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RECORD OF A DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND DR. VAN ZYL SLABBERT AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 1980 AT 1730 HOURS

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Present:

Prime Minister  
Mr. M.O'D.B. Alexander  
Dr. Van Zyl Slabbert  
Dr. Dawie de Villiers

Namibia

Dr. Slabbert said that he had had an interesting talk in Bonn earlier in the week with Herr Genscher and had been struck by his knowledge of and interest in Namibia. His own impression from his recent visits to Namibia was that there was increasing disillusionment there with both the United Nations and the South African Government. There was an increasing tendency to look for action by the Front Line States. He had been anxious to discover in Bonn whether there was any sign of a new initiative to build confidence between the various parties involved. However he had received no indication that such an initiative was envisaged. The Prime Minister commented that the situation in Namibia was quite different from that in Rhodesia. The absence of an external party that was responsible in the way the United Kingdom had been made it much more difficult to organise diplomatic initiatives or conferences. Dr. Slabbert agreed. Dr. de Villiers said that there were evident signs of interest among the Front Line States in a confidence-building initiative. However, it might be better if such an initiative did not have a formal structure but consisted in developing bilateral contacts.

The Prime Minister stressed the need for the South African Government not to go too slowly although of course they had to proceed on a secure basis. There was a need to show both patience and urgency. Dr. de Villiers said that his Government recognised this. But it was difficult, especially after what had happened in Zimbabwe, for them to push too hard. There were close links between the white population in South West Africa and in South Africa. To implement changes which would result in SWAPO being put in charge was a political problem of some magnitude. The Prime Minister

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commented that she had used precisely this argument in her discussions with African leaders. Nonetheless, it was important that the South African Government should not go too slowly: Western Governments were under constant pressure. Dr. de Villiers said that a new initiative by the Front Line States would be of great help, especially if South Africa could include representatives of South West Africa in their delegation so that they could speak for themselves. The Prime Minister asked about the support for Turnhalle in Namibia. Dr. Slabbert said that Mr. Mudge claimed that he would win 13 out of the 18 white seats. His party, of course, enjoyed little support in Ovanboland. But it was important to realise that SWAPO did not speak for all the non-white population. There was a middle group who were not committed to SWAPO. The picture was a very mixed one.

#### South Africa

The Prime Minister asked about the situation inside South Africa. Dr. Slabbert said that Mr. P.W. Botha had consolidated his position. The recent reshuffle had drawn a clear line between his Cabinet and his party's caucus. The real test would come during the next session of Parliament when it would become apparent whether Mr. Botha was prepared to use his strength to push through necessary reforms. If he were to do so the impact both inside South Africa and outside could be considerable. But it was not clear how far Mr. Botha would be able to go. Some of the Acts e.g. the Immorality Act which needed reform provided the legal basis for considerable bureaucratic machines. The existence of these machines was a major obstacle to reform.

The Prime Minister recalled that there had been a warm welcome overseas for Mr. Botha's original announcement, last autumn, of his intention to institute reforms. She herself had referred to the reforms in her speech in New York. There was a need for international leaders to encourage the tendency to reform in South Africa. In the past positive moves had not always been welcomed as warmly as they should have been. Dr. de Villiers said that the Prime Minister's New York speech had been very important. Dr. Slabbert said that South Africa was once more in a period of raised expectations. He was more sceptical than he had been last November about the possibility of making progress but nonetheless remained hopeful.

The Prime Minister asked about progress with the proposal to

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establish a President's Council. Dr. de Villiers said that unfortunately the coloured and black population had rejected the President's Council. Although the official position was that the Council would not be enlarged, he thought that there was a lot of life left in the idea. He saw it as a beginning and an innovation which might yet prove viable. Dr. Slabbert said that given the general urgency of the situation in South Africa, he could not understand why blacks were being excluded. He knew that many members of the South African Cabinet agreed. Mr. Botha would have to bite the bullet. The Prime Minister asked if South Africans would follow Mr. Botha's lead. Dr. Slabbert said that 70% of the white electorate would follow Mr. Botha even if they didn't agree with his proposals. It was evident that Mr. Botha himself was in favour of reform. He had spoken very strongly in the Transvaal Caucus. The Prime Minister said that nonetheless Mr. Botha would, no doubt, have to move cautiously in order to keep his Cabinet, his party and the people in general with him. Some time had to be given for the meaning of his statements to sink in.

Dr. Slabbert agreed. He added that it was very important that people outside South Africa should not give the impression that the white population in South Africa was expendable and that there was no option for reform. Unlike the whites in Rhodesia, those in South Africa had nowhere else to go. The Prime Minister said that she hoped everyone realised this. Her own position was that no-one was expendable. But it was important for the South African Government to go as fast as it could. There had to be movement because in the absence of movement the situation would erupt. It was in the interests of everyone, both within and outside South Africa, to find a peaceful solution.

The Prime Minister asked about possible ways forward. Dr. Slabbert said that it was clear that 90% of the black population would prefer a unitary system of Government and that 80/90% of the white population would prefer partition. The mid point between these two views was some kind of confederal system. In his view a political "culture" was developing in which compromise could be found. The situation was far from hopeless. The Prime Minister asked about relations with the neighbouring countries. Dr. de Villiers said that there was little

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in the way of formal relations but plenty of practical co-operation. The Government was committed to regional co-operation. The political difficulties had to be overcome.

At the end of the conversation, Dr. Slabbert asked the Prime Minister whether it would be possible for her to visit South Africa in the next year. The Prime Minister said that she already had an extremely full programme of overseas visits. But Dr. Slabbert and the Ambassador could be sure that the British Government would respond positively to any signs of progress either in South Africa or in Namibia.

The conversation ended at 1805.

*Ans*

20 September 1980

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