

CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 April 1983

ZIMBABWE

Mr. and Mrs. Tim Gibbs called on me this morning. He is the son of Sir Humphrey Gibbs. They farm Bonisa Farm which is to the North West of Bulawayo. They are at present on a month's holiday in this country. The Prime Minister knows the family.

Mr. Gibbs said that he was very concerned about the agricultural situation in Zimbabwe. Production was decreasing drastically. He believed there would be widespread starvation in Zimbabwe this year. Large food import bills were being incurred. White farmers were leaving the land, and leaving Zimbabwe, in increasing numbers.

He and other members of the white farming community were concerned that the British aid programme was not being used more effectively to help remedy this situation. He suggested that a small delegation from the Commercial Farmers' Union should visit London to discuss this matter with aid officials. They would have a number of practical ideas to put forward. For example, the Zimbabwe national tractor fleet was now 10-15 years old. Spares were either unobtainable or very expensive. Could we not use our aid to finance spares which would mostly have to come from Britain. Secondly, instead of our aid money being used to buy food from abroad, could we not apply some of it to the provision of incentives for farmers. If, for example, 20p could be paid in London for every bag of maize supplied to the Zimbabwe Agricultural Marketing Board, this would be a

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considerable encouragement to farmers whose ability to remit profits outside Zimbabwe was extremely limited.

I asked whether or not all these ideas had been discussed with our High Commission in Harare. Mr. Gibbs said that they had not been, partly because of the current change of High Commissioner. Moreover, he was aware that his ideas would involve decisions of principle for the British Government which would have to be taken in London and he therefore felt that it was right for the proposed delegation to pay us a visit. I also pointed out that the use of our aid programme had to be agreed with the Government of Zimbabwe. He acknowledged this but thought that Mr. Mugabe was well aware of the importance of the white farming community to the future of Zimbabwe and might go along with the kind of ideas he had outlined, albeit with some reluctance.

I made no commitment as to whether we would receive such a delegation, but suggested that it would be useful for Mr. Gibbs to take the opportunity of his visit here to have a meeting with appropriate officials. He welcomed this - and you and I agreed on the telephone that we would try to arrange such a meeting during either Wednesday morning or Thursday morning of next week.

Mr. Gibbs had a good deal to say about the security situation in Matabeleland. But I shall not record this because much of it will be known to you and because he will doubtless go over the ground again with whichever officials he meets. I should, however, record that he made it plain that if the British military assistance training team left Zimbabwe, he and his family would also leave immediately. Their presence was an enormous assurance to the white farmers.

A. J. COLES

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