The New South African Diplomats:
Sean Cleary, #2 Man in Namibia

By Ned Munger, Thomas Berto, and William Butler

Appendix: Mayor Tom Bradley and His Accusers
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cover: The "famous" photograph of Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles presenting the key to the City of the Angels, as he does to all accredited consular officials, to Sean Cleary. This was printed in the South African Digest and subsequently used as "evidence" of Bradley's alleged support for South Africa by the Washington Office on Africa and critics in Los Angeles.
PREFACE

Winston Churchill observed that young men sow wild oats but old men grow sage. If one thinks of sowing in the political sense, you can learn a great deal more about the future of a nation by observing the men and women moving up the leadership ladder than by trying to project the attitudes of the current leaders too far into the future.

One problem in selecting a sapling in the forest as the great oak of tomorrow is that there are always a number of superior saplings among the thicket. This issue is intended to focus attention among that class of younger men and women in the South African Foreign Service and the broader Civil Service who may not individually rise to great national prominence, but from among whom leaders of tomorrow will surely come.

I do not say “the leaders” because surely the leaders of tomorrow in South Africa will be drawn from a far wider ethnic base than predominates today. In speaking to the final year high school matriculation class at Esselen Park High School in Worcester in early 1983, my remarks focused on the changes I anticipate.

This “Coloured” High School was the scene of some of the worst rioting during the so-called “Coloured student riots” in 1976. The graduation rate dipped sharply after the riots but has now recovered and gone on to be one of the highest in South Africa under Principal Abrahams. The students, perhaps because I said only a few sentences in their home language of Afrikaans and was asking them to listen in English with an American accent, were not particularly articulate about their future. So I undertook to pick out individuals and tell them what I thought they would be doing in a decade.

One young woman I saw as a co-pilot on a South African Airways 747. A tall young man I saw as the Political Officer in Singapore. Basically, I selected so-called “male” occupations for the women — doctor not nurse — and positions almost exclusively now held by whites in the government and industry for the men, and sometimes both switches. I did this because I believe that Coloured leaders — and Asian and African leaders — will not be merely consulted but will have dynamic decision-making roles in South Africa in the relatively near future.

But at the same time that I foresee political and economic decisions being made by people of all races on behalf of people of all races in a greater South Africa, I also foresee that white South Africans will be playing key roles. In short, I am among that small academic minority in the United States who believe in (1) rapid change to a just society and (2) relatively peaceful change. My own article in Foreign Affairs in 1958 has been hailed as the first serious prediction by an American scholar of basic changes that did not begin to be accepted as such until twenty-five years later.
Therefore, much as I see change, I see a significant role for whites in making that change and in holding important positions after the change.

When I first began to study South Africa, the Afrikaner Nationalists had just come to power. There was suddenly a great dearth of English-speaking whites going into the Civil Service and the Foreign Service. But it is a tribute to Afrikaner leadership that, despite harassment of some English-speakers that led to resignations, those already in the service have risen on merit to the top. Hence we had the spectacle in the 1970s of four successive key Ambassadorships going to men with English names. One may expect something of a dearth of such men for a few years. But English-speakers did begin once again in the 1970s to enter government service.

One of the most prescient observers of the South African Foreign Service is John Chettle, Director for North and South America of the South Africa Foundation. This business-centered private organization parallels some of the efforts of the Foreign and Information Services. Chettle, a former Rhodes Scholar, Shell Oil executive, and magazine editor, tells me that in his view the National Party had been fair-handed towards English-speakers since their first five years in power. Early on, South Africa lost some fine civil servants and outstanding military men because English-speakers were discriminated against. But particularly since the coming to power of Prime Minister P. W. Botha, Chettle feels that merit has been the rule in the Foreign Service as between English- and Afrikaans-speakers.

In picking out one person, we want to emphasize that he is representative of a number of brilliant young men and women who are rising in the Foreign Service. One could have as easily focused on Neil van Heerden, whose excellent service in Washington this editor observed, and who is now Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, or Dave Stewart, now head of policy planning. But to mention only three should not obscure others. The longer a listing, the more invidious to leave talented officers off.

Since I wrote one of the first books ever published on the making of South African foreign policy (Notes on the Formation of South African Foreign Policy, 1965), there has been an enormous improvement in the professionalization of the service. My book, which is often quoted but has long since been superseded by more profound and contemporary analyses, came about by an accident which may be worth relating.

The Carnegie Endowment in New York commissioned a study of South Africa from an American perspective. I was asked to contribute a major chapter. Fortunately, I was asked to comment on the rest of the book. Its whole tenor, which wavered between a possible American invasion of South Africa to the harshest of sanctions, was, in my judgment, so far from the most likely scenario that I wanted no part of such a misguided academic-cum-political Jeremiad. Like critics before me, I was caught in the dilemma of having made strong criticisms of the book, but of finding that while I was thanked for my ideas they were ignored for the most part. I didn’t feel quite like Prime Minister Chamberlain being thanked by Adolf Hitler for his advice not to invade Czechoslovakia, but I certainly felt an impending guilt by association. More to the point, I insist-
ed on an enlargement of my chapter. Fortunately, as hoped, the editor refused. Thereupon I asked to withdraw it so as to have it published elsewhere.

I am often asked by some of the louder and more polemical critics of South African policy to contribute to a book (viz: Robertson and Whitten: Race and Politics in South Africa, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1978) or to appear on a lecture platform (viz: African-American Institute Symposium for business men in Los Angeles, 1982), for the purpose of “showing we are balanced.” My ideas may be right or they may be wrong. But asking one contributor or speaker out of six or sixteen to provide balance, places too great a responsibility on a less than able debater such as I. An illusion of balance is served if not satisfied.

There are generic problems of writing about a younger person who is not the “President of the Company,” the “Director of the Foreign Service,” the “Full Professor,” and so on. In my judgment, you cannot fairly ask the person to review the material for mistakes. That involves obtaining tacit approval as to what is right. Carried a step forward, you then subject the person to the necessary requirement of obtaining clearance. Furthermore, not many people can edit praise of themselves without sounding pompous at best and conceited at worst. Such an essay as this not only places the subject at risk of criticism by his superiors but of criticism and envy by his peers. So if one is to publish a profile such as this, one must do it on one’s own responsibility without the permission of the subject. This issue does not have the subject’s approval or disapproval.

The most successful and distinguished diplomat serving South Africa today is Brand Fourie, Ambassador to the United States following his retirement as Secretary of Foreign Affairs. By a twist of fate, I wrote a brief profile of Brand Fourie thirty years ago when he was the young, charismatic, liberal-sounding, bon vivant Ambassador to the United Nations. Fourie was a member of the South African delegation from 1947 to 1952 and returned as UN Ambassador from 1958 to 1962. After his first wife was tragically killed in an automobile crash, Brand became quite subdued in contrast to his formerly ebullient self. Brand Fourie is an absolute key to a successful independence of Namibia. His role is widely recognized by professionals of divers political viewpoints. It is noteworthy that the chief Angolan negotiator with Brand Fourie, first over secret prisoner exchanges, and more recently and less secretly over Namibia and the water scheme on the Kunene River, was quoted in the official Luanda government newspaper as saying that his personal relations with Fourie were always cordial.

In my experience the toughest American negotiator that Fourie has had to contend with is Donald McHenry, the American Ambassador at the United Nations for the Carter Administration, following Andy Young. Don McHenry knows facts about South Africa like the back of his hand. I once debated with him at Umhlanga Rocks at a United States South African Leader Exchange conference in 1973 over whether South Africa would give independence to Namibia. Don said, in one of the rare times he has been wrong, that he knew the Afrikaners and that they would never seriously negotiate. I have a habit of selectively remembering debates only when I’m proved to be right. So I wrote to Don in 1981 when he was at the U.N., reminding him that I
was, after all, right, but also paying tribute to his skills in forwarding the negotiations to disprove his earlier dictum. I added that if Namibia became independent during his tenure, I would write a letter nominating him for a well deserved Nobel Peace Prize. With characteristic humility, Don accepted my accolade but pointed out that I was one of the few people who knew what difficulties he had had to overcome.

To quote Ambassador McHenry in praise of Brand Fourie as an extremely able and affable human being—which implies no agreement on policies—led me to ask Don recently at a conference on South Africa what he thought of Sean Cleary.

"Smart, articulate, well educated, and sharp," were words that defined Cleary. Don added, "We used to live near each other in Washington and I was sorry to see him transferred away."

John Chettle, politically on the other side of the street, so to speak, from Ambassador McHenry, observed Cleary during the latter's three years as Political Officer in Washington D. C. He observed for me:

"Sean Cleary is one of the finest of the new breed of English-speaking diplomats in our country. He has a confidence that some of the older English-speakers didn't have when it came to sensitive political issues. Sean is a gifted diplomat, and established an unparalleled circle of important political acquaintances in Washington that made him a superb reporter on the American scene in Washington. He is both knowledgeable and articulate and cares deeply about the future of South Africa."

Sean Cleary, after a brief posting of only seven months as Consul General for the twelve western American States, has just taken up duties as the Number Two South African official in Windhoek. There could scarcely be a more challenging post for a young South African diplomat. Success in achieving a peaceful transition to a just society in Namibia could well be the key which would convince the South African electorate (white now, likely to be white and brown shortly) that a mechanism for including blacks can be worked out with justice and without major violence. Sean Cleary strikes a fine balance between the idealistic dreamer—dream no little dreams, dream only dreams that stir men's blood—and the pragmatic civil servant who knows both human frailty and limitations on political change.

This examination of Cleary's background and thoughts is offered as a way of gaining insight into the process of political change within the white society that has so long dominated southern Africa and now struggles, in the words of Prime Minister P. W. Botha, "to adapt or die."

The hand of fate has linked Sean Cleary to Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles. An appendix on Bradley's accusers is included.

NED MUNGER

Note: The authors are most grateful to Wilma Fairchild and Susan McCloud for their editing.
TIME LINE FOR SEAN CLEARY

1948: October: Born in Somerset West, 30 miles from Cape Town.
1966: Joined the South African Navy.
1970: March or April: Returned to South Africa.
1970-71: Academic Year: Went to Iran, took courses at Pahlavi University in Shiraz.
1971: middle: Transferred to Teheran.
1971: Married.
1975: December: Left Iran and returned to South Africa, began work in the Economic and Financial Services Division of the South African Foreign Service.
1977: September or October: Took over the departmental training division.
1978: Started 3 year stint in Washington DC as a political counselor.
1982: July 1: Started as South African Consul General for the Western United States.
1983: Appointed Number Two in Namibia.

Q: Tell us about your background.
A: I was born on the 26th of October, 1948.

Q: In Somerset West?
A: Yes. My father, Thomas Stanislaus, was a Chartered Secretary. It’s a profession which is characteristic of an English system. It’s an executive function associated with the management of companies. He was also a lawyer and legal advisor to an institution known as the National Industrial Council of the Printing and Newspaper Industry.

Q: When you were young was there much encouragement from his side to follow in his footsteps? Or—from whence came your choice of careers?
A: Oh, I don’t think that there was any particular choice really involved, I suppose. Like an awful lot of people growing up, I didn’t have any particularly clear sense of what I wanted to do until fairly late in life. My father was certainly enthusiastic about my studying law.

Q: Your mother, Isabel Forsythe, did she work?
A: She never practiced a profession. The type of life that they led, how can I put it, would have made it strange if she had worked outside of the home.
Q: How was your young life—halcyon or just normal for a South African boy?
A: I think it was normal. It was pleasant. It was enjoyable. I don't have any major traumas that I can relate to that period.

Q: You told me that you went into the Navy when you were 16. Is this required? Was it some sort of draft, or is this just expected . . . ?

A: All that happened was that I had finished high school at an unusually early age and I was uncertain about what I wanted to do at that stage. My father was enthusiastic about my preparing to go on and do a law degree, and to take subjects for my undergraduate degree that would essentially be consonant with that eventual objective. I was unsure what I wanted to do. I therefore attended the University of Capetown for one year, completed my subjects in that year toward a Bachelor of Arts degree. At the end of the year I was still, however, uncertain as to what I wanted to do in a larger context. I would have had to make some basic decisions about what I was going to do as far as majors were concerned at that stage, and decided that a breathing spell would be useful.

We have a system of national service in South Africa which at that time required one to be called up, as it were, for nine months. You could, however, by serving twelve months in what was known as the Permanent Force, the standing defense structure, secure exemption from that nine months' period of national service. I couldn't be called up for national service until I was 18, and for that reason, I decided to get my national service out of the way by actually joining up, while at the same time giving myself a little time to think about what I wanted to do over the longer term.

Q: When you were in the Navy you mentioned that you started as a radar operator, and then . . .

A: You go through a basic set-up where you do conventional basic training in terms of all the things that seamen do, because we don't have a separate marine branch—so you go through basic training. After basic training, you spend a certain amount of time, usually on a vessel at sea. I spent time on a mine sweeper, then after that was sent on a radar operator's course, completed that, then spent time on a frigate, the President Kruger, and was then transferred from that frigate to the staff of Staff Officer, Intelligence, at Maritime Headquarters in Jansveld.

Q: Was that transferral to intelligence an interest on your part, or was that a decision of one of your supervisors?

A: My CO, my commanding officer at the time, decided that that would be a sensible thing to do with me at that point.

Q: So you stayed in the Navy from 1966 to 1969, then?

A: Middle of '69.

Q: From then, my impression is that you went on to become a political officer in Teheran?

A: Not quite, no. At that stage, well, I left the Navy largely because I
was asked to participate in a project that, because it involved a significant amount of overseas training, which would have obviously cost the Navy quite an amount of money, would have involved my actually signing a contract to serve in the South African Navy for seven years after the completion of that further training.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And, I was, I guess, twenty years of age at that stage and seven years looked like an awfully long time and I just wasn’t prepared to bind myself down for that long. I also had a sense that as I had an undergraduate degree out of the way at that stage, I needed to decide what I was going to do in the longer term, both academically and professionally, and my original intention at that point was to go overseas and do some post-graduate study. In fact, I started to do that, actually had left to go to the United Kingdom for a program of study associated with the University of Cambridge.

Q: Cambridge?

A: Then a number of factors came together. One, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange collapsed rather dramatically toward the end of 1969. Much of the money that I was relying on—I’d taken a very independent stance vis-à-vis my parents by that stage, and much of the money that I was relying on to support me during the period that I was going to be in the United Kingdom was declining in value very significantly. And, in addition to that, the beginnings of a ruckus associated with the relations between the government of the United Kingdom and the government of South Africa were flaring up in connection with the Simonstown agreement, and when I’d been in the Navy that had been a particular field of endeavor and interest, and I’d written a certain amount about it. So, in London at that stage, I became drawn into that debate and I eventually went back—in March or April of that year, I couldn’t put a finger on it now—I went back to South Africa, having become convinced, or been convinced, that the way in which to pursue those particular interests was through the Department of Foreign Affairs. So, I then joined the Department of Foreign Affairs in about May of 1970 and registered at the same time for law studies and then found myself transferred within about three and a half months, I suppose, of having joined the department, to Shiraz, in Iran, where the Iranian government had a fairly impressive English language university known as Pahlavi University. The Department, which had just concluded, or was just about to formally conclude, diplomatic relations with Iran, had in fact offered a number of scholarships to Iranian students to study at South African universities—and the Iranians felt obliged, or felt the wish, to reciprocate at this stage. The Department thus looked around through its ranks for people who would be in a position to make some sort of a contribution to its reservoir of skills, and perhaps to the university, by taking up that particular scholarship, and two of us were sent off to Pahlavi University at the beginning of the 1971—no, I beg your pardon,—the ’70-’71 academic year—and that was how I ended up in Iran. We stayed at Pahlavi University studying Persian, ancient Iranian history, Iranian civilization, and a variety of other Middle Eastern-oriented courses for that aca-
demic year, after which I was transferred up to the South African Consulate General in Teheran to exercise oversight responsibilities over the Consulate Division of the Administrative Division and to do political reporting.

Q: You've attended quite a few colleges. I also have noted that you went to the University of South Africa. Was that...?

A: No, the University of South Africa is the original examining body for South African universities. Originally, the different universities were, in fact, colleges of the University of South Africa. There are different universities—Stellenbosch, Capetown, Natal Free State, and so on,—which have since been spawned off into individual universities, and the University of South Africa itself now retains a residual function associated chiefly with examinations, but also with the provision of tuition, through written lectures and the like. In other words, it's an institution—I guess it now has about 40,000 students, probably worldwide, but obviously chiefly in South Africa—and it offers a range of degrees both at undergraduate and graduate level which do not entail extended periods of residence at the university. In other words, if somebody is already, for example, in professional employment and cannot take the time off to go and do a full-scale residential course at the university, he can, in fact, get a degree through the University of South Africa while continuing his professional employment.

Q: Next you went on for 3 1/2 years as political counselor at the South African Embassy in Washington, D. C.?

A: That's a little bit of jumping. I was in Iran for a little over five years—from, what was it, September, 1970, to the end of December, 1975. I then went back to South Africa. When I was back in South Africa, I was posted to the Economic and Financial Relations Division of the department, in which I was responsible for relations with economic institutions such as IMF, the International Bank for Reconstructions and Development, the World Bank, IDA, IFC, the European Community, and so on. I also did a range of special projects associated with South Africa's international economic policy. That continued until, I suppose, about September or October, 1977, when I was asked to go and take over as the officer in charge of the departmental training division, which is an outfit that performs, in a tiny fashion, much the same role as the Foreign Service performs vis-à-vis the U. S. Department of State. In other words, we have extended 14-month and new-entry courses for persons joining the Department for the first time, and we do a certain amount of administrative—managerial—and policy-level training for more senior officers on an ad hoc basis.

Q: Had you gone through the same training when you first started?

A: No, the division was brought into existence in 1973; it was after I joined.

Q: At the conclusion, then, you went to Washington, D. C.?


Q: And spent 3 1/2 years there as a political counselor. What did that involve for you?
A: Well, it basically involved the range of financial relationships between the United States and South Africa, liaison with the Executive Branch, the Department of State, the National Security Council staff dealing with South African issues, with the Defense, CIA, other communities that deal in that particular area, with the Congress, particularly those committees that have some form of oversight responsibility either over African issues in general, or over issues of international economics and trade, or perhaps arms control issues, or any issues that affect the relationship between the two countries. And then, in addition to that, academic interest groups, and so on.

Q: I read Dr. Munger’s book, *Notes on the Formation of South African Foreign Policy,* and he noted that South African diplomats in the United States encountered a lot of hostility toward the general policies of South Africa and toward apartheid. They also tended to become a little bit embittered after a lot of exposure to this.

A: I think it’s an observation which was particularly true at the time that Professor Munger was writing that book. It was a relatively new experience at that stage; one has to understand that South Africa had just left the Commonwealth in 1961, and was thus, if you will, for the first time pursuing a changed world role. It was associated with the range of perceptions about its policies and about the sense of disjunction between what it was doing and what was happening historically on the continent of Africa at that stage. I’m sure that it probably did result in a great deal of frustration and lack of comprehension on the part of many South African diplomats that their role was so misunderstood. I think the problem has, to a considerable extent, been reduced by the passage of time. It is true that some hostility is still encountered, but I think a range of developments since then have contributed significantly to making that less acute. First, the specialists that one tends to deal with mostly in respect to African policy have in many cases acquired a more sophisticated understanding of these issues. Second, I think it’s more widely appreciated today that the entire process of African decolonization has scarcely been a resounding success, and the types of concerns that are presumed to be in the minds of South African government officials are much better understood today than they were before. The extent of personal hostility that one encounters is slight today. I certainly don’t encounter any significant amount.

Q: I would expect that any professional political officer dealing with the situation would have long ago tempered his feelings . . . .

A: And have acquired a greater degree of understanding of the way different facets lock together.

Q: I know, as a normal civilian, that there is a lot of uneducated bad feeling toward South Africa. Do you come into contact with that?

A: Certainly, I do come in contact with it, but if I don’t react aggressively to it, and if I take the posture: think about it this way and look at it that way, and have you ever thought of this, and so on, then most people do tend to understand fairly quickly that the stereotypical view on which they were basing their aggression is not necessarily well founded, and there tends to be some fairly swift re-
consideration. I don’t find it particularly useful to get involved in slinging matches or irrational arguments with people. I defer to everyone’s right to have their own opinion about everything and if people are interested in my perspective on the subject I’ll be delighted to give it.

Q: What about the boycott of the South African athletes from the Montreal Olympics?

A: One of the more hypocritical elements of the way in which South Africa is dealt with internationally today is the fact that it alone of all the many countries on the face of the planet is not permitted to participate in Olympic sport. If that is a measure of the extent of our transgressions measured against those of other states, then no conventional assessment thereof, not by any of the groups that get involved in the rating of such transgressions, would sustain the analysis. One has to conclude that it’s hypocritical. It’s not a pleasing factor. It’s a very distressing one, but it’s a reality of life at present.

Q: Does further action from the boycott side tend to work against what the implementers of the boycott had intended, and further embitter the South African government?

A: It’s not really even a function of the government. It’s a matter of people in general. You know, Sydney Maree, for example, who’s a black South African middle distance runner who was on the verge of setting the world records in the mile and three mile in 1977-78, finding himself unable to do that from South Africa, was offered a scholarship to come to Villanova University in the States. He came along to Villanova on an academic scholarship—or rather, a sports scholarship—he participated at college level, did superbly, was setting world standard times, but was prohibited from participating in national or international events because he came from South Africa. If that isn’t totally self-defeating: here was a black South African athlete seeking to acquire a measure of excellence, but because he came from South Africa, he wasn’t allowed to participate, even in the United States. It—the mind boggles.

Q: Starting on July 1, 1982, you became Consul General?

A: For the 12 states, essentially Alaska through Hawaii—of the conventional thirteen Western states. It excluded only New Mexico, which falls under Houston, where we have another office.

Q: How many people of your rank are there in the United States?

A: We have an embassy in Washington, which has approximately forty South African officials, and about the same number of locally employed officials. We have Consulates General in New York, Chicago, Houston, and Beverly Hills, and in essence those Consulates General divide up the 50 states among them. In other words, we all have about 12 states under us. At each one of those missions, there would be something between probably six and ten officials from South Africa, with probably another ten or fifteen locally recruited officials. Our total strength here at this one is 25 at the moment.

Q: In Dr. Munger’s book, he suggests that the main concepts and thrusts of South African foreign policy originated in the minds of just a few people. Back
then, Prime Minister Verwoerd was the most striking example. Is that still the case?

**A:** I think there's an inevitable maturation association with participation at the international level. In other words, once again, one has to remember that the book was written at a time when South Africa's international relationships had just emerged from an embryonic stage.

**Q:** Four or five years old.

**A:** Prior to that they had been incorporated within the general ambit of British Commonwealth policies, as it were. And at that stage, the concept of, or the nature of, an independent foreign policy was obviously not one that many people had given much thought to. We weren't dealing with a developed international studies discipline, or range of disciplines, in South Africa, and therefore there wasn't much academic work being done there. That was probably the first book written on South African policy at that stage. Things have changed an awful lot since then. The type of complaint that one gets today from the academic community is very similar to the type of complaint that practitioners in the United States get: academics are frustrated about not being drawn into the policy process to a greater extent. There's a very enthusiastic debate about the principles and processes of foreign policy.

**Q:** Another problem noted back then was that only about 10% of the staff were English-speaking.

**A:** Foreign Affairs has traditionally been a department which has perhaps had, certainly in terms of the public services, a disproportionately high percentage of English-speaking staff, inter alia because it wasn't an area that there was any particular immediate interest in Afrikaans speakers at an earlier stage. There was a tendency in the 30's and the 40's, during the formative years of the original department, which was part of the Department of the Prime Minister, there was a tendency, I think, to be comparatively insular with regard to the immediate policy priorities in South Africa. It was perhaps to a greater extent those with an English-speaking heritage, who had a sense of relationship to a world outside of South Africa, that led many of them into the department at that stage. Today, I would be hard pressed to come up with a figure, but I suspect that you'd find that something like 30%, probably, of the department would have English as a first language and about 70% would have Afrikaans as a first language, but that distinction blurs very much in practice. My own home language is as much Afrikaans as it is English, it really doesn't make any particular difference. My wife's home language is Afrikaans. When we arrived in the United States, the children having been born in Teheran and been back in South Africa for three years before coming here, they actually arrived in the country speaking no English—or perhaps twenty-five words of English—on their arrival. The irony of it is, of course, that having had all of their formal education in the United States so far, they now speak Afrikaans badly and still don't speak English. If I can be facetious, they speak very good American! (Laughter)
Q: All right, I take that as an insult! (Laughter) You are married then. When were you married?
Q: Was this someone you met in Iran, then?
A: No no no. No, I met her in South Africa.
Q: Getting back to the main thrust of this discussion, what are your personal responsibilities as Consul General beyond administration?
A: From a personal perspective, my own objective is to try to ensure that, given the fact that the West has assumed a particular significance, at least during the present administration, those who influence decision-makers in Washington as a result of long-standing contact with them, whether of an academic or a professional or a personal character, also develop some understanding of the issues that are at stake in terms of the relationship between South Africa and the United States.
Q: You seem to me to be younger than the typical image of a diplomat that I have in my head, being only 34, going on 35. Do you see yourself remaining in this position for a while and just consolidating for a few years and then continuing on, or what?
A: I think that the types of issues that we confront in the context of South Africa are going to have to be addressed very fundamentally within the next few years. I don't think that one is looking at quite the same sort of situation as one is perhaps in a country like France or the United States at this stage. I have very strong feelings about the need to get building blocks into place as soon as possible that will ensure that an accommodation can be sustained in South Africa over the longer time. I suspect — and this is not, in any sense, a declaration of intent at the moment — but I suspect that I will come increasingly to believe within the next probably eighteen months to two years that the contributions I have to make to that process are going to be made more effectively in South Africa, within the ambit of either advisory or elective politics in the next four or five years.
Q: What is your relationship with the South African government at this stage, in terms of how much they control you, and just how independent do you feel?
A: Oh, no. One works, you know, one represents the government — that's the essence of diplomacy. You are the representative of your government to another government, in exactly the same sense that.... Let me back up a little on that — I don't mean to strive to define what I think the role of a diplomat is. A diplomat, if he's any good at his job, is somebody who understands his own political environment well enough to make it intelligible to the authorities in the receiving state, and who understands the local political environment in the state in which he's resident well enough to make it intelligible to his own authorities at home. Therefore, the primary function of the diplomat in that context is the communication of those opportunities inside certain aspects of policy which will promote better understanding of the parameters of policy on
both sides of his communicational channels, as it were. Now, that means that if I can do my job at all effectively, I can do it on the basis of making intelligible to American policy-makers what is happening in South Africa, what the government intends to do. It also means that I'm required to make intelligible to the South African government what is happening in the United States, and what the reaction of the United States is likely to be to a variety of possible developments in respect to South Africa. Now, that gives me a great deal of intellectual independence, but in a formal sense of representational responsibility, obviously makes me derivative and unoriginal.

Q: That covers all my major questions. I wanted to ask, though, if you have published any articles.

A: We're not encouraged to publish, for very simple reasons. The ordinary process requires so much clearance by governmental authority because of the fact that, obviously, when we write, our views are attributed to the government rather than to the individual. It's very difficult if one is in a representative mode. But I've obviously written a fair amount, some of which has found its way into the public domain.

Thank you for your letter of December 15 regarding my talk at Caltech. I think you may have misunderstood the thrust of my message: It was not "don't criticise us now"—it is a moot point whether anyone in one nation has any business "criticising" other nations—but rather, "when reaching conclusions about our society, try to do so with an understanding of the circumstances—social, political, developmental and cultural—which we have to grapple with when facing the challenges, difficulties and opportunities which confront us." Please think about the difference between these two messages: the first would have been as presumptuous and as futile as any "criticism" that you might have offered; the second—which I sought to communicate—is a prerequisite to informed comment of any kind.

Let me respond briefly to the points you raise. My comments will not satisfy you fully, both because of their terseness and because the issues are more complex than either one of us can do justice to in this sort of correspondence. Perhaps, however, they will stimulate further thought.

1. "... change will not occur without constructive criticism."

Of course not! Change in policies occurs because policymakers (whether an elite or broadly representative of the whole of a society) change their minds about the utility (which concept has an ethical component) of those policies. Such a change of mind can result either from new insights, or from an increase in the cost (in social, political or economic terms) of pursuing a particular policy. Healthy spirited debate, the expression of strongly held views, protest and demonstration all contribute to this process. But remember three things:

First, you personally/students in general/American citizens/etc. have no monopoly of concern or of opportunity to express "constructive criticism." That—in respect of South African society—is chiefly the prerogative of South Africans, all of us, and it is presumptuous to imagine that your "criticism" is a prerequisite for change.

Second, "change" is not a "good," an ethical ideal; it is a process. It is not a matter of things needing to change—as though change were an end in itself—the simple reality is that things do change. It is the characteristic feature of existence. One does not therefore strive for "change" but rather for specific goals. When seeking to reform a society, it is necessary to contemplate and define those goals and to develop strategies to achieve them. It requires much understanding of the dynamics of the society in
question. I sought to convey some understanding of those dynamics in
my talk to Professor Munger’s seminar.
Third, “change” is inexorable, there is no natural or divine law which
says it will be beneficial. Much “change” has been disastrous when mea-
sured on an historical scale—the rise of National Socialism eventually
leading to the Holocaust; the Stalinist era; the Bolshevik Revolution; the
transformation of Iran after the fall of the Shah; the presidency of Idi
Amin in Uganda; the imperial reign of Emperor Bokassa of the Central
African Empire; the wars between India and Pakistan following the decoloniza-
tion of British India; the plight of the Palestinians after the 1948 war between
Israel and the Arab states, the emergence of the PLO, Black September in Jordan
and the role of the PLO since that time. Most other “change” brings a mixed bag
of blessings and curses; some are hurt and some advantaged. One’s assessment
depends largely on one’s perspective. This realization breeds humility, caution,
and reflection.

So much for the general observation; now to your specific criticisms:

2. “An average black, on half a modest income for one student must
support a family of, say, four.”

Understand firstly, that the assumption of the person drafting the SAFTO ad-
vice is that the reader is an American college student used to an American life-
style. If you have travelled at all, you will know how many things which are tak-
en for granted by middle class youth in this society are regarded as extraordi-
nary luxuries in many other parts of the world. The lifestyle that one would be
in a position to afford on R500 - R650 per month in South Africa would approxi-
mate to that which a middle class college student, with a part-time job, would
enjoy in the U.S.A. One would suffer no privations, but would not be able
to save for the future or pay a mortgage.

This simply underlines the vast disparities between average incomes in
the industrialized societies and those of the Third World. In South Africa this
reality is sharply apparent. A majority of the population is not fully integrated
into the market economy, which, in terms relative to the U.S. economy, is minis-
cule. The South Africa GNP (under R60 billion in 1980) pales into insignifi-
cance when set against the U.S.A.’s $2700 billion in the same year—or even the
$179 billion generated in the Los Angeles 60-mile circle in 1980.

Even with the enormous resources at your disposal, which could be ap-
plied (and have been, in large measure) to eliminate similar disparities in
the income patterns in your society, black family income is markedly
below that of whites, black unemployment is about twice that of whites
and black teenage unemployment presently is about 50 percent. Your
black community is more or less numerically equivalent to South Afri-
a’s, although better educated, more urbanized and more easily cultur-
ally assimilable (language, tribal identity, cultural patterns); so the scale
of the resources potentially available to both societies in order to pro-
vide basic and remedial education and training is highly relevant.

The fact that you have problems does not diminish ours, nor lessen the need for
our resolve to address them. It ought to put ours into perspective, however, and to induce a sense of empathy. One ought, moreover, to note that we do seek to ameliorate these disparities—even as you do—in several different ways. Bread, corn meal and milk, staples in the diets of the urban poor (particularly blacks) in South Africa, are all heavily subsidized to hold prices down. Basic sub-economic housing is provided at exceedingly low rentals to black urban residents. The average rental per dwelling unit (including service charges), for SOWETO residents was 527 per month (or eight percent of the average SOWETO family’s monthly income of 5338) in March 1979. At the same time a real—albeit gradual—redistribution of income is occurring. The real average income of blacks, Asians and coloureds rose by more than 40 percent between 1970 and 1979 while the real average income of whites declined by three percent over the same period.

When thinking about education in South Africa, please bear in mind that it is Africa we are speaking about, not Europe or the USA. Despite the pressing need for education throughout Africa, only 9.7 percent of the continent’s population outside of South Africa is at school. Over 21 percent of blacks in South Africa (about 25 percent of the whites and 29 percent of the coloured and Asian communities) are at school. Surely that is a meaningful measure (albeit not the only one) of the utility of the system of government. The government has announced the goal of equalizing the standard and has made important strides in this direction in recent years. Between 1972 and 1981—to add to the figures you cite—there was a tenfold increase in government spending on black education, more than twice the increase in spending on education for whites, over the same period. Per capita expenditure on black education increased by 230 percent between 1975 and 1980. Since then there have been cumulative increases of 26 percent, 42 percent and 51 percent in successive budgets. Comparative statistics are, moreover, misleading. Whereas the statistics for white per capita spending usually cited include the cost of physical plant—buildings, sports fields etc.—those for black per capita expenditures do not, simply because such outlays are not budgeted for by the Department of Education and Training (which provides educational services) but by the Department of Cooperation and Development, various Administration Boards and (ethnic) national governments.

The ideal of equality of educational standards will not, however, be easily achieved. The Economic Research Unit at the University of Stellenbosch has calculated that equalizing such expenditures at the level currently applicable to white education, would require spending on education of an amount almost double the national budget—i.e. double the total of present government expenditure on all services (defense, health, housing, education etc.). Whites, providing the great bulk of the taxpayers—and thus sources of government revenues—will not, understandably, easily agree to a reduction in the standard of education presently available to them, any more than Americans would be likely to agree to a reallocating of the U.S. education budget to pay for the education of South Africans, on the grounds that the economic success of U.S. industry is in part a function of the low cost of chrome and
manganese mined and refined in South Africa.
The thrust of the message which I want to leave with you, however, is
that education and training are recognized as being of crucial im-
portance and that, within the parameters of financial and political reality,
effort is being, and will be further, given to that recognition.

3. "Trade unions around the world have protested the detentions in No-

vember and December of more than a dozen black trade union leaders."

(You extrapolate this to include Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela.)

No one gets arrested for being a trade unionist or performing trade
union functions. The government's White Paper in response to the Wie-
hahn Commission's Report, expressly guaranteed to all workers:

- the right to fair remuneration and equitable conditions of service;
- the right of access to training and retraining;
- the right to organize and belong to employee organizations;
- the right to protection against unfair labor practices; among several
other rights.

The Labor Relations Act of 1956 (as extensively amended after the gov-

ternment's acceptance of the recommendations of the Wiehahn Commission)
provides for a new labor dispensation without reference to race, color or sex.
The Minister of Manpower announced four basic guidelines:

- Maximum self-governance and minimum state intervention in the
private relationships between an employer and an employee;
- Maximum self-governance and decision-making by trade unions in
the conduct of their own affairs;
- All workers should be free to sell or not to sell their services, and
to sell them to the highest bidder;
- Orderly and disciplined labor relations should be maintained.

No one can imagine that the government would have gone to the trou-
ble of revising the entire framework of labor relations—legislatively, admin-
istratively and philosophically—to strengthen trade unionism and include
blacks in the labor union system, if it intended to hamper the organization of la-
bor. It is indeed the government's belief that—as you express it—"the organiza-
tion of labor (will) benefit both the employees and the country by raising the
employee standard of living and allowing increased production through orga-
nization." What the government will not permit—indeed cannot, in the interest
of the common good—is the misuse of labor organizations and the process of
strike and negotiation to the advancement of the economic interests of
the union members and of the whole society, but to disruption of the
economy and mass strike action to destabilize the social order as a pre-
lude to revolution.

If one reflects thereon, it is not surprising that some political activists
with a radical agenda have elected to use (particularly) black trade unions—as
opposed to mixed unions—to achieve their goals. There is general agreement
that black unions are among the most potent vehicles for social change in South
Africa today and there is presently a dearth of alternative vehicles perceived by
urban blacks as legitimate, for the expression of political objectives. But no one
who hopes for a more democratic future for South Africa can ask the gov-
ernment to allow activists who seek to bring about a collapse of the present polit-
ico-economic system, to work their will through incitement of illegal
strikes, physical and psychological intimidation of workers who wish to
return to work, and political rabble-rousing unrelated to matters in dis-
pute in the workplace. In the medium-term, the problem of such activity
will be alleviated and eventually eliminated by the emergence of vehicles,
which urban blacks perceive as legitimate, for the articulation of political griev-
ances and interests. This falls within the realm of constitutional planning,
about which I said a good deal at Caltech.
Parenthetically, neither Mr. Mandela nor Mr. Biko had anything to do
with labor unions. Mr. Biko’s circumstances, which, unfortunate though
they unquestionably were, did result in a salutary shake-up of the guide-
lines regarding the treatment of detainees, are known to you. Mr. Man-
dela was convicted, inter alia, of sabotage in that he recruited others for
the purpose of, and himself engaged in, the preparation, manufacture
and use of explosives; and military training, including guerrilla training,
for the purpose of causing a violent revolution. “Operation Mayibuye,”
the operational blueprint of Umkonto we Sizwe, of which Mr. Mandela was one
of the leaders, made provision for a guerrilla attack by “four groups of 30 based
on our present resources, either by ship or air, armed and properly equipped in
such a way as to be self-sufficient in every respect for at least a month.”
Once the guerrilla groups were in place, and had engaged in further
recruitment to create a guerrilla force of some 7000 persons, the operational
plan envisaged an invasion by an external force directed from the ANC office at
Dar es Salaam. “Operation Mayibuye” noted:

“In the initial period and for a short (while) while the military advantage will
be ours, the plan envisages a massive onslaught on preselected targets
which will create maximum havoc and confusion in the enemy camp…. In
this period the corner-stone of guerrilla operations is ‘shamelessly attack
the weak and shamelessly flee from the strong.’”

Another document introduced at Mr. Mandela’s trial read as follows:

“Production Requirements: 210,000 handgrenades; 48,000 anti-personnel
mines; 1,500 time devices for bombs; 144 tons of ammonium nitrate; 21.6
tons of aluminum powder and 15 tons of black powder.”

It is not surprising that Mr. Mandela was sentenced to a long period of
imprisonment:

4. “… I see much mistreatment of prisoners which has resulted even
in the death of some, such as Biko.”

Newspapers in South Africa and in the U.S.A. have indeed noted that
more than fifty people have died while in police custody in South Africa
since 1963. Such deaths in detention are to be deeply regretted and have
resulted in more clearly defined procedures in lock-ups and prisons to
prevent recurrences. But in fairness to South Africa—and particularly the
South African Police—one does need to see these deaths in perspec-
itive.
According to the *Times* (London) of April 13, 1982, statistics for the period 1970-80 indicate that 336 deaths occurred in police custody in England and Wales (excluding Northern Ireland and Scotland). In addition, between 1969 and 1979, there were 631 deaths in prison of which 226, as determined by inquest, were due to unnatural causes or suicide.

Nearer to home, the *Chicago Sun-Times* of March 1, 1982, reports that Chicago Police Superintendent Richard J. Brzezczek last October issued a directive designed to reduce lock-up suicides after 17 prisoners had died by handling in city lock-ups during the previous 22 months. You may also be aware of Mr. Ron Settles who was found hanged in his Signal Hill (California) jail cell on June 2, 1981 and the subsequent coroner’s inquest jury which ruled 5-4 that “Settles died at the hand of another.” (*Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, March 25, 1982.)

I mention these statistics only to make the point that deaths in detention occur in other countries which maintain high standards of criminal justice and administrative control of police and prison authorities and that South Africa is in no sense unique in this regard. It is unfortunate that some reputable newspapers and political commentators, however, fall into the trap of assuming the worst about South Africa, even when dispassionate evaluation of the evidence discloses no more—in most cases—than untested allegations by persons whose objectivity cannot, in the circumstances, be considered to be beyond reproach.

Western systems of law and justice have been premised on the maxim “innocent until proven guilty” for many centuries, precisely to guard against such pitfalls. One ought perhaps to bear the principle in mind.

The most recent step taken by the government to ensure that detainees are not subjected to torture or any form of degradation and are treated in an humane manner at all times, is the publication on November 24 of a code of conduct binding on all members of the South African Police. The provisions regarding treatment of detainees, which were previously contained in departmental directives, have now been codified and noncompliance with the code will result in criminal prosecution in addition to disciplinary action. A comprehensive procedure involving both regular visits by judicial officers and district surgeons (medical doctors) to detainees and prisoners and a system of mandatory review of detention orders and prison conditions is also in effect, to eliminate and prevent abuse of authority.

I hope these responses have been of some use to you, if only to come to grips with the complexity of South Africa, or indeed of most human societies. Little is cast in terms of black and white; moral ambiguity is almost all-pervasive. The majority of sojourners on our planet, including you and me, are very imperfect beings doing their best to handle the challenges we all confront. One ought not to be too arrogant about the attempts of others.

You conclude with the observation that: “History seems to suggest... that great changes do not take place slowly, but quickly, and generally through revolution.” I’m not sure how much history
you've read but would refer you, for a divergent view—which accords largely with my own—to a recent essay on the subject of revolution by Professor Bob Nisbet, published this year as part of a catalogue of essays under the title, Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary, by the Harvard University Press. In case it is not yet available at Caltech, I shall enclose a photocopy of the essay.

Of course revolution could come to South Africa, but if it were to, it would be as a result of the collapse of government, the erosion of its legitimacy to such a point that it no longer had the capacity, or will, to sustain itself. Those who seek to promote revolution have as their goal the destruction of the government's legitimacy, both internationally and domestically. Those of us in South Africa who know that revolution would be a catastrophe for all in our country, have an obligation to advance the government's legitimacy by constructive reform in the direction of greater inclusivity, while recognizing the enormous challenges posed by cultural diversity and developmental and socio-economic disparity. Those outside of the country who would avert cataclysm, would be well advised to oppose the irresponsible and often malevolent onslaughts on the legitimacy of the process of evolutionary adaption already underway.

Thank you for writing. My best wishes for a successful New Year.

Sincerely yours,

Sean M. Cleary
Consul General
Appendix: Mayor Tom Bradley and His Accusers

Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles, who came within 5% of being elected Governor of California, is one of the better informed American public officials on South Africa. I have spoken with him at length on the subject on two social occasions. One was in the company of the Nigerian Ambassador at the United Nations and head of the anti-apartheid committee. Bradley, who was defeated by Mayor Sam Yorty in a racially bitter campaign before Bradley won four years later, needs no one's defense of his position in opposing any form of racial discrimination.

It is ironic that the Washington Office on Africa and a small group of local critics have heavily castigated him in leaflets, with protest placards, and in picketing his home, all on the grounds that he met with Sean Cleary and presented, as he does to all accredited foreign representatives, the symbolic key to Los Angeles.

His bitter critics have attempted to interpret this action as being a "support for apartheid." They ask Bradley to make an independent decision on what countries he chooses to recognize or not to recognize.

This is even more laced with irony in light of a major criticism of his predecessor as Mayor. Sam Yorty was wont to conduct his own foreign policy when he was Mayor. He was frequently ridiculed by the media and indirectly criticized by the State Department for deciding what countries Los Angeles would recognize and which it would refuse to do business with—largely countries categorized in McCarthy-like terms as "red."

One's mind reels at the thought of every American mayor conducting his or her own foreign policy and disregarding official federal protocol. One does not need to be a constitutional lawyer to accept that the federal government has jurisdiction on matters of national recognition and diplomatic exchange.

Just take California as an example. Governor George Deukmejian told a group of 10,000 fellow Armenian-Americans that he was convinced that the Turkish government murdered over 1.5 million Armenians in 1915. The classic case of post World War I genocide. The Turkish consular offices in Los Angeles have often been the target of enraged Armenians, including the throwing of Molotov cocktails. A Turkish Consul General was murdered two years ago. Should the Governor withdraw the protection of the State from such a consulate because of his personal views? Or is he open to the charge of "protecting Turks?"

During her recall campaign, Mayor Dianne Feinstein of San Francisco was featured on the CBS program "60 Minutes." One of her critics, a prominent Filipino resident of Baghdad by the Bay, denounced the Mayor for receiving President Marcos of the Phillipines.

It is fair to say that Mayor Bradley is not the only official in Los Angeles to be picketed for association with Sean Cleary as South African Consulate General. At a farewell reception for Cleary, attended by most of the consular corps, the outstanding Kenyan diplomat, Mr. Sam C. Okungu, was picketed by some of his personal friends for his attendance. ("Nothing personal," they said
to an interviewer on the sidewalk outside the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.)

There is always the possibility that frank dialogue between such men as Bradley and Okungu on the one hand, and Cleary on the other, could contribute to some small degree to a peaceful solution to the problems of racial injustice in South Africa. The Kenyan was frankly impressed with Cleary's grasp of the political scene in Southern Africa. This does not imply any acceptance of the South African view on the part of Consul General Okungu and certainly not of his government. A significant development in recent years has been the marked increase in private contacts between senior African diplomats and South African diplomats, led most spectacularly by the Angolan-South African meetings, both those in secret and those which have been publicized.

Mayor Bradley's critics are sincere and genuinely concerned about injustice in South Africa. Many are appalled that he would appear to honor a representative of the devil by handing over a key to the City of Angels. Some of the Bradley critics are white and some are black. As a black mayor heading a city that is around 10% or less black, Bradley makes a great effort to see that all communities are represented on his staff and that he, in turn, fairly represents all his constituents and not just one section. One result is that Bradley has been criticized from time to time as "not doing enough for the brothers."

On the other hand, he has a number of key aides who are black and has certainly supported the principle of equal opportunity employment, clashing when occasion demanded it with such powerful satraps as the Police Department.

The unfair attack on Tom Bradley appeared to have died out as we went to press with this issue, whereupon at a concert at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles in June, 1983, Harry Belafonte made reference to it from the stage and pointedly invited the Mayor to his dressing room after the show.

Subsequently, I asked Tom Bradley, "What happened?"

"Oh nothing, Ned," he replied, "I did go back stage, but," and his mouth assumed a characteristically sly grin, "Belafonte never mentioned South Africa."

Unchanged in Bradley's determination to promote trade between Los Angeles and various black African countries. The most recent trade mission of his "African Task Force" went to Liberia. But before it left Bradley devoted a whole morning to join Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Leonard Robinson, and Liberian Investment Chairman Trohse Kparghai, in a thorough briefing of the black and white American business leaders who paid to go on the mission.

Bradley has been outstanding among American mayors of major cities in prompting trade ties with Africa. His "Mayor's Africa Task Force" is one of the most successful such groups operating under a grant from the U. S. Department of Commerce. Bradley has made two trips to black Africa for the purpose of promoting the trade of Los Angeles-based industries. Most recently, he attended the African-American Institute meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Tom Bradley is an outstanding American whose perseverance against great odds and often blatant racial discrimination has led him to a position of great respect in the state of California. He is a possible Vice Presidential candidate in 1984 and, given the swirling tides of history, possibly the first black President of the United States.

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