

MCH01-45-8-4

I.C.S.

Attention Dorothy Williams

Hello, Dorothy.

Can you pass this on  
to the BBC? - If they  
want any changes, can  
you fax Steve at Legal  
Resources Centre?

- Albee

19/10/90.

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## FIFTH COLUMN

There are tens of thousands of us all over southern Africa, people who have lost arms and legs, sometimes eyes, sometimes even the mind, through bombs going off, landmines, car-bombs, petrol grenades. We are black, white and brown, a non-racial democracy of disabled people whose lives were disturbed and nearly taken away by explosions and bullets. Most of us are peasants, walking in fields, treading on landmines, a few like myself, are victims of car-bombs deliberately intended to take our lives.

Now, all of a sudden, after decades of violence, visibly coming from the army and the police, it is made to appear as though violence is something inherent in relations between blacks and blacks.

If it is possible to be privileged even in disaster then I am the most privileged of bomb victims. I have a white skin, I am a lawyer, I write books, I travel. In the world that we live in, the loss of my one white arm appears to count for more than the loss of thousands and tens of thousands of black limbs. It is painful to feel this privilege, but perhaps I should use the opportunities available to speak out on behalf of all of us. I would like to give my views on the recent violence in South African townships.

We have to look at southern Africa as a whole. We now have chances of real peace in our zone, for the first time ever since I can remember. The toll in the region has been terrible, especially for people going about their business, caught up in the war, hit by police and army repression, blasted by the forces of destabilisation. It is hard for me to imagine what it is like for someone travelling in a bus suddenly to be attacked by automatic rifles, or for passengers to be hurled off a train, or for a peasant child tending goats to be blasted into the air and wake up in hospital to discover that he or she has lost an arm or a leg. Mozambique and Angola alone have thousands of such children learning to walk with artificial limbs. Those fortunate enough to get wheel-chairs have special difficulty propelling the chairs through the sand. There are a million and a half refugees across the Mozambique border and two million inside that country alone, all uprooted as a result of organised forces of destabilisation.

It's called low-intensity war. Pretoria has trained thousands of Mozambicans and Angolans in camps on South African soil to kill and maim their fellow countrymen and women. South African Security has also established so-called vigilante forces throughout the country to smash consumer boycotts, trade union activity and civic associations. It used to be called "total strategy". The aim was to destroy the ANC, not to talk to it. Special assassination units were set up to bump us off one by one, inside the country and out. When we insisted that such squads were operating with military and police connivance we were told not to be paranoid. Now some of the killers have themselves spilt the beans and the position is even worse than we imagined. These were not rogue forces of the ultra right operating outside of security structures. The government knew what was going on, it established them, paid them, and gave them what we consider the bitterly ironic title of Civil Cooperation Bureau.

Then it was total strategy, now it is partial strategy. Government leaders have taken significant steps to recognise the injustices of apartheid and the impossibility of curbing the ANC. But there are still tens of thousands of members of the security forces and vigilantes of all races who are determined to carry on in the old way. The right wing revolt is failing manifestly and has no chance of succeeding, but tremendous damage can be done by activating forces of destabilisation inside South Africa itself. The assassinations have resumed. Fake leaflets have been given out. Episode succeeds episode in a way that defies the laws of spontaneity. While some of the persons responsible for security try to calm the situation, others intervene in such a way as to fan the flames.

What can be done about it? Clearly, the provocations can only function if there are weaknesses and tensions in a community. A lot of hard work of promoting tolerance and reconciliation has to be done on the ground. The tensions will not be eliminated simply by slogans about national unity. It is also obvious that, if people live in squalid conditions, cooped up in single-sex hostels, or huddled together in shacks, there can be little tranquility or normality in their lives. Proper homes have to be built in South Africa, not just as a human right, but as a pre-condition for stability and peace.

But this is not where the real problems lie. The immediate issue is to transform the security services so that they represent the whole South African population, and fulfil their true role as impartial guarantors of the peace. The whole network of squads dedicated to internal and external destabilisation has to be uncovered and disbanded. A new army and police force has to be established. There are honest and dedicated soldiers and police, both white and black, in the present security forces. They have to join with trained personnel of the ANC, as well as the non-corrupt forces of the various bantustans to create a genuinely national peace-keeping force.

But most important of all, South Africans must get used to the practice of solving their problems through political means and not through force. This means that the vote for all, and the institutions for democracy must be installed as soon as possible. Far from the violence, provoked by elements in the state, being used as a pretext for postponing democracy, the bloodshed reminds us of how urgent it is to give democracy a chance, and enable our people, all our people, to accustom themselves to settling their differences in a peaceful way. It is true that the vote in itself, parliamentary democracy, and a Bill of Rights guaranteeing individual rights, do not of themselves ensure peace. But what we can say is, that, without the vote, without democratic institutions, peace simply has no chance.

Those of us who have been directly affected by the conflict have a special yearning for real and enduring peace. Peace is the greatest healer. I called the book I wrote on my experience, *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter*. The idea of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, an arm for an arm, is horrifying. Freedom can never mean a world of limbless and blinded people. The only vengeance worthy of our wounds is peace. And, without democracy, without equality, without justice, there can never be peace, and we can never be healed.