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RECORD OF A DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND
PROFESSOR PIETER DE LANGE, RECTOR OF THE RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY
AND PRESIDENT OF THE BROEDERBOND

Present

Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe
Sir Patrick Moberly
Mr E A J Fergusson

Professor de Lange

1. Professor de Lange said that he would speak for the 15-16,000 Afrikaners in the Broederbond who, since the 1982 split, represented those who believed that the interests of Afrikaners could only be established within the interests of South Africa as a whole. There was concern at what were perceived as attempts to take away from Afrikaners any opportunity to determine their own future. Nevertheless he believed that there was general acceptance of powersharing as the basis of a negotiated settlement, provided that the Afrikaners were left with sufficient powers to protect themselves and their culture group (control over schools and language were especially sensitive).

2. Professor de Lange said that he had had talks with the ANC, most recently at a meeting in New York in June. There had been surprisingly little negative reaction in the Broederbond to his doing so; there was growing acceptance of the need for ANC participation at the negotiating table, subject to their committing themselves to abjuring violence. None the less, the negative impact of the ANC's communist affiliations should not be underestimated. He believed that the alliance between the SACP and the nationalist element in the ANC was an alliance of convenience: many nationalists had embraced Marxism as an instrument for the pursuit of social justice and not as a basic ideology. It was difficult to judge the weight within the ANC of committed Communists such as Slovo and Maharaj but their role was a source of confusion for Afrikaners thinking about ANC involvement in the negotiating process. The Secretary of State commented that all nationalist movements tended to have their communist elements. We saw the ANC as only one of the black representative organisations, but they were important and people such as Tambo and Mandela clearly displayed wisdom and moderation. One should discriminate between the radical ideologists and those who genuinely wanted to discuss a stable future for South Africa. The best way of reinforcing the latter was by taking the major leap of releasing Mandela and the other political prisoners and unbanning the political parties.

3. Professor de Lange said that he believed that Afrikaners were ready for new thinking and for innovative leadership. Many members of the party and the government accepted the need to get the ANC to the negotiating table. The problem was how to get PW Botha out of the corner into which he had painted himself, given his very strong personal feelings. Professor de Lange believed that if PW Botha acted imaginatively he would find strong support in Cabinet and in the national party caucus, and such action would have a band-waggon effect. There would also be support from many English speakers (he counselled against identifying the English speakers with liberalism; some were among the most conservative elements in the population).

4. Professor de Lange said that, allowing for media exaggeration, there was genuine pressure on the right. On the other hand he had been surprised how far Afrikaners, even in the most remote rural areas, had been prepared to go in accepting reform. But terrorist violence had a profoundly negative impact on such changes of attitude.

5. In response to the Secretary of State's arguments for more rapid movement, Professor de Lange emphasised that in dealing with the present South African Government, one was dealing with a group with all the prickly, defensive/aggressive characteristics of a minority. If Afrikaners felt that their existence was being put into question then they would rally to each other and there would be a "hell of a mess". He could not exclude that possibility. There was massive new external pressure on South Africa but the emotional terms in which such pressures were expressed provoked a matching emotional reaction in Afrikanerdom, and could only lead to increasing obstinacy.

6. Professor de Lange said that the essential political change had to come from within the President himself. He spoke to PW Botha fairly often and had no doubt of his honesty of purpose in pursuing the reform programme. PW had revealed "a feeling of sadness" that he could not move the process along faster. In talking of Mandela he had said "we are both old men". The two main psychological blocks on the President's part were his pathological fear of 'communism' and his absolute rejection of revolutionary violence as a means of pressure. PW Botha also believed that he had to stay in office to carry through the reform process because, in the absence of any obvious successor, there would be a prolonged struggle for the succession. The need for change was so urgent that such delay was unacceptable.

7. The Secretary of State restated his view that other black African organisations had a part to play. It was impossible to predict now what the ultimate balance would be between the parties but without the participation of the banned organisations he could not see how violence in the townships could be brought under control. Professor de Lange said that a vital question

was how far, for its part, the ANC was ready to join the negotiating process as only one of a number of parties. So far they continued to insist that they alone represented the black people. The Secretary of State said that the position of the Commonwealth and of the European Community was clear on this: we did not admit that the ANC was the sole authentic voice.

8. Professor de Lange accepted the Secretary of State's view that the longer the process of reform was protracted the greater the influence of the revolutionary left; that had been his own experience in the university field, where the rhetoric of Marxism was becoming more commonplace. Indeed divisions in the black community across the generation divide were leading older people to adopt radical terminologies in order to preserve any credibility with and influence over younger people, for instance in the faculties and among those involved in the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee. The Secretary of State commented that this process tended to bring everyone down on the wrong side of the ideological divide.

9. The Secretary of State said he hoped that the South African Government could get away from emphasis on the semantics of violence. Professor de Lange said that he had told the President that in saying that no negotiation had ever been undertaken while violence was continuing he was talking nonsense. The Secretary of State said that if the Government took the brave decision to release Mandela and unban the parties, he believed that countries outside South Africa could help get the participants to commit themselves to peaceful discussion around the table.

10. The Secretary of State said that he wanted to counteract the impression that we were seeking to wish communism on South Africa. The truth was that we believed that the faster the move to dialogue the better was the chance of counteracting communism - an ideology which in recent years had been seen increasingly to have no convincing message to offer.

11. The Secretary of State referred to the homelands policy and the decision to give KwaNdebele independence. This made the Government's other protestations in a favour of change seem incredible. Had it really been thought through? Professor de Lange, with some apparent embarrassment, said that the decision had derived from the original apartheid philosophy which itself could only have been evolved by someone of Verwoerd's monumental ignorance of economics. The reality was, however, that the homelands were political entities which would be part of the scene for the foreseeable future, though he did not disagree with the Secretary of State that that might be as no more than administrative units in a wider structure and not as independent components.

12. In response to a question, Professor de Lange said that Xhosa influence in the ANC was still dominant (Mandela, Tambo, Mbeki etc). Other groups were represented, from among black, white, coloured and Indian groups, but the majority in the Executive was still strongly Xhosa. He accepted, however, that young people from all tribal backgrounds were joining the ANC.

13. Summing up his own views, Professor de Lange said that he feared that the South African Government were at present trying to finesse the influence of the far right and the far left and to build up enough support in the centre of the political spectrum to allow negotiations to take place. But history showed how difficult this was. Any peaceful settlement needed to bring in the extremes. It was essential to get this insight into the mind of PW Botha - his present policy was based on a fallacy.