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From the Private Secretary

31 March 1980

The Prime Minister's Emissary to South Africa

Lord Hunt called on the Prime Minister this afternoon to discuss his mission to South Africa. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was also present.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary recalled the genesis of Lord Hunt's mission. Mr. Botha's letter had been received at a time when there was considerable uncertainty about South Africa's attitude towards the situation in Rhodesia. Our response had been designed in part to keep the South Africans in play. Lord Hunt would now be arriving in South Africa at a time when the government were both having to cope with an outcome in Rhodesia that they found distasteful and to take a decision about Namibia. If South Africa were to delay unduly on Namibia, the Front Line States would certainly go on to the offensive. This would in due course force Mr. Mugabe to side with the Front Line States. The situation might rapidly develop to a point where the borders between the Front Line States and South Africa would be sealed with all the consequences this would have for Rhodesia's chances of retaining a moderate approach. It was essential therefore that South Africa should try to be constructive on Namibia. They still had a chance of getting an acceptable Government there. The UK had to work on the Front Line States and on the UN to delay action (although there were already indications that the Zambian Permanent Representative in New York was working for a Security Council Resolution condemning South Africa) and on South Africa to accelerate its consideration of the problem.

Describing HMG's overall policy towards the continent as a whole, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it was essential if at all possible to avoid having to choose between Black and White Africa. British interests would best be served if trade and investment were maintained with both the Black States and with South Africa. The significance of the Namibia problem was that a UN Resolution could force us into the position of having to make a choice. If faced with the choice we would almost certainly have to choose South Africa, i.e., we would have to veto a Resolution imposing sanctions on South Africa. (The Prime Minister agreed.) Whether or not we were faced with this choice depended in part on our own handling of the issue in the weeks ahead.

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On our policy towards South Africa itself, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that we should avoid becoming too closely involved. It was difficult to see how the problems of race relations in South Africa would ever be solved: the end result would probably be a bloodbath. We should of course be prepared to give advice to the South Africans if they asked for it, but we should not get into the position of playing "father confessor" to the present regime.

The Prime Minister agreed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary about the need to try to avoid having to choose between Black and White Africa. But she said that there was also a need both to try to bring about an evolution in Black African attitudes towards South Africa, and to give the South African Government encouragement in their effort to develop more enlightened policies within their country. They had had to absorb a number of shocks in recent weeks, e.g., Rhodesia, the difficulties of the international oil market, and the strains within the ruling party. They should not have pressed too hard. We should not attempt to force our views on them. Our line should be that failure to move somewhat faster was likely to be contrary to South Africa's interests and that if South Africa did push ahead, we would offer encouragement. If, for instance, South Africa were to opt for genuinely mixed sport, the UK would take the lead in seeking the repeal of the Gleneagles Agreement. It was important that the UK should not get into a position of appearing to condemn South Africa altogether.

During the discussion agreement was reached on the line Lord Hunt should take on a number of detailed points:-

- (a) Lord Hunt should convey a friendly message from the Prime Minister to Mr. Botha.
- (b) The Prime Minister would be willing in principle to envisage a meeting with Mr. Botha at a suitable moment. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that if such a meeting were to be arranged, it would be preferable for it to be held in this country rather than for the Prime Minister to go to South Africa. The Prime Minister agreed that Lord Hunt should take the line proposed in the brief and should not be too discouraging.
- (c) If Mr. Botha were to make proposals suggesting a closer co-operation between the two Governments, e.g., a joint study of the threat to South Africa, Lord Hunt should react cautiously and should avoid being "sucked in".
- (d) Although the South Africans would no doubt have guessed how the UK would vote if faced with a sanctions resolution, Lord Hunt should not give any undertaking to Mr. Botha that we would veto. He should limit himself to saying that a sanctions resolution would face a number of countries with very difficult decisions, and that it would be infinitely preferable to prevent the situation arising.

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- (e) Lord Hunt could hint at the possibility of the South Africans talking directly to SWAPO about the Namibia problem. But, given the danger of appearing to undermine the work of the Five, he should not make too much of this.

During the discussion of the international situation in South Africa, the Prime Minister asked whether any work had been done in this country about the feasibility of some form of partition in South Africa, i.e., on a basis more equitable than that already implemented. I should be grateful if you could let me have a copy of any paper you may have about this.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

George Walden, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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