

22 JANUARY 1993

Dear Sue,

Could you
give this transcript to

Albie. It is a complete

transcript! We are

working on it and will
have an edited version for
Albie's approval next week P.T.O.

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For the people for whom the question of water is overwhelming, they're either flooded out and they're made wet in winter, they can't get clean water, they have to walk miles to fetch water. The problem of water and the environment isn't simply a question of hidden pollutants, it's a question of access to clean water that people also understand - about dirty water and the importance of boiling water and cleanliness and so on - and clearly if one wants a water consciousness to develop in the whole population you can't do that without relating it to the question of access to water - water to people, people to water - and that has immediate implications, and I wish the people concerned with the environment in the broad sense would take more interest in the environment in the immediate sense. The same applies to soil and to land, where the soil is blown into your home and house and your eyes and ... there is no fixed soil on which you can build, on which you can grow things ... there's a great sensitivity towards the stability of the earth ... it's not a difficult concept and the question of management of scarce resources is something the poor people know much more about than the rich ... it's the rich who despoil and utilise resources and throw away in a massive way ... it's the poor who pick up ... pick up the abandoned scraps ... so in that sense I would say that there is a greater capacity for understanding amongst the poor than there is among the rich, of environmental questions.

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A.C.: There are many poor people in South Africa trying to survive on a day to day basis. For them, the stratospheric ozone layer which they have never seen and do not understand, or the protection of biological diversity, or the stabilization of the climate, are rather remote problems. These issues don't have anything to do with surviving the next day. How do you create a situation in which people, who are preoccupied with short-term survival needs, can begin to think about the long-term?

A.S.: I think the ... look, there's no inherited possibility. Everybody wants to feel that they are part of the world and part of the community; everybody wants to feel they count and that their opinion matters. The problem is if the attention given to these huge cosmic and stratospheric questions is seen as taking away attention from the very immediate environmental problems. Then it's seen as a contradiction and then people might even be resistant to attention and time and money and energy and imagination being expended on those very remote issues. So the overall problem is to try and find the connections between the immediate world in which every individual lives and the broad planet on which we all exist. I think that for people for whom the immediate environment is catastrophic and harmful, it's actually easier to make the connections than for people who live in comfort and luxury. For people for whom the environment is immediately and evidently and vividly ugly and threatening, it's often easier to make the connections about the hidden dangers to the environment. Also for people who have been lied to all their lives it's easier to expose the deceits that were involved - they have very strong mistrust of government, of employers, of manufacturers - so from that point it is not more difficult. The difference, I suppose, would be to evoke a sense of meaningful interest, not just a vague kind of sentimental interest in the environment.

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I sense amongst them a considerable environmental awareness. So, in principle, one won't be overcoming obstacles to get it included and intergrated into the curriculum. There are certain subjects that already exist where it would fit in. Funny, we used to have a thing called Nature Study and then Nature Study got replaced by Biology ... Biology sounded more scientific. Maybe we should go back to Nature Study ... the content is basically the same, but ... perhaps it has a broader sense, and then it's not simply learning about stamens and pollens and how the birds and the bees do it. It would be intergrated into the whole concept of the planet and the world in which we live and the air we breathe and ourselves as part of that. I would urge that environmental consciousness be introduced into all subjects ... and certainly into History. The devastation of continents and countries should be part of the history. Into Geography ... changing the geography and the manipulation of the geography ... It would certainly come into biology ... and it has to come into the study of human beings which, I seem to remember, was actually rather neglected at school. We learned very little about ourselves, very little about our bodies, certainly nothing about our emotions, almost nothing about our own minds ... and nothing about our place in the world, which is what education should be about. And then I think those of us specifically concerned with environmental questions would urge the people specifically concerned with education to ensure that it is there. But again I think it would be a pity if it was simply studied as a course for which you got marks and passed an exam. What one wants is an environmental awareness that enters into the daily life of the school and the pupils ... an attitude towards conservation and specific materials ... an attitude about waste. We used to learn a lot about cleanliness and that cleanliness was next to godliness and 'keep your school tidy'. An enormous amount of energy went into that, but also with rather scant results as far as I can remember ... but that same kind of morality in daily life and the habits of daily life maybe could be brought out into something a bit more meaningful. So maybe instead of cleanliness being next to godliness, it could be conservation.

A.C.: Can I ask you a private question ... I won't transcribe it ?
Why do you think there is so much litter around the townships ?

A.S.: I think it's partly because there isn't proper rubbish collection ... mainly because of that ... then the stuff just blows in the wind and gets caught up. But it goes with the general theme of lack of rights ... not counting...not counting in the overall picture of things. Because Arican tradition regarding cleanliness - cleanliness in the home and hearth and sweeping up - is very powerful. So it's not a matter of tradition ... it's not automatic ... it's the living in an urban environment but without any of the urban supports.

A.C.: Just too many people in too small a space ?

A.S.: No. The most densely populated part of Cape Town is Sea Point, it's not Khyalitsha. It's infrastructure ... it's expenditure it's concern, it's having people responsible. The same in New York ... it's not a question of high-rise buildings. The high-rise buildings inhabited by the wealthy are spotlessly clean because they have porters. They have a rubbish collection system and there is expenditure and attention is paid to the upkeep. In the high-rise buildings in the poorer areas there are no porters ... there are no proper janitors ... there's no proper security, there's no proper waste collection and so you get degradation. It's not a question of density of population.

A.C.: A quote from the World Conservation Strategy states: " A new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people, is required for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being. The long-term task of environmental education is to foster or reinforce attitudes and behaviour compatible with this new ethic".

Recently there's been a lot of focus on our country's game reserves where the white rich drive around in lush vegetation observing wildlife while on the other side of the fence the rural people starve through lack of resources. Is it in your party's blueprint to change the status quo, and if so, how ?

A.S.: The question of the future of the game parks is getting special attention - and the game parks are a very important natural resource and it's not simply because of tourism ... they're part of our country, and as parts of the original habitat of the country are being preserved, and we would like all our people to have that sense: to have a sense of access and to glory in the diversity of the fauna and the flora and so on. So that's one of the questions: to open up the access to tourism, so that it's not simply for rich tourists and for whites, but so that all our people have access. The other aspect that's flagrant is that many people who traditionally have relied on hunting for a certain source of food supply are cut off from that ... people find also that land which they've used for agriculture is being used now simply for game - the game have land and they don't have land and there's just generally a lack of employment opportunities for many people living in the vicinity of the game parks. Steps have been taken already in some areas to have an integrated approach towards the environment ... employment and conservation - that's obviously got to be the way the future has to run. There has to be extensive participation of people on the ground, in other words, there mustn't be programmes for them ... they must be part and parcel of the programmes, the decision-making. They must benefit from the programmes economically and in terms of life-style, in terms of personal dignity ...

I think that's already started and we will encourage that whole process, so that there isn't an inevitable conflict between livelihood and a sense of belonging, of the people living on the outskirts of the game parks on the one hand, and conservation of parks and tourism on the other.

A.C.: On a recent visit to the Okavango swamps it was incredibly obvious, even with the drought-stricken conditions, that people living outside the fence were creating quite a bit of havoc to the environment because of the tradition of keeping cattle and goats which actually don't belong there, while on the other side of the fence the game were in these beautiful lush parklands, even though there was an eight year drought, because they feed differentially. Even from an economic point of view: for one head of cattle I think they get about R400, whereas one springbok could fetch R 2000. Would it not be better maybe to reintroduce indigenous species to the people living on the land rather than to let them farm cattle and goats; let them go back to having their indigenous animals.

A.S.: I can't speak for Botswana. I know what's complicated the position in this country - people haven't had basic rights, they haven't had the vote, ... they're not involved in local government, ... they're not involved in regional government. The people who were put there from the black communities were mostly very corrupt, totally uninterested, and by and large have a terrible record of mismanagement, inefficiency and corruption. So what one really wants is local government that functions in a democratic way

with a lot of participation. One wants development programmes also operating on the same basis. People are not stupid ... people will see the advantages of the extra food supply that they can get, the extra income they can earn, and I'm sure they will respond ... but they must be part and parcel of the process. It must not be some programme which is worked out in some remote office, for then they are told that they are stupid because they are not doing what's in their own best interests. You had all sorts of so called betterment schemes in the past that were imposed in that way which had the effect of really limiting the number of cattle that people could have. They saw white farmers with huge herds of cattle and it just couldn't work and it didn't work ... people resisted. So what one's dealing with now is a new system of government, a new concept of rights ... human rights ... employment rights..economic rights of people, rights in relation to the land. It's all part of a comprehensive package. So we have to develop these new styles, these new ways of working, and clearly the example you've given sounds like a very good example: where the respect for indigenous fauna and flora goes together with conservation and goes together with economic advantages. It mightn't always be possible to do that. We can't regard cattle in South Africa, or maize, as alien animals and alien vegetation. Can you imagine forbidding South Africans to grow maize because it came from South America? It's inconceivable ... and forbidding people from having cattle.

A.C.: Maybe the people don't realise that goats cause erosion and aren't very valuable as a meat source.

A.S.: No. People know all that, but there may be reasons - goats are hardy, they can look after themselves, and so there are practical advantages in terms of the life-style of those people. And then, with the system of incentives and alternatives and the technical education which people will get, which enlarges their range of choices, and hopefully good laws in relation to respect for the soil and conservation - the proper use of water and so on - there will be the evolution of new attitudes and new habits.

A.C.: What is your stance on population control ?
Is it perceived as a mechanism amongst whites to control black supremacy in terms of numbers, or do blacks understand it as a question of economics and sustainable growth ?

A.S.: I think the starting point on any discussion on population control has to be human rights. If population control is seen as some enforceable method of getting people to have fewer children, then I think it's disastrous. It violates human rights ... it doesn't work. If limiting the number of children is seen by people, particularly women, as a great advantage, then it works. The fundamental question here is the human rights of woman. The right to control fertility as a matter of choice. In particular, access to contraception. The right to safe childbirth is part and parcel of that ... the right to choose to not have unwanted children. I would personally say it's very important. There isn't a final ANC policy yet on the question of abortion, but in any event I don't think abortion should ever be the key method of population control. If women have access to education and access to employment as a matter of choice ... everywhere in the world that's been the greatest factor in reducing the number of births.

As somebody put it: "DEVELOPMENT IS THE BEST PILL", and I think we would all go along with that. In the case of South Africa the population question comes through in a most unfortunate way: the pressure is on black families to be smaller, not on white families, and you hear that from people sometimes in large families themselves. Sometimes you discover that they're one of seven or eight brothers and sisters, and they certainly wouldn't have denied their own right to exist. Also what's left out of that is that it's the whites who consume resources in this country ... their pressure on resources ... their utilisation particularly of non-renewable resources. I think that in absolute terms, the whites, being only 15% of the population, consume more non-renewable resources than blacks do. So the population control shouldn't be done on the basis of scarcity of resources ... there is no white who could use that argument against blacks. What can be said is that smaller families give the children, whatever the background, more chance for access to schooling, to training, to having personal attention, and so on. But the key to any form of limiting the size of families is the decision, the choice, the volition, the informed volition, of the women.

A.C.: The wealth of South African citizens is greatly affected by existing laws regarding land tenure. Does the ANC have any intention of changing the status quo in this regard?

A.S.: As far as land tenure is concerned, we're doing a lot of work on this. The old Roman Dutch law system actually included - and this is what I learned at University - the phrase 'the owner has the right' - *ius utendi et abutendi* - to use and abuse the land ... was actually written into the law. There could be no greater right than that: you could dig holes in it, you could burn it down, you could destroy it, and that was the classical Roman Dutch law that we inherited, and to a large extent it still survives. It's only subject to certain planning permissions, use permissions and controls which apply at certain moments. When you want to do certain things you have to get permission, but by and large the general principle is that unless the law permits an interference by some public authority in a particular way, you can still use and abuse your land, your property and your resources. You can't do it in a way which damages the neighbour. There can be restrictions on that, but that principle still applies. I think that has to change.

I think we also have to have concepts of multiple use of land. Many people having guarantee rights and interest in the land, because you can't expand the amount of land you've got ... the land is a finite resource and the present ownership is so grossly unequal and unjust it has to be changed. One way of changing it is by not simply transferring absolute ownership from one group to the other, but by extending the range of interests and rights that different people can have on the same piece of land. Then the forms of communal forms of tenure also has to be gone into ... they do exist in certain parts of the country already, where land is legally held in trust by the chiefs on behalf of the whole community, and there are many advantages to that type of system. There are disadvantages as well. The big disadvantage is getting any security for building a home or agricultural development or whatever it might be, and there's always the possibility of corruption. But the advantage is that the land is seen as a whole and the actual boundaries and fences, to some extent, are less important, and the concept of the land being in trust for the whole community is a very positive one and very favourable to the idea of environment. But because of the great overcrowding that there has been the reality is that the plots tend to be too small, they're under-resourced, they're over-utilised ... they're abused in that sense. So it's not the tenure system alone that's going to conserve those areas.

But I think that attention can be paid to the idea of communal or group ownership of tracts of land not only in the existing Bantustans, but maybe in other areas as well. Where it fits in with the culture of the people, where the people actually want that. It's not an argument for collective farms ... not that at all.

A.C.: And redistribution of existing ownership? Are you not going to have to force people to sell part of their land?

A.S.: We have quite elaborately developed ideas on redistribution. It will be done through a court, a land claims tribunal. Some people would have a claim as of right: those people who have been expelled from land in recent times, from the black spots, would get that land back. They wouldn't pay compensation. There might be some compensation for existing title holders. Then you are going to need guarantee rights for people who have lived on land for a century or more, whose great-great-great-grandparents were often given titles by Paul Kruger and other leaders of the time, and who are now regarded as squatters with no rights at all. So they must also have rights ... they can't be expelled. They have rights to utilise plots and have security in relation to their homesteads, and to reconcile that with the rights of the existing title holders, there has to be a legal framework. Then there's unused land ... there are lots of questions that have to be gone into, and the question all along will be to build in the green factor wherever possible. People are telling us, in fact, that family farming can be more productive than the existing large scale farming, and it tends to be less devastating to the soil, so there's no danger in big farms being converted into smaller units. But what one really wants is productive use of the land bearing in mind the conservation of the soil.

A.C.: In the light of the fact that the profit motive cannot ensure sympathetic environmental consideration, what does the ANC intend to do to prevent exploitation and pollution of our natural resources?

A.S.: We are told that the world can't live without the profit motive and that it's the driving force of everything, and if we even raise an eyebrow at that we are accused of being radicals and who knows what. The fact is that it looks as though profits are going to be with us maybe always, so what that means is that you try to create incentives for conservation and disincentives for anything which is harmful to the environment. If one could rely simply on that it would be wonderful. But experience in other countries, particularly countries with powerful marketing economies, suggests that is not enough. In other words, if there could be pure voluntary adherence to environmental codes, and the industrialists and the people involved in the extractive industries, and so on, would accept voluntarily maybe reducing profits for the sake of conserving the environment, then one mightn't need strict environmental laws. But experience everywhere has proved exactly the opposite and it's not enough to have a few managers or directors of boards who have got a 'green' awareness. So it's always a question of getting the right balance, but in the end the profits can come and go - you know the earth is one and it's just got to survive.

AC: The present government has had no environmental policy as such and the few laws they do have are unco-ordinated and poorly implemented, whilst the ANC does have an excellent environmental policy. How do you intend to ensure that it's properly enforced?

A.S.: I would say there are three keys ... three essential elements. The first one is very strong NGO's, and public involvement and concern. That's important partly to keep up the pressure, but partly it's people literally on the ground, literally at the grass roots, who are going to know what's going on, who are going to feel the impact and who are going to keep up the pressure. The second is a strong right to information. That has to be built into government at every level. People must know what's going on and the right to information must apply not only to government and government structures. It must be strong enough to compel industrialists and other people, whose activities naturally impinge upon the environment, to come clean. Thirdly it's going to be necessary to train people to be whistle-blowers all over the place, attached to government, keeping their eyes and ears open all the time, in touch with the NGO's and just watching out for what's happening, but with the necessary technical expertise to understand and to be well-informed. I would say these are the three key factors. We are discussing the whole question now of how to structure, and what structures in government would be best to ensure that proper attention is paid at all levels to the environment. In other words, should we have a separate department or should environmental people be put into every department. There has to be meaningful involvement, but how do you organise it ... is it better to have a separate watchdog with a global responsibility, or do you have little pockets, as it were, in every ministry and in every department, or do you have some combination of both ?

Can I just say ... it's very important that we have an awareness now ... we look to the future but also we don't make empty promises. If ever there was an area which requires integrity, that's been messed up by a lot of words and fancy phrases and democratic statements ... it's the area of the environment, and we have to be careful ourselves, while we are enthusiastic about it, also not to succumb to that temptation.

A.C.: How much of your annual budget do you intend to allocate to environmental issues ? In the previous issue of EarthYear it came across that the present government, while they spend 23% of their budget on defence, spend .03% of the budget on conservation.

A.S.: I think there has to be a total review of the defence budget. Anyhow its not only that it's involved colossal wastage of money for very negative purposes (to deny people their rights in the townships, to terrorize people and to invade neighbouring countries), there have been vast expenditures on weapons of destruction which we don't need. But a particular area which we will have to look into will be the area of nuclear energy and the capacity to produce nuclear weapons. ANC policy has been against that for a long time and I trust that this stand will be maintained. What does South Africa need nuclear weapons for ? So that's one area that you would have to look into, but are there also other things: weapons testing that's happening right now at Rooi Els.

There you get this combination of vast expense and destruction to the environment (a very, very beautiful area) and lies and more lies, deceit - all three going together. Promises are made about huge sums, that South Africa is going to be in the first league of the nations of the world ... we are going to export so much and you know, I just don't believe a word of it. The army uses state-owned land because they don't have to pay for it ... and so on . I can see that if we can bring an end to that kind of thing it doesn't necessarily mean we are spending more money on the environment, but we are doing fewer things that are damaging to the environment in the name of defence.

I am not sure how one calculates the money spent on the environment: I suppose it would come in two ways: you spend a certain sum of money specifically on calculated programmes to protect the environment, but one also wants programmes of a more negative nature that don't have the effect of impinging negatively on the environment. We've got to have experts ... that's one of the things that I'm discovering now ... that I can have, personally, as Albie, I can have a certain sensibility and general views, but I always have to run to friends to find out: is this damaging or not? There you need quite a lot of technical know-how about the marine environment, about the sea-shore, about air, about water what things really mean.

A.C.: In his book Private Power: Multi-national Corporations and their role in the survival of our planet, Axel Mercken asserts that global enterprise stands in stunning contrast to government power. The fastest economic growth is in countries where governments stay out of technology's way - progress lags wherever it is subject to bureaucracy.

National governments are inadequate when it comes to dealing with the planet's necessities. This country has had an abysmal history of nationalisation of the central services, resulting in expensive, inefficient systems which we have all had to suffer, of excessive bureaucracy blocking initiative and communication flow, of mysterious boards keeping prices of essential goods such as meat and dairy products at astronomically inflated prices. How does the ANC intend to avoid these pitfalls, especially when they tend to favour even more nationalisation and bureaucracy?

A.S.: I think governments must do the things governments are good at and let the market do the things that the market is good at. Governments are not good at making nice, attractive, cheap shoes; let the market do that and the people choose. But the markets are not good at providing basic education, health, systems of transport, roads - the general infrastructure for the country. In this country it's particularly important that government takes on that responsibility, which it's provided for the whites for decades now, for the whole population. It has to be done properly. I'm a little bit surprised by the question because the record of the multi-nationals in relation to the environment has been pathetic, it's been shocking. They just go from continent to continent, country to country, looking for resources - whether it's cutting down forests for timber or whether it's mining sand dunes for aluminium that can be used simply to feed industry and make profits. So government has a very big role to play, in that sense, in protecting the environment and establishing a legal framework to prevent that despoliation of the environment. In terms of bureaucracy ... I think that nobody has suffered more than the black people of South Africa from the behaviour of bureaucrats. It's bureaucrats who've told people where they can live, forced them to carry passes, controlled every aspect and every detail of their lives. So people want freedom, they want choice, they want the right to pursue personal initiatives, to pursue happiness in their way, and from that point of view we want much less government than there's been in the past. Also there's a multiplicity of boards which were set up basically to promote the interests