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FM PRETORIA

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 374

OF 031630Z OCTOBER 85

INFO ROUTINE HARARE, LUSAKA, GABORONE, MASERU, MBABANE,
MAPUTO, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, JOHANNESBURG.
INFO SAVING CAPE TOWN CONSULATE, DURBAN.

SOUTH AFRICA: INTERNAL

SUMMARY

1. THE GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE REACHED A WATERSHED IN THEIR DRIVE TO INTRODUCE REFORM WITHOUT LOSING CONTROL. THEY HAVE NOW ADOPTED MUCH OF THE RIGHT LANGUAGE ABOUT CHANGE IN ADDITION TO HAVING ANNOUNCED SPECIFIC REFORMS. I DOUBT IF WE SHOULD EXPECT MORE STATEMENTS FOR THE TIME BEING. BUT BLACKS REMAIN UNCONVINCED AND FRUSTRATED, ALTHOUGH THE PROSPECTS ARE NOT WHOLLY NEGATIVE.

DETAIL

2. PRESIDENT BOTHA HAS NOW MADE FOUR MAJOR SPEECHES IN THE PAST SIX WEEKS AT PROVINCIAL CONGRESSES OF HIS NATIONAL PARTY. HE HAS PROBABLY SAID ALL HE USEFULLY CAN FOR THE MOMENT ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S GENERAL APPROACH TO REFORM. THE NEXT EVENT IN THE REGULAR POLITICAL CALENDAR IS THE REOPENING OF PARLIAMENT IN JANUARY. BETWEEN NOW AND THEN I WOULD EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT TO CONCENTRATE ON TRYING TO BUILD UPON THE FOUNDATIONS THEY FEEL THEY HAVE LAID FOR BRINGING BLACKS INTO NEGOTIATION ABOUT THE POLITICAL FUTURE.

3. THE ONLY NOTABLE CHANGES ACTUALLY PROPOSED IN THE PRESIDENT'S RECENT SPEECHES ARE COMMON CITIZENSHIP AND INCLUSION OF BLACKS IN THE ADVISORY PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL (IN THE LATTER CASE A PROMISE TO CONSIDER, ALTHOUGH IN AFRIKANER JARGON THAT MAKES IT A CERTAINTY). AFTER THE DISASTROUS AUGUST SPEECH AT DURBAN, HOWEVER, THIS WEEK'S SPEECH AT PORT ELIZABETH WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE SERIES FOR WHAT THE PRESIDENT HAD TO SAY ABOUT POWER-SHARING AND UNIVERSAL FRANCHISE IN SOME FORM, PHRASES WHICH WOULD HAVE MADE MORE IMPACT IF USED EARLIER.

4. IT REMAINS THE CASE THAT THE GOVERNMENT ARE LAMENTABLY POOR AT PRESENTING THEIR POLICY TO THE BLACKS. ONE HAS TO REMEMBER THAT THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECHES ARE DESIGNED AT LEAST AS MUCH FOR WHITE CONSUMPTION. THE GOVERNMENT ARE OBSESSED WITH THE NEED TO EDUCATE THEIR OWN FOLLOWERS. THEY HAVE SUCCEEDED TO THE EXTENT THAT AT THE RECENT PARTY CONGRESSES THE RANK AND FILE MOOD HAS IF ANYTHING BEEN TO ENCOURAGE THE GOVERNMENT TO MOVE FASTER ON REFORM. FIVE BY-ELECTIONS ARE DUE AT THE END OF OCTOBER. PROVIDED THESE DO NOT GO TOO BADLY, THE GOVERNMENT MAY THEN FEEL A LITTLE LESS NERVOUS ABOUT LOOKING OVER THEIR OWN RIGHT SHOULDER AT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THEIR SUPPORT AMONG THE WHITES.

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5. IT IS A SAD REFLECTION ON THE GOVERNMENT'S LOW CREDIBILITY WITH BLACKS THAT SO MUCH OF PRESIDENT BOTHA'S MORE FORTHCOMING APPROACH IS DISCOUNTED OR IGNORED. MUCH OF THE BLAME RESTS ON THE GOVERNMENT THEMSELVES FOR MISHANDLING THE SITUATION IN THE TOWNSHIPS. POLICE METHODS HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY MADE MATTERS WORSE. FEELINGS CONTINUE TO RUN HIGH. BLACK OPINION HAS NOT JUST BEEN POLARISED, IT HAS COLLECTIVELY MOVED FURTHER AWAY FROM THE GOVERNMENT. TOO OFTEN IT IS A CASE OF TWO MOVES FORWARD, ONE BACK. IN A WEEK WHEN THE PRESIDENT SAYS HE WANTS TO BRING A WIDER BLACK LEADERSHIP INTO NEGOTIATION, A LEADING MEMBER OF MOTLANAS CIVIC ASSOCIATION IN SOWETO HAS BEEN DETAINED, THUS PULLING THE RUG FROM UNDER PEOPLE WHOM THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE DOING THEIR BEST TO ATTRACT.

6. MINISTERS WHOM I MEET STILL EXPRESS CONFIDENCE THAT THEY ARE ON THE RIGHT ROAD OVER DIALOGUE WITH BLACKS. PRIVATELY I SUSPECT THEY ARE MORE UNCERTAIN THAN THEY ARE PREPARED TO ADMIT ABOUT HOW TO HANDLE AN EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX SITUATION. A SHARPER TONE IS CREEPING INTO THEIR PUBLIC REACTION TO WESTERN PRESSURE AND ADVICE. YET I DO NOT BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT NOW FEEL THERE CAN BE ANY TURNING BACK FROM THE COURSE TO WHICH THEY ARE COMMITTED.

7. AS REGARDS THE BLACKS THERE IS LITTLE SIGN AT PRESENT, CERTAINLY NOT OUTWARDLY, OF INTEREST IN COMPROMISE. NEVERTHELESS RADICALS DO NOT HOLD ALL THE CARDS. SOME BLACKS ARE TIRED OF CONTINUED INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE, WHICH IN PLACES HAS OTRUN THE CONTROL EVEN OF ITS ORIGINAL INSTIGATORS. GO-BETWEENS SUCH AS THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY ARE BUSY TRYING TO FIND ENOUGH COMMON GROUND BEHIND THE SCENES AT LEAST TO MAKE A START ON DIALOGUE. DESPITE DEEP SUSPICION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S MOTIVES, MORE REASONABLE BLACKS WILL AT SOME STAGE HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DRIVING THE GOVERNMENT AGAINST A WALL OR EXPLORING A BETTER DEAL WITH THEM THAN SEEMED POSSIBLE ONLY A SHORT WHILE AGO. WE MAY BE NEAR THE MOMENT WHEN ALL CONCERNED PAUSE FOR REFLECTION.

8. THE GOVERNMENT HAVE ONE CARD UP THEIR SLEEVE WHICH THEY HAVE YET TO PLAY, NAMELY TO LIFT THE STATE OF EMERGENCY. I ASKED THE MINISTER OF LAW AND ORDER LAST NIGHT WHETHER HE SAW THIS HAPPENING SOON. LE GRANGE SAID THAT HE PERSONALLY WOULD LIKE TO SEE A START BEING MADE WITH LIFTING THE EMERGENCY IN A NUMBER OF PLACES. ADVISERS WERE ALWAYS ASKING FOR ANOTHER WEEK OR TWO. BUT HE EXPECTED THE CABINET'S SECURITY COMMITTEE (WHICH NORMALLY MEETS FORTNIGHTLY) TO LOOK AGAIN AT THE SITUATION ON 7 OCTOBER.

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9. LE GRANGE ADDED THAT A DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN AND WOULD BE ANNOUNCED SOON TO ADD ANOTHER 20,000 POLICE TO THE EXISTING 60,000. HE REMARKED THAT THIS WOULD STILL BE A LOWER RATIO OF POLICE TO POPULATION THAN IN MOST WESTERN COUNTRIES.

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MR J R J JOHNSON
CABINET OFFICE

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