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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 January 1986

I showed the Prime Minister a copy of Derek Tonkin's farewell letter from Pretoria - Tot Siens, Suid-Afrika - which had come my way. The Prime Minister found it a very interesting and well-written account, if rather depressing in its conclusions.

You may care to tell Mr. Tonkin what an excellent piece of work the Prime Minister found his letter.

I am copying this letter to Sherard Cowper-Cowles in Sir Antony Acland's Office.

C.D. POWELL

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

BM.

S. AFRICA FILE



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. Charles Powell.

PS/No 10.

I thought that you
might like some more
bet. time reading on
South Africa. Jack
Tonkin's 'teleberry' is
very commonsensical.
It isn't possible to be
consistent. We just have
to try to ensure that external
pressures don't loose up
all chances of a stable solution.

Happy New Year. Egan.



BRITISH EMBASSY
PRETORIA

19 December 1985

A Reeve Esq
Southern African Department
FCO

Secr To/ys:

ms
Paine Minister
You may be interested
to glance at this
Farewell letter from the
number two in our Embassy
in Pretoria.

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17/1

TOT SIENS, SUID-AFRIKA

"There is a man sleeping in the grass and over him is gathering the greatest storm of all his days"

Alan Paton - Cry the Beloved Country

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1. I leave South Africa tomorrow for fresh pastures and offer a few personal thoughts after nearly three years in this fascinating country.
2. South Africa can be both exhilarating and deeply depressing. I have met many delightful South Africans of all colours and persuasions and am saddened that some of my South African friends nowadays have to suffer displays of mindless personal abuse when overseas simply because they are South Africans. Much of what is said about South Africa is inaccurate, untruthful, exaggerated, mischievous, deceitful and downright un-Christian. And yet they say that only if you come to South Africa can you understand how complex, indeed unique, South Africa's problems are. And visitors do come, and most understand - and some still go away as appalled as when they first came and even more depressed. And contrary to popular belief, blacks are not materially better off in South Africa than anywhere else on the continent - maybe better than most, in the sense that deaths from malnutrition are relatively few, but probably not among the top five countries in Africa in terms of GNP per capita.
3. The contrasts in South Africa are sharper than in any other country in which I have served. Despite all the recent troubles, I have never once seen a stone thrown in anger; though the black township of Mamelodi lies just over the hill from where I live, the gunfire and teargas have not once reached our prosperous white suburb. Driving through what we used to know as Zululand in Natal, you pass in and out of the KwaZulu homeland a dozen times on the road from Durban to Ulundi, the KwaZulu capital, and you experience a constant transition back and forth from efficient, first world agricultural units to typical third world native subsistence farming. The contrasts reflect the tensions in South African society. Many white South Africans live on their nerves. Child abuse, divorces, executive stress, road accidents - all the usual

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sociological indicators - make unhappy reading and put South African white society among the most troubled in the world today.

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"If you asked me for a priority list of health-related problems in South Africa, I think they must be malnutrition, tuberculosis, population growth, cancer, coronary artery disease and high blood pressure, drug abuse and violence."

Professor John Geer, University of the Witwatersrand

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4. The contrasts within the white community are as sharp as those between the black, white and coloured communities themselves. Yet who would imagine that 700,000 swarthy, Catholic, diminutive Portuguese immigrants could make common political cause with 2.7 million stolid, Calvinist, Germanic Afrikaners? Most whites are indeed of Afrikaner stock, but there are significant differences between the Afrikaner of the Cape, who tolerated the British during the Anglo-Boer war, and the Afrikaner of the Transvaal, who descended from the Voortrekkers and whom one English-speaking South African described to me as a cross between a mule and an ostrich. Afrikaners are generally regarded as being of Dutch origin, but some historians have pointed out that many of the "Dutch" farmers who emigrated in the 18th century to South Africa were in fact impoverished platt-deutsch (Low German) peasants from the German Federation who had crossed into prosperous, bourgeois Holland in search of work and took the opportunity to escape from their penury. By the middle of the 19th century, some 40% of all Afrikaners were of German origin, 35% Dutch and significant percentages of French Huguenot and Scottish stock. Their church was, and remains to this day, the "Nederduits" or Low German Reformed Church.

5. The Germanic origins of the Afrikaners should not be overlooked. They help to explain much of their "Weltanschauung": their punctiliousness and formality, their concern for good order and discipline, possibly even their racial obsessions. "Decidedly teutonic" is how Business Day last week described South African proposals for rescheduling the country's indebtedness. Those of us who have served in Germany feel curiously "at home" again on arrival in South Africa. Little wonder that the Germans are achieving such a commanding commercial and industrial position in South Africa; they understand the Afrikaner psyche better than any of us.

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"I have a disease
in my skin
somehow I'm not at ease
in my skin
But goddam all
it is my skin."

Sipho Sepamla - "The Root is One"

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6. Whatever their origins, most Afrikaners never wanted to have anything to do with the black communities whom they met as they trekked away from British imperialism in the Cape. It was mainly out of charity and good neighbourliness that the Voortrekkers used any black labourers on their farms at all. At the time of the Great Trek, the black communities in Southern Africa were in a highly volatile stage and the human debris of internecine tribal rivalries were scattered all over the southern part of the continent.

7. It was the discovery of gold and diamonds in the 1870s which created the need for cheap black labour and the responsibility in historical terms for the present antagonisms between black and white in South Africa rest not so much with the Afrikaners, who wanted nothing better than to farm their own lands in splendid biblical isolation, but with the Anglo-Saxon, European-Jewish financiers, entrepreneurs and adventurers who came to the Transvaal in the latter part of the 19th century. The treatment meted out to black workers at the time was degrading and unreasonable. The business community are currently in the foreground of the campaign for change in South Africa; the pressures are genuine and sincere and reflect enlightened self-interest, but one can understand the reserve, if not scepticism of certain blacks who hark back to their earlier exploitation.

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"In reality South Africa no longer faces a 'native problem', but it certainly faces an 'Afrikaner problem'."

Professor F A van Jaarsveld, University of Pretoria

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8. The Afrikaner struggle against British commercial and political dominance finally achieved success in 1948 when the National Party assumed power from General Smuts's United Party. Faced with a complex situation, the Afrikaner-based National Party put all its eggs in the basket of apartheid, a philosophy

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designed to realise Afrikaner striving for self-sufficiency and self-reliance. But the economic and industrial imperative meant increasing integration between black and white communities in business and on the mines, despite the many hundreds of pieces of apartheid legislation which have filled the statute books in the last 30 years.

9. As it became increasingly evident that apartheid could not possibly work, so Afrikaner fears about their survival have increased. Successive Afrikaner leaders became more intransigent, more bigoted and more Mephistophelean until finally the realities of the situation overwhelmed the latest Afrikaner strongman, P W Botha, who has had the courage to acknowledge that change is essential if South Africa is to avoid its own destruction.

10. P W Botha and his closest associates are unfortunately not men of vision (with the possible exception of Dr Gerrit Viljoen - and he was a former Chairman of the secret Broederbond) and although they claim to understand blacks in South Africa, they have singularly failed to respond to their aspirations. Their handling of international relations has been appalling. Their obsession with domestic politics has overridden any sense of prudence or balance on the international stage. The State President's disastrous speech in Durban on 15 August, which was televised worldwide and dashed expectations of any early fundamental political reform, is calculated by some pundits to have cost the South African Government something like 2% of annual GDP in terms of loss of international financial confidence. In almost any other country, such a débâcle would have resulted in a Government crisis: not so in South Africa.

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"P W Botha is very bad-tempered in Parliament. He's short-tempered and ill-tempered. Any interjection annoys him, any argument. In fact they asked us not to interject while he's speaking because it makes him cross ... I don't think he's got an enlightened thought in his head."

Helen Suzman

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11. White supremacy is not negotiable for a majority of whites in South Africa. It is white supremacy which gave birth to apartheid, not vice versa. Most still regard it as essential that they should continue to manage and control the political and economic process. Current economic difficulties, conflagration in

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the townships and international censure are seen as a tolerable burden. Things will have to get very much worse before whites begin to acknowledge that some measure of real power may have to pass from their hands. Admittedly, white perceptions are changing. On the cocktail round and at dinner parties, few Afrikaners seem to have much good to say about the present Government. But they are not typical of the broad mass of English- and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who are nowadays so anxious about their future, but who perceive the results of independence in the rest of Africa as an unmitigated disaster and hence a stern warning of what could happen in their country. Should we blame them? Would an incompetent, black African Socialist administration in South Africa improve the lot of the average black?

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"I see no hope in talking. Our views are known now, so they need not be reiterated."

Mothobi Matloaste, author and editor

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12. There is nowadays much talk of power-sharing, but this is meant by the Government only as a willingness to share decision-taking in consultation with the black communities and through structures which will continue to ensure a controlling white interest in such fundamentals as defence, internal security and finance. For politically-minded blacks, the issue is now only how long will it take until they have a commanding political voice. They assume that, over the next two or three years, virtually all remaining apartheid legislation will be repealed. They acknowledge that the Government will only repeal this legislation grudgingly and under pressure. Accordingly these expected gains have already been discounted and black sights are now firmly set on achieving political power. In this situation, there are many gloomy Cassandras predicting Armageddon just around the corner. The sheer unpredictability of what is likely to happen next can be rather terrifying for those who live here.

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"You try too much to be nice when you are with us, fussing around in a kind of inverted paternalism."

Bishop Tutu, to white liberals

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13. A major factor, probably the most important in bringing white South Africans to their senses, is likely to be the further collapse of living standards under severe economic pressures. These standards have indeed declined steadily for whites over the

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past three years, but they have just been able to keep their heads above water by drawing on savings and incurring massive personal debts. Economic recovery has so far failed to materialise. Many whites are now at the end of their financial tether and have begun to make personal sacrifices hitherto unimagined. The crucial question is whether those who traditionally vote for the National Party will move more to the left than to the right. If reformist pressures among rank-and-file NP workers at the recent Transvaal and Orange Free State Congresses indeed reflect grass roots sentiment, whites may eventually acknowledge that they have no alternative but to do a deal with the blacks. I would hazard the guess that most whites want the Government to get a move on with reform, not to continue to prevaricate.

14. 1986 is likely to be a crunch year on the economic front; and I say this despite bullish predictions from the Establishment here of economic recovery and a possible 3% growth rate. The Rand has fallen from 1.60 to the £ when I arrived in March 1983 to around R4 to the £ today. Corrective measures by Government have only had a temporary effect: the trend has been inexorably downwards. In a few months' time, South Africans will wake up to the fact that imported goods and locally manufactured products based on imported materials will have doubled if not trebled in price. This is bound to put up the rate of inflation, currently hovering between 16 and 17%, to well above 20%. Drastic measures will be taken to prevent hyper-inflation, but the effect on white confidence could be marked.

15. South Africa will have a rough ride from the international banking community over the rescheduling of its indebtedness. International confidence in South Africa's shorter term financial future is at an all time low. For all practical purposes, external financing is no longer available. The trend, despite the low value of the Rand, is towards steady repatriation of capital or at least towards running down existing operations in South Africa. During 1986 as well, international boycott action by consumer organisations, trade unions and other anti-apartheid groups seems bound to increase, to the point where most Western companies (with the probable exception of most British) are likely to conclude that doing business with South Africa at all is simply not worth the hassle. Actions by foreign governments to tighten sanctions are unlikely to have all that much effect, but will provide stimulus to banks and industrial groups both to reduce their exposure on the South African market and to take a tough line in negotiation.

16. The danger in all this is that the South African Government may opt, and indeed may have no choice but to opt, for

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a siege economy. This could lead to isolationism, a further polarisation between black and white communities and some vicious retaliatory action, in the security and economic fields, both within South Africa and against her neighbours. But it would be a mistake to think that the authorities are anywhere near losing control of the situation. The whites have the guns and the armoured cars; and with the limitations on reporting, could generally restrict any black insurrection to the townships. As it is, there are already signs of battle exhaustion in the Eastern Cape which could lead to something of a truce between the warring factions, both white versus black as well as black versus black: the human race can take only so much self-inflicted misery.

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"The Government has got to make changes but it has to do it carefully, man, because who thought of apartheid in the first place."

Cape Coloured fisherman

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17. My time in South Africa has been the most testing of my postings in terms of professional integrity. In no other country have I found it so essential to guard against personal prejudice and subjective reaction. In no other country, likewise, have conflicts of interest over policy resulted, now and again, in our consent to actions which we know in our heart of hearts are likely to be counterproductive.

18. The sports boycott resulting from the Gleneagles Declaration, for example, though initially helpful in inducing sports bodies in South Africa to eliminate discrimination in sport (and in defusing calls for more biting sanctions from the Commonwealth), no longer has any real influence or relevance in this direction because nothing that sports bodies here have done has provoked any recognition in the outside world. It is after all not apartheid in sport, but apartheid in general which is the real target of Gleneagles. The boycott is now counterproductive, particularly in the sense that it helps to rally support among sportsmen and women to the South African Government against what are seen as unreasonable external pressures. But the imperative of our relations with the Commonwealth makes any adjustment to Gleneagles, even in the interests of inducing further change in South Africa, unthinkable at the present time. Likewise, the decision to withdraw our Defence Attachés, which will mean that we are now less well informed in an important area of South

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African policy and less able to get messages across to the South African Defence Force, as the Mozambican Deputy Minister of Defence recently requested us, might be compared with withdrawing our Defence Attachés from Moscow because we disapprove of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. But the action was taken for our own domestic political reasons and in the interests of European Community solidarity.

19. We shall continue to have to take some very difficult decisions about our policy towards South Africa which may well be intellectually unsustainable, but which reflect political realities at home and abroad. If there is one general comment which I could make about our South African policy, it is that we should put more emphasis on the elimination of racially discriminatory legislation and less on stock human rights issues like release of political prisoners and ending the State of Emergency. Many, alas too many other Governments are equally guilty of human rights abuses, but it is South Africa's racial policies which excite Western condemnation more than anything else. Pressuring the South Africans to release persons convicted of terrorist offenses and to rescind an emergency introduced to calm white anxieties ought not to be a main priority. But entrenched racial discrimination is absolutely indefensible - criticism targetted exclusively on this issue tends to make the South African Government very uncomfortable indeed. /c

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"My brother
 What do we want
 Now that we have twisted our tongues into Harvard
 and Oxford hisses and begun to wonder
 What our old people used to talk about."

Nongawe Wally Serote - "Behold Mama, Flowers"

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20. Some basic questions and answers

(a) Question: What does the world want from South Africa?

Answer: Probably no more than that blacks should have the right to decide their own future instead of constantly being told by whites what is best for them.

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(b) Question: Is black majority rule in South Africa viable?

Answer: An ANC/Xhosa one-party state would be a disaster; the best hope is for some federal structure to contain strong, traditional animosities among South Africa's tribes and nationalities.

(c) Question: Are we moving towards economic warfare against South Africa?

Answer: It looks like it. There are far too many groups and individuals only too anxious to bring the South African Government down, regardless of the chaos and suffering which is likely to result.

(d) Question: So what does the future hold?

Answer: The whites will fight "like a cornered animal" (Pik Botha) - a tough, relentless rearguard action, regardless of the consequences.

(e) Question: When the blacks take over, will the world at last forget South Africa?

Answer: No, for the simple reason that there are 1.5 million European Community nationals in South Africa, and many more with rights of residence in the Community.

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Alles sal regkom. Moenie worry nie!

Gons edr

Seret

Derek Tonkin
(Minister)

cc Miss T A H Solesby, CAfD, FCO
Chancery Washington
UKMis New York
Harare
Lusaka
Cape Town