

PC14/5/4/212

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Dear Peter,

I think that it's pretty disgusting that it has taken me two months to reply to your sparkling letter of 9 Feb, particularly as I always feel that I could fill ten letters a month (what would your friends in the Special Branch think of that?). In fact some of the words for this letter have been in my mind ever since February, but somehow they never managed to reach the paper. In particular I looked for a card to send you to express my commiseration on reading of your confession of age - it is a disease that appears to have struck a number of friends in recent times, and I hope that I can fend it off for a little while yet.

It was that most unbeloved P.M. Harold Wilson who said that a week was a long time in politics, and two months is a hell of a lot longer. The miners strike is almost forgotten, Uitenhage (had it ever occurred to you that this place presumably got its name because one of its founder was 'uit Den Haag'?) is very much in the news, and all this rubbish about Botha wanting to reform is seen for what it is worth. Having said that, the 'dialogue' with Mandela, though abortive for the moment, was worth a point or two, because of its implicit recognition that the govt. must negotiate with the ANC, not with people who hold no cards. But, having listed these few high spots of the recent political scene, how is one to comment in any meaningful way with such intervals between letters?

Recently I noticed that Michael O'Dowd managed to get his picture into the South African Digest, presumably to advertise the fact that senior AAC managers sometimes speak to Blacks. It is ironic that Tony would presumably not want to be seen in that publication in any form. We are seeing less of the O'Dowds these days, but every now and then Tony comes to St. Albans Chess Club for a match (he plays at Hoddesdon, on the other side of the county) and a fortnight ago he and I had our first game of chess for many years - it ended in a draw: I pointed out to the St Albans team captain that after thirty years of friendship a win for one or the other would have dreadful consequences.

The political scene here is once more becoming interesting, with the support for the Tories falling to a point where the next election is not a dead cert., though much will happen before it is due. The government seems to have managed to commit a whole string of blunders, and Mrs. T. in particular has come out of that in a bad light - perhaps the Iron Lady has now become the Soulless Lady. From the occasional contact with people who get closer to her than I would ever dream of doing one also hears considerable resentment of her attitude that she is the most knowledgeable in all things - she is her own Chief Scientist, almost certainly her own Chief Economist, and has most recently promoted herself to Chief Policeman and told the Football League how to control those mobs that are so much of an embarrassment to so many of us (on the occasion of the latest upsurge I happened to be on a train taking the 'fans' to Luton - it was some experience.) Even the faithful Tory press seems to be losing its enthusiasm for her and her skills. It will be interesting to see whether the Labour programme on unemployment will get across to the electorate - the political correspondent of The Guardian (my typing is not of the best this evening) seems to think that when the chips are down the majority in work will not spare too many thoughts for the minority on the dole - we shall have to wait and see. I must say that I am pleased to see the Labour Party highlight this issue - well, it hardly needs highlighting - but I do hope that the electorate does not tire of it before the election.

It pays to re-read your letter. I would have you know that I have not retired - I leave that to the over-60's - and would not dream of running out of coal.

PS (6 April): 25 years today since I walked through the park. I did not know that you present expires today. I did, all the well.

Regards to you & thanks from
both of us, yrs,
loofly

In fact we managed to survive without having to burn any of the furniture, but it was touch and go. As for prayers - well, I leave that to others. I liked your story about speaking to Archbishop Hurley. (He has been around for quite a long time, has he not?) But we also have other problems - I spoke to our younger daughter on the phone a few evenings ago - she is spending this academic year in Paris as part of her course at Sussex University - and asked her what her plans for Easter were. Got a flea in my ear for that - EASTER? She informed me that it was Passover. How should I know (well, yes, I did, but I would not normally use that as a time marker) but one's children are not bound to follow your own attitude to life. Curiously our three are very close to one another, far more so than either Celeste or I ever were with our families, but Penelope and the other two are poles apart on Middle Eastern affairs. We spent a few days in Paris a fortnight ago in order to see something of her lifestyle and had a splendid time.

I am beginning to make some plans for your visit next year. Where do you want to have breakfast? And how many shall we invite to dinner?

I hope that you haven't fallen asleep reading this letter. Keep well. WRITE!