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JOHANNESBURG - SOUTH AFRICA

22 Court Chambers - 129 Adderley St. - Port Elizabeth - Tel. 43383

10th November, 1964.

My dear Randolph and Gillian,

Thank you so much for your letter but oh god how I wish I could read your writing. I get quite hysterical about it. I see it is dated 4th November but can decipher no mention of my airletter to you about Sheila's departure or - which is worse - the long, hand-written letter I sent to an address in Woking ages ago. The latter wasn't madly indiscreet but it was pretty personal. Could you perhaps ask the people at the Woking address if they know anything about it? It was addressed to you but I think only the V in Vigne was distinguishable. Anyway, in case you didn't get the airletter either (it was addressed to Park West), Sheila and Janey left Cape Town by boat on Friday 30th October and are due to arrive in Southampton on Friday 13th - I think - it was the Stirling Castle. As soon as she left I wrote to Des Polack (SIRIUS, Hatchet Close, Hale, Fordingbridge, Hants) and asked him to meet her and put her up for a couple of weeks but have still had no reply from him and could have heard days ago and am now frightfully worried that he has gone away or something. I wrote to Sheila yesterday a letter which she should get as soon as the boat docks giving her your phone number (AMBassador 0707 ?) in case Des does not turn up. She has money and should be able to stay in a hotel until Thea, perhaps, can come down for her - she had planned to stay with Thea after the first two weeks with Des. But I guess it will all have worked itself out by the time you get this so I should not have written about it but I feel so impotent and desperate right now. Sheila will tell you why we suddenly decided she must leave, but briefly we feared - and with good reason, I think - that there was a possibility she would be called to give evidence in Cape Town and, particularly with the baby, I was not prepared to allow her to take the risk.

* Nobody ever bloody well told me anything, but it seemed that after she signed a Security Police statement here to the effect that she had been a member of the ARM there was not an awful lot of point in her hanging around waiting for something to happen. Besides I don't believe that they could have been so foolish as to believe her when she said she only knew of the involvement of three people who happened to have left the country. I was also told in Cape Town by Alan's lawyers that the Branch did not have very much on him and that if Sheila knew anything about him she would be safer outside. Incidentally, do I sound apologetic? I feel it. You see I had been toying with the idea of leaving for some time before - independently of the danger to Sheila - and am suspicious ^{now} of my real motive for insisting that she go. Thus it is necessary for me to believe that she was in danger and that I therefore need feel no guilt about walking out. Unfortunately I do feel guilty. Hideously guilty. And I ^{also} am pleased that I have an excuse for leaving even if it is flimsy. I feel intensely bitter about Alan and Steph and Adrian and to a lesser extent about Eddie and Spike and Hugh - not because of what they did or didn't do or wanted or didn't want to do but because of how this thing has balled up their lives. Of course they have only themselves to blame. Of course

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they are old enough and mature enough to make up their own minds. But what makes me sick is that I know if I had been 'recruited' by you for example, because I love and respect you, I would have been flattered and put myself in your charge and scarcely questioned the fatuousness and criminal futility of it all. Man did it to impress Steph who did it to impress Adrian who did it to impress Neville who did it from 6,000 miles away. Bloody marvellous, isn't it? And Hugh incidentally did it to impress Liz. Of course they all vaguely felt frustration and anger and a need to express their opposition but this only meant that it was easy to persuade them that blowing up a pylon could produce one of those cracks in the granite wall Peter was always looking for. And only dear, pig-headed, egocentric Peter had the guts to say no. But I still can't figure out what earthly use my report on SWA was to Adrian. Anyway I am profoundly grateful that we never got round to that tête-à-tête on the beach you once promised me. I have cut out everything I could find on the Cape Town trial and will be sending it all to Sheila soon and you must ask her for the cuttings if you are interested. Most of it is pretty embarrassing but the nightmare does contain flashes of humour - like your entry in the Sunday Times's WHO'S WHO IN THE CAPE SABOTAGE TRIAL. It's all about how fluent you are in Xhosa. And there's another piece about how Watson thought he was Lawrence of Arabia, which makes him the only well-adjusted person in the whole rotten outfit. Everybody else seemed to think that they were involved in a sort of rather exciting school-boy prank with overtones of high moral seriousness. I have learnt not to trust; I hope you have learnt the potency of your influence, and diffidence about wielding it.

on

I shall go/here until the end of December partly because I am unwilling to leave Cecil in the lurch and partly because I want to find a job to go to. I am then to spend a week in Johannesburg and a week in Cape Town before sailing on 15th January. POST offered me the job of running a branch office in Lusaka which I gracefully declined and Sutherland very generously wrote a number of perfectly shy-making letters to Top People on my behalf and there seems to be a very good chance that I will get a job in London with Reuters. I think I would like that. But of course I may land up with the Birmingham Post & Mail or something equally hideous but at least then I would be able to look round for something else from a position of some security. Right now I am stuck with a large, expensive flat, about 300 books and a hell of a lot of furniture and no cobb but I guess I'll make out. I am also very worried about England. I don't know if I have the conviction and the sense of dedication to want to do my little bit there for the Cause. Frankly, I am not sure that I CARE. Of course there is a future for the LP here. The 'English' universities will continue to produce their little crop of liberals who will be keen to hold forums, run cake sales, write for Contact and the TLN and maybe even do some political intelligence and - who knows - blow up pylons. The LP in fact will continue to have as much of a future as it has had in the past. But so what? Politically it will continue to be of little significance and, as in the past, will go on being a framework from which people like us can hang themselves and express themselves. I suppose it is important that our 'line' should continue to be plugged here and overseas and if it wasn't I should probably be very upset but as it is I scarcely care. I dread the expatriate life - living most of the time 6,000 miles away - and at the same time fear beginning all over again. I don't know if I can be interested in anything else. And yet seriously I would like

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to review for the NA. Let me put it this way: can I be of any use in London? Five hundred people here arrested since May. Three hundred tried and all found guilty - sentences range from 18 months to eight and a half years. And they are still picking people up. Most of the wives ^{have} large, young families and no money. Twenty-two men are to be brought off Robben Island to face charges of sabotage, arson and murder at Graaff Reinet later this month. At present in East London an African who has been condemned to death for sabotage is giving evidence against three members of the Branch who when they arrested him handcuffed his hands behind his back and then tied a rope to the handcuffs and hung him from the ceiling and flogged him and twisted his testicles. (It is alleged). And all this plus the number of educated, intelligent, articulate Africans who are prepared to try to make Bantustan work means no change here for 20 years anyway no matter how ecstatic your reception at Oxford, no matter how many books I review for the NA, no matter how many letters Mary Benson writes to the New Statesman and no matter how many plastic bombs South African [redacted] refugees in London send to their less fortunate colleagues in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Norman and Harry have done 106 and 104 days respectively and it is expected that when they are charged it will be with furthering the aims and not sabotage. Rumour has it that they have something on Norman in addition, connected with your [redacted] departure. Betty Mearns was sold down the river and released after 77 days on condition that she give evidence for the State. If John Laredo in Durban pleads not guilty she will give evidence against him otherwise merely against Norman and Harry. But it is not important really - Adrian will be able to tell them all they want to know and they simply need a bit of [redacted] corroboration.

I've just deciphered a bit more of your letter - Isn't the time ripe for a change of course? Well, off hand, I should say it is... Oh hell I am sorry this is such a bitchy letter. Pessimism is a terribly depressing thing. (The people in this country right now who are really suffering are those - and their families - who threw themselves into the fight against the Nats. Most other people, relatively speaking, are happy. Sure they work hard, long hours, they're poor, many are hungry, others are cold but most are used to it and life goes on and they're not in jail. It IS true that on the whole they are better off than their compatriots in the rest of the continent where it is really only the intellectuals, the politicians and the upper middle-classes who are reaping most of the benefits of uhuru. The rest are occupied with the business of keeping alive from day to day and it probably hasn't occurred to them that they aren't oppressed any more. Sure it's immoral. But then who's really worried about immorality?) I would like to know the secret of your optimism, your faith. Or is it just like living? You don't know why but somehow you've just got to keep on - sort of doing your best like the Boy Scouts. Desperately looking forward to seeing you all. Please write if you can - to the office, I'm moving out of Bluewaters.

Yours John.

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