



BRITISH EMBASSY
PARLIAMENT STREET, CAPE TOWN

25 August 1987

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FCO

Dear Kieran,

CHAIRMAN OF THE BROEDERBOND

1. In Johannesburg last week, I called to see Professor de Lange, head of the Broederbond. He asked for his regards to be passed to the Secretary of State.
2. As de Lange raised the Slabbert safari to Dakar, I asked about his own contacts with the ANC. De Lange said that he had met members of the ANC at a conference last year in New York. During that conference, he had a private discussion over dinner with Thabo Mbeki. He had since received a message from Tambo in which Tambo had suggested a private meeting with de Lange at a time and place of de Lange's choosing. The problem was that Tambo could not be relied upon to keep the meeting private: Mbeki had publicised his own meeting with de Lange despite an agreement that he would not do so (obliging Pik Botha to give an embarrassed reply in Parliament to Conservative Party questioning about de Lange's contacts). De Lange, however, would go on looking for ways in which he could keep in touch, discreetly, with the ANC.
3. I asked de Lange whether he believed, as several Nationalist Party MPs I had met seemed to think, that the Conservative Party could win the next white elections. De Lange said that he was sceptical about this. He thought the Conservative Party were quite close to the limits of their support. That support came, however, not just from the country towns and districts, but in large measure also from blue collar workers and the lower ranks of the civil service. The split in Afrikaner ranks had been traumatic for the present generation of National Party leaders. But of course there was nothing new in this: there had been similar divisions between Herzog and Botha, and Smuts and Malan. In any event he was not prepared to contemplate returning to a situation in which one-third of the Broederbond had paralysed any effective action or thinking about the future. It was not worth having unity at any price.
4. De Lange added that P W Botha still worried deeply about the split. He had tried to convince him that it was irreversible and that it was necessary now to broaden the National Party's support by including a reasonable proportion of English-speakers in the Cabinet (there are none at present, the only English-origin Ministers being the Deputy Ministers of Finance and the Economy). But the State President still thought and talked almost exclusively in terms of Afrikanerdom.

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5. I asked de Lange about the Group Areas Act. De Lange said that, of course, it would have to go; and the Separate Amenities Act very soon would go. But not all of this could be done overnight. He thought the Americans had a fundamentally distorted view of the situation here because of the lack of any historical sense. They believed in magical and rapid solutions. The only exception among them was Kissinger. The fact was that the process of change in South Africa was going to be long-drawn out and painful, and accompanied by bursts of violence and repression. But the process of change was ineluctable. It was a question of managing that process rather than striving for "solutions" which by their nature would turn out to be only interim steps.

6. I asked de Lange how capable he thought P W Botha was of carrying much further the process of reform. De Lange said that in his private talks with him, P W Botha recognised the arguments in favour of going ahead further and faster, but said that there were limits to what he could and would do. He would take the first steps towards bringing blacks into the government. The process of change of course would have to continue thereafter; but that would be under someone else. De Lange said that P W Botha was in many respects a realist and pragmatist, but at times also a "sentimentalist" who continued to find it hard to give up Verwoerdian concepts. This meant that he would move forward only very slowly and cautiously - far too cautiously - on the Group Areas Act. De Lange had to admit, however, that P W Botha had political antennae which he, de Lange, lacked and an instinctive feeling for how far he could take the white electorate.

7. I said that a number of concepts now being advanced by the Government, including the possibility that eight to ten million urban blacks might elect their own representatives to the proposed National Council to decide the future constitutional dispensation, obviously were quite radical steps in National Party terms. But unless there was some further and more imaginative step, it seemed all too likely that such elections either could not be held or would have to be held with the participation only of one or two homeland leaders and a number of black councillors and others who would carry little conviction in terms of real support. This seemed bad politics not only vis-à-vis the blacks, but also vis-à-vis Treurnicht, who would point out that the reform process was showing no results. I had been very struck by the phrase in the Broederbond document that "the greatest risk was not taking any risks". What prospect was there of the Government deciding, in its own interests, to consider taking some greater risks if this process was to be made more credible?

8. De Lange said that he agreed with much of this. He had discussed on a number of occasions with P W Botha the difficulties attending the release of Mandela. P W Botha at times seemed to want to release him. They were much the same age: P W referred to Mandela as the "old man", and acknowledged that, after 24 years in prison, he really should be freed. But each time the conversation got to this point, P W reverted to his insistence on an absolute renunciation of violence. Since then he had given himself a bit

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more room for manoeuvre (my telegram No 366). But de Lange interprets this, as I do, as meaning that Mandela would not be allowed to die in jail - but not that he is likely very soon to be released.

9. I talked to de Lange about the South African economy and the very poor prospects for economic growth if a situation could not be created in which South Africa once again stood some chance of access to external capital and/or was able to generate more confidence internally. De Lange attaches more importance to the latter concept, but needed no convincing that if the conditions were not created for a resumption of economic growth, all other problems would become still harder to manage; nor that the key factors of uncertainty were political.

10. I said that the one encouraging feature of the current scene seemed to me the intensity of the debate now engaged within Afrikanerdom about the direction reform should take. Although not numerically strong, people like Giliomee, Wimpie de Klerk, Esterhuysen and others represented a very important fraction of the intellectual elite - and that in a society which paid rather more homage than we did in Britain to Professors! De Lange said that he saw things in that light: the politicians would have to catch up. But the catching up process would not be easy and would take time. Meanwhile black radicals who professed to believe that the Afrikaners were at the end of their tether would have to find out the nature of their mistake. He could see no prospect of the ANC being able to overthrow the present government in the foreseeable future. In the end there would have to be an accommodation between Afrikaner nationalism and African nationalism. Neither side was ready for it yet; but he and others would go on with their efforts to persuade their own side that this day would have to come.

11. I found de Lange and de Kock, Governor of the Reserve Bank (whose remarks I am reporting separately), by far the most impressive people I have met here so far. I shall be keeping in close touch with both of them.

Tours war,

Robin

R W Renwick

P.S. Stalder told me today that he is in close contact with de Lange, and knew about Tambo's approach to him.

cc to: Lyn Parker Esq
APS/Secretary of State
FCO

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