

PC16/5/2/49
. 38 The Uplands,
Harpenden
9th February 1974



Dear Peter,

Just as well that your letter arrived this morning - I had already planned to write this week-end, and I prefer our letters, rare as they are, not to cross. You are of course right in saying that I should have quite a lot to say, and for that reason I am taking the precaution of using single-spacing. If I run out of ideas or patter I shall simply revert to triple-spacing.

Firstly the explanation : at the end of last summer (ours) I decided that there was little prospect of persuading my mother to visit us and that I must therefore visit her. The visit was to take place in mid-February but then just before Xmas my sister decided that in her old age (she is two years older than I am) she was going to give up her spinster life and take a husband. Consequently my trip was retimed to coincidence with the wedding, which took place in Johannesburg on 5th January. From the point of view of my commitments at work I could not afford to stay more than a week, and I wanted to use that time to sort out some of my mother's problems. Quite hopeless, of course, and she is not all that well to go with it, but I console myself with the thought that if I stayed a year I would not sort them out any better. Yes, I had hinted at this trip in my earlier letter to you, but felt that if I was to stand any chance of visiting you it would be best to say as little as possible. I had asked for some advice on the subject, as you might well imagine, before leaving here. I had in fact hoped that I might have reason to visit our Durban factory, in which case I would have found it much easier to call on you, but the time and the timing did not allow me to arrange that. I don't think that I need say how much I regretted that failure, but perhaps even more galling, because of the distances involved, was my inability to meet the Mswelis, who live in Dube. (You may remember that they are related to Archie Gumede.)

I don't know where to begin - I wrote a long letter to Jack and Beryl soon after my return and subsequently felt that I would like to put my impressions down in a more recoverable way, for what they are worth, but then you also ask a question about the Patons and I might write a book about that, a very sober one at that, and finally it is beyond my ken to avoid some comment on the situation here in Britain. Somewhere this letter has to stop. Let me begin at the beginning.

I flew south with Iberia on some concession which at least saved me some of the standard fare - not as much as I had hoped to be able to save, but enough to justify the somewhat inconvenient dates. The flight programme involved an overnight stop in Madrid (a few days after the Spanish P.M. had been blown sky-high), which turned out to be very fortunate as it meant a day-long flight down Africa. This was fascinating - it was the first time that I had had this marvellous view of African geography, and largely as a result I found that arrival in Jo'burg left me with the feeling that I was in Africa rather than just South Africa, i.e. that there was an entity about the continent from which S.A. could not divorce itself. Romantic ? Emotional? I don't know, but the feeling was clearly there. Arrival itself might have been exciting, but was not : on the 'plane the crew told us that there would be an inspection of vaccination certificates and on opening mine I found that it was out of date. Fortunately someone bungled (just like the real old days !) and there never was an inspection. Crossed that hurdle by a stroke of burglar's luck. Then came the question-

ing by the passport inspector. He had me worried - more about that on some other occasion - but I crossed that bridge as well, perhaps because I did not express any view when told that I would be permitted to stay for two months. The rest of the arrival was just emotional.

Even before my arrival the extent of the physical change in Johannesburg had been impressed on me. In vain - concrete has a habit of spreading itself from an airport wherever you happen to be in the world, or at least those few parts that I have seen in these last ten years. It does not impress but remains monotonous in all its forms. It is of course true that I largely did not recognise the route to Parkhurst, but so what? The attempt to impress on me the extent of change was maintained for most of the week, as though this represented some summit of achievement. It would have been interesting to have had an opportunity to assess the extent of physical change in the African areas, but to my great disappointment this proved impossible.

I had an early opportunity to see some sort of life in the city when I was in town with my sister and mother on the Saturday morning after arrival. At best a superficial opportunity as I did not even get as far as talking to anyone, but it did leave me with the feeling that Africans were better dressed and possibly more self-confident (some would say more willing to assert themselves) than I remembered. As I say, a superficial impression was formed, but it came to mind a few days later when I had a chance to observe African domestic servants in the suburbs. No change there at all - the pace and nature of life did not seem to have changed by one iota. Perhaps the superficial impression in town had something to do with it. I was in town again during the week and could not really add to it, but much the more important opportunity to make an assessment came when I went to see our factory in Boksburg. The production manager is a friend of mine from the Merseyside area and he immediately introduced me to his boss, who would therefore be General Factory Manager or whatever the local hierarchy calls him, and we had a long talk about factory operations that led to an even longer discussion of people. I had seen some of the data on pay and job structures some while ago during the Guardian campaign on wages but in any case had no reason to doubt the information given to me. Given that Unilever in SA is apparently one of the better employers, I was certainly impressed by the information - not only because of the rates of pay quoted, which are of course very much higher than any known to me in 1960, but also because I could recognise that Africans were being employed, and possibly recruited, in job classes which already entail considerable responsibility in the UK (the system used is pretty well international). That is promising and very encouraging - in fact it made me wonder whether Harry Opp. had not been right in saying many years ago that economic truths would break apartheid. On reflection I think that I would say that there is at least some force in the argument. I apparently managed to ask the key question: when I asked the 'big man' when he expected to have a situation in his factory where an African would have a white working for him he said 'Never' so unequivocally that I was quite amused to find him backing down a minute later to the extent of saying 'Well, Never is a strong word.'

Yes, the visit to Boksburg was interesting and pleasant but of course it was also pleasant to speak to a number of old friends again, mostly simply on the telephone. One of the interesting features of all my conversations (apart from those in Boksburg) was the extent to which my contacts were solicitous concerning the well-being of the British. From the very first telephone call I found

myself constantly having to reassure people - much to their chagrin, I felt - that the UK was not about to slide over the precipice . It was in turn amusing, irritating and hilarious to listen to their reasons for believing that the decline in the status and fortunes of the British were irrevocable. In the end it seemed to me to be a kind of defence mechanism, a version, probably quite legitimate, of the dictum that attack is the best form of defence.

Of course it was also interesting to hear, or observe, how anxious people were to hear me say that I had detected some improvements - someone even asked me to catalogue them, and in fairness next asked me to name the points which had left me feeling that no progress had been made. Perhaps I should have called you in, surely a much more competent cataloguer (or would it be cataloguist?). Here I must confess that my awareness factor (1== immediate recognition of a situation, 0= low perception, dim) was recognisably low, and I needed a full four days to plug into the reality of the situation : here was a variety of comfortable, complacent whites, reclining into their ever-more-comfortable armchairs, asking me whether they had not done well for the Africans. My first reaction was to answer that in certain respects Africans had done better than I had expected and that this might be attributed to a number of factors, not least of which would be the pressures from the world outside, but amongst which I could not at all perceive the benevolence of whites (honourable exception - the TEACH scheme run by The Star). Some days later it dawned on me that if Africans are better off than they were in '60 then the whites are that much better off still, but of course they do not recognise this - they have not noticed the growth in the number of swimming baths, the enlargement of properties, etc.,etc. Towards the end of my stay (a.f. now creeping up towards 0.5) I suggested to one or two of my questioners that it would be more pertinent to ask an African in Soweto how he saw the changes and this seemed to surprise them - why was I not competent to judge ? I was consequently rather pleased to find both The Star and the RDM publishing extracts from a market survey on African attitudes which obviously told a lot more than I was able to tell. At this point I may as well throw in that it was pretty depressing to be forced to read newspapers like the RLM and The Star - this was only put in perspective by a friend of mine saying that some people in England read the Daily Mail and the Mirror daily. Touché. I might add that I was pleased to learn from one or other of these enlightening papers - the only news from the UI was the proceedings of the prostitution case at present running in London, and some report on the miners's dispute - that some of the pettier ingredients of apartheid are indeed being dismantled, but again I would like to ask someone from Soweto whether that is very important to him when he sees a policeman coming towards him, presumably to ask him for his pass.

Has this given you an idea of my impressions? I would have much preferred to have discussed them with you over a couple of beers. More than I had at the Patons, but let me not hold that against them. My addiction to beer is not such. I do not think that I can hold anything against them, but I should say that I was quite unprepared for the change there. You will have observed it in one way or another. I had already had some other commitment that evening and consequently only got there after 9 p.m., by the standards of earlier times not an unreasonable hour. Nancy came to fetch me, David being semi-asleep at about that time. He did me the honour of waking up, and we almost immediately got entangled in a pretty bottomless political argument. Of course I would not want you to mention anything of this to any of the Patons, but I must tell you that when I returned to Parkhurst 2 1/2 hours later I was feeling rather shattered.

Obviously I am in no position to reconstruct the argument as it proceeded - it was always friendly, and I do not feel estranged - but I can tell you that over and over again, that evening and for the next few days, I was asking myself how such change in outlook is possible. I can understand someone coming to the realisation that a given set of objectives is no longer realistic - I have to do that quite regularly in my work - but to stand the bulk of your principles on their heads is beyond my comprehension. It would be unfair of me to try to quote the odd remarks, which, in any case out of context, might be considered rather startling, but I think that it may not be unfair to remark that on several occasions I found myself wondering whether people expressing the views that I heard that evening would be voting for Vorster or Sir. You will understand that I was very sad that evening, and for some time after. I am convinced that Liberalism as we spelt it out in the late '50's and you continued to proclaim it for some years after was such a binding force on those who had committed themselves to it that it was a great stimulant for one's entire way of life - to break that cement is not something to be undertaken lightly. This is beginning to sound emotionally highly charged and I must come off it, but I feel sure that you understand. Once again - no word of this to anyone else. I must, however, take it one step further. During my stay in Jo'burg The Star published parts of AP's editorial in the current issue of Reality concerning the UP. I only saw the full text when that issue reached us here a week or two ago. It leaves me distinctly unhappy, though it is not unfair. Liberals have long recognised that they cannot, or at least will not capture political power at the ballot boxes and that if change is to come in that way then some other party must be the agent of it. The question in my mind is whether that reasoning is justification for making certain recommendations to a possible agent of change, as I fear that that could result in the counter-proposal to argue the matter out within the counsels of that party rather than from the outside. A difficult matter. I wondered whether I could not detect a clear line from the arguments put forward by D&N to those put forward by Alan. I shall be very interested in your comments on this section.

I have not left myself much room to comment on local affairs, and I may add that after all this typing I am somewhat out of breath. You have something to answer for - and to !

While in SA I repeatedly stated that I could see no way in which the govt. could permit the miners' dispute to carry on for even three weeks. Now they have managed to make it go on for two months with an election to boot. It seems so totally impossible and irresponsible that I cannot find the appropriate words for Heath. I should add that I have shared the govt's reluctance to allow the miners to break Phase 2 limits, though it is interesting that a number of industrialists not necessarily of Socialist persuasion have suggested that the miners have a good case. But in the final analysis the loss to the country of the consequent shortfall in production far outweighs the cost of paying the miners and probably all the secondary effects thereof as well. How does one then go the country and ask for a vote of confidence ? It seems to me to be utter and barefaced Chutzpah (ask Frame for the meaning of that word!!) and I feel sure that Labour will expose Heath for it. Nevertheless there still seems to be a pretty good chance that the blighter will get back, perhaps with a tiny majority and a bigger Lib. block in the House, because Conservatives hate reason. And what will he do about the strike when or if he does get back? I despair. Incidentally, Harold - still a big bad ogre in SA - sounds eminently reasonable at present, and by some miracle his turnabout argument on the EEC sounds fairly plausible just now. A remarkable man, but tricky.

P.S. Sorry about the accent - especially developed for you colonialists. Fooled a lot of people.

Good feed - have did 30 manage to make me & to all this. Dr's enough
 for 1974. Regards to all Archie, Sam, Ev, Phoebe
 Tom's, heart