

PC 16/5/314/68

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Dear Peter,

I had hoped to put in an application for an invitation to the reunion party but it took me too long to think up the supporting argument. I trust that it went well without me.

There seems to be a fair amount of reporting of matters South African at the present time. Your referendum surfaces in the news at intervals (though I am not sure about who is in favour of the new constitution and who is against: I think that the Progs. are against - are you?). Does it matter all that much? It seems to me that it does not advance anyone's rights one iota (but I have read little in the way of detail about the proposals), since a veto effectively resides in white hands. If the others feel that they gain by being consulted, they should perhaps recall the days of the Natives Rep. Council. There may be more subtle arguments - I am conscious of the fact that when one takes the view that little matters other than (non-existent) negotiations on Blacks' rights there must be at least some prospect of such negotiations materialising in the foreseeable future. Otherwise one may get trapped in the creation of 'facts' such as the Israelis have exploited so callously. Every now and then Namibia also gets into our headlines, or at least has a paragraph devoted to it, and usually to record that yet another attempt has been made to progress matters there. One can easily form the impression that Namibia is extremely useful to the SA govt. as a base for operations in Angola and elsewhere in that part of Africa, and if that is a correct assessment then it would seem rather naive to expect the SA govt. to hand the place over to SWAPO.

There has also been reference to SA in more literary circles (or quarters - which do you prefer?). This week's Times Higher Educational Supplement has a diary contribution by a Prof. Wacks of Natal University - is he supposed to be one of 'us'? He writes of his contacts with others, both students and staff, in the university and I am left with the impression that he is not any sort of an activist. A fortnight ago the Times Literary Supplement ran a series of book reviews covering all sorts of writings about South Africa which I found very interesting. Earlier, probably two months ago or so, one of the supplements carried a review of a new book on South African politics but unfortunately I cannot now find the review. An impression that I am left with is that much of the discussion in academic circles focusses on whether race or class is the dominant feature of the South African political map, and this way of looking at the scene must inevitably bring a lot of Marxist thinking into the arguments. It is amazing, then, that Marxist thinking and analysis, for all its faults, should have managed to establish itself in such a hostile environment. Having said that, it also seemed to me that the arguments being paraded are not much more than a more erudite form of the argument which occupied some of our thoughts in the late fifties - do we want to press for socialism before or after the overthrow of apartheid? I seem to remember pressing the view on Pat v.R. that socialism had better wait until after. In several respects I could see myself taking the other view now but, as I had reason to explain to our son (B.A.(Hons.) Politics, Exeter) a few weeks ago, I would think more than twice before wanting to be found in the same boat as the Slovos of this world.

Of course you will have had your fill of news of the latest activities in the Labour Party, and within a few days now Neil Kinnock will be the new leader.

From his appearances on TV he seems an attractive personality and certainly far more unequivocal than Michael Foot, but I have to feel sorry for a person who is a candidate for leading such an army. Nap. on his way home from Moscow must have been a better bet. I suppose that when you sit down and work it out it becomes obvious that right-wing ascendancy of the sort we have here - disgusting enough to drive many right out of political contemplation - the left, i.e. the opposing force, is always likely to show signs of disintegration. Of course it is easy enough to be wise about it at this stage but it seems to me that Labour has all along failed to educate its potential supporters in the principles of socialism as it might apply to Britain. I must add that that assumes that the Labour leadership wanted to move towards some form of democratic socialism rather than simply providing a better deal for the less-well-off. The possibility of anyone actually practising socialism on anything larger than a kibbutz scale seems ever more remote.

The Middle East obviously figures more prominently in our papers than SA, and is another area to make one despair of man's respect for man. (In the house I would be taken to task for that wording - the place teems with feminists.) I think that I have expressed the view before that despite his all too obvious weaknesses I thought that Sadat was a man of considerable courage and stature, quite unlike Begin whom at times I might have classified as a criminal. The situation in Lebanon over the past year has done nothing to increase our sympathy for Israel and in some unkind way it seems to me that the latest turn of events serves the Israelis right for acting like overlords. The one redeeming feature as far as Israel is concerned is that increasingly the Israelis have come to realise that they have become imperialists, but that can be of little comfort to the Lebanese. Having said all that one is left in despair when considering Syrian attitudes, as they are at least as imperialistically-minded as the Israelis. Who in hell wants to actually live in Lebanon in these circumstances?

One is sometimes driven to focus attention on one's own garden to the exclusion of the world's troublespots. It has in fact been a good year in the garden at 38 the Uplands, although the wet spring seems to have demolished our potato crop. We have also harvested two new degrees - Jeremy, now 23, finished his course at Exeter and Patricia, 18 months younger, completed her course in English Lit. at Durham. The result - two people added to the unemployment register. Jeremy has now moved to Sheffield, where he hopes to find a job. You might have heard Sheffield referred to as the Republic of South Yorkshire, as it has had a very progressive Labour council for years. The most visible consequence of that is that Sheffield bus fares are heavily subsidised from the rates and fares are less than 25% of those prevailing in this area of the country. Our younger daughter is about to begin her second year of a 4-year History course at Sussex University.

Do you ever see the Times Literary Supplement? I wonder whether to send you the pages on South Africa referred to above.

It would be marvellous to attend the LP reunion but that must remain a dream. Do you see Archie Gumede these days? How is Alan? I trust that you are well.

Yours,

Leaf