela would be able to unify African leadership.

why unified under Mandela
The Government would have known that it would never be able to get support for its concept of the future in such circumstances. On the contrary, a unified Black leadership under Mandela, negotiating with the Government, would have exposed absolutely the mythology of the Government's claim for South Africa to be a nation of minorities and the falseness of the Government's suggestion that political rights should be exercised through racial groups.

Such a realisation, which would have been evident from reports of discussions we had with Chief Buthelezi and Nelson Mandela, which were obviously freely available to the Government, must have been a significant contributing factor in turning the Government against negotiation.

If you can accept this analysis, it is clear that something substantial will have to happen to alter the balance before the Government would be moved from its own view.

Against the background I have outlined, that would be a formidable task indeed.

We must keep in mind that ultimately there will have to be two or more parties to a negotiation. While the Commonwealth Group was confident that the Black leadership would have accepted our negotiation concept in the environment of April, I think that we would be equally confident that today they would not even consider it. What more must Government do, therefore, to re-establish the possibility of negotiation? I would think at the minimum a withdrawal of the emergency provisions and laws that have been put in place in the last few months, the lifting of censorship, together with the repeal of the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, two fundamental legal pillars of Apartheid.

Perhaps a point of emphasis is needed here. If the Government were genuine in seeking to establish one South Africa, based on individual political rights, it should have no problem with the repeal of these two Acts. Economic forces would prevent any sudden exodus of Blacks from the townships or the homelands. How many could afford to buy a house in the white suburbs or establish a business in any of the central business districts? Economic forces would prevent any dramatic change in the face of South Africa for perhaps 20 years.

3.

Can Sir Geoffrey Howe persuade the South African Government to undertake the measures I have indicated? It would be a notable, quite singular achievement if he could. I suggest that anything less could not be successful.

I am sure the South African Government will say that they are prepared to negotiate. That they have been calling for people to come and speak with them for well over a year. We know that the genuine leaders of the Blacks will not talk with the Government because the conditions for talks do not prevail. The Government, by its action, has made it plain that it only wants talks on its own terms. It will be important not to be bemused by South African diplomacy.

Chester Crocker has 5-6 years of unhappy history of discussion with the South African Government under his policy of constructive engagement. That also has achieved nothing. The South African Government has conceded nothing. Whatever agreements it had entered into, the Lusaka and Nkomati accords were broken almost before the ink was dry. The South African Government is very good at negotiating to no purpose. The time is past when any of us should continue to play their game.

In the next few weeks it will be important to bear in mind that the Black leadership has its own agenda, its own timetable. The Commonwealth leaders will be meeting early in August. This might be the most fundamental date of all. If the Commonwealth then decides to take no action, or if Britain does not join in concerted Commonwealth action, thus grievously damaging the effectiveness of whatever the Commonwealth could do, the Black leadership may well decide that, so far as effective support of the West is concerned, they are truly on their own.

That decision would be of some significance because, once it is taken, the Black leadership will be inevitably moved towards a total guerilla effort throughout South Africa. This would be a guerilla war Asia-style, in which soft targets are the prime targets attacked, in which every family, every school, every small community would soon be demanding full-time military protection.

Relatively few guerillas could dissipate the strength of the South African army quickly. They could not overcome the Government in a matter of months or even a year or two. That would take 8, 10, maybe 12 years, but it would happen. If anyone still believes that the Afrikaner and the Whites of South Africa can be secure behind that army, then they misunderstand the lessons of guerilla warfare of the last 50 years. I have some knowledge of these things as Minister for the Army and Minister for Defence and what I am saying is not opinion, it is factually based.

The kind of Government that would emerge from such a conflict would owe allegiance to its source of arms; it would probably be Marxist; the whole of southern Africa would be embroiled. The kind of Government that emerged would nationalise the

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totality of Western commercial interest. Thus Western strategic and commercial interests would both be destroyed by this course. That would be the consequence of merely maintaining present policies.

Thus, what Commonwealth leaders do early in August will be of significance. It is possible, if Britain does not join the Commonwealth at that point, that the kinds of decisions that I have foreshadowed may be deferred until action from the United States becomes clearer. Before the Congress rises for their mid-term election, the same critical point will have been reached. Beyond that time the capacity for the West to influence events may have ended. In other words, the European Economic Community timetable of three months is too long and too late.

Let me mention one or two specific points.

The purpose of sanctions would not be to destroy the South African economy but they would need to be constructed in such a way to give the economy and the white population in particular a real body-blow. It is not a question of turning the screws gently and steadily, it is a question of a hard blow. When the banks took their action last year, based on commercial decisions, many white South Africans for the first time understood that their futures were under threat. Since then, whites have been more active in seeking to bring pressures on their own Government. The purpose of sanctions must be to cause them to re-enforce their efforts considerably. Incidentally, it is not sanctions but guerilla warfare that would really destroy the economy.

The measures mentioned in the letter sent to you jointly by my Co-Chairman and myself are the minimum measures that General Obasanjo and I considered necessary.

It is often said that sanctions hurt Blacks and therefore should not be imposed. While recognising that sanctions will have an impact on the lives of Blacks, I really do believe, Prime Minister, that this argument should be put aside. The Blacks are hurting now, every day, in South Africa. In many townships the unemployment is 60%-70%. Because the land is barren in the homelands, there is virtually no activity and unemployment is even greater. Further, the mere imposition of Apartheid creates most difficult conditions for the Black population.

Virtually all Black leaders, with the exception of Chief Buthelezi, say 'impose sanctions, we would sooner be hurt more now than to endure our present conditions for ever.' That is their decision. It is a legitimate decision. It is motivated by the same yearning for participation in one's own Government that has motivated forces for freedom around the world time and time again. It cannot be regarded as less legitimate because the yearning comes from Blacks in South Africa. The hurt done to Blacks through sanctions will be nothing compared to the otherwise inevitable loss of life and destructions caused by civil and guerilla war.

5.

Unfortunately, the South African Government has made things more difficult for itself by falsely slandering the African National Congress. The best description of the ANC has been provided by Professor Lodge of Witswatersrand University. He concludes that, even though there are some Communists within the ANC, there are not as many as the Government claims. It is basically a pragmatic organisation, committed to national purposes and objectives. Indeed, in the condition of South Africa, it may be a wonder that more Blacks have not joined the Communist Party. It is quite clear, however, that, if something is not done to break the present circle, the Black leadership will be driven towards the Soviet Union and her satellites for arms. The West, by inaction, is quite capable of making a present of southern Africa to the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, a Government which included Mandela, Tambo, Buthelezi and other Black leaders would be largely pragmatic. I doubt very much if it would embark on any major course of nationalisation. We need to remember the Freedom Charter was written a very long while ago, before collectivist policies had been demonstrated to fail for most of southern Africa. It would be naive to suggest that lessons that have been learned across the entire continent have not carried weight with the leadership of the ANC.

You mention in your letter to me that we must be careful not to force the South African Government into the laager where he will refuse to budge his position. I have a contrary view of the Afrikaner character which I believe should be considered and which, in my view, is reinforced by the lessons of British history. The Afrikaner is stubborn, he is determined. He will not be dissuaded from his own chosen course by reasoned argument or quiet diplomacy, even if it is called constructive engagement. He will only be dissuaded from his own course by pressure and often extreme pressure. Misunderstanding of this point has hampered the West's dealings with South Africa over decades. We have accepted their dis-information and in our own minds made it reality.

At the conclusion of your letter you asked if General Obasanjo and myself feel able to lend such support and encouragement as we can to Sir Geoffrey's visit. I take that to mean can we persuade the Black leadership to meet Sir Geoffrey.

I do not believe we could be successful in such a venture because the Black leadership regard this visit and the decision of the EEC as an attempt to delay and to divert consideration of our own report.

Further, the visit must be judged in the context in which the Black leadership has become very sceptical of British objectives, simply because of Britain's repeated objections to sanctions.

Incidentally, it is currently more sceptical of the U.S. policy, not only because of the President's stated attitude to sanctions but also because of the US support for Savimbi. That act has virtually destroyed US influence in southern Africa.

6.

There may well be a time when whatever influence General Obasanjo and I have with the Black leadership will need to be used in purposes capable of success.

I regret that, in my judgment, to seek to use that influence on this occasion would only depreciate whatever credit we had.

I earnestly ask you, Prime Minister, to heed the arguments that I have put in this letter and hope very much that Britain will feel able to join all other members of the Commonwealth in full-blooded support for stern measures when the leaders meet in August.

Nobody can guarantee that substantial economic measures will work. I personally believe there is a reasonable chance that they will. I also believe they represent the last remaining option for major states in the West to exercise influence in a cause which is just but, perhaps more to the point, from their own national perspective, is indeed in their own self interest.

My warmest good wishes.

(Malcolm Fraser)

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and I have with the British leadership will need to be used in
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I earnestly ask you, Prime Minister, to heed the arguments that
I have put in this letter and hope very much that Britain will
lead able to join all other members of the Commonwealth in
broad support for these measures when the leaders meet in
London.

My warmest good wishes.

(Signature)



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

11 July 1986

*How to do with Gladstone
then J. Fraser!*

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*Prime Minister
An incomprehensible letter
from Malcolm Fraser.
And a great contrast to
the line taken by Obasanjo.*

Dear Charles,

COMGEP : Letter from Mr Fraser

*CDP
14/7.*

I mentioned by telephone that we had received today by facsimile from Canberra the text of a letter from Mr Fraser to the Prime Minister.

I now enclose the text. You will in particular note Mr Fraser's judgement, expressed in the penultimate page of his letter, that he and General Obasanjo could not be successful in persuading black leadership to meet Sir Geoffrey Howe.

Yours ever

(R N Culshaw)
Private Secretary

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[Faint, illegible handwriting]