

**PFP-ANC Meeting  
Lusaka, 12 and 13 October 1985**

In July 1985, when I was member of parliament for the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) in the Durban Central constituency, our family went on holiday to Zimbabwe to visit my parents-in-law in Harare.

Prior to that, I had on occasion met Howard Barrell in Natal. He lived on the North Coast and I probably met him at one or other PFP event in that area. I was aware that he was a political activist and that his political views were to the left of the PFP and sympathetic towards the banned ANC. At the time, we did not know that Howard was involved in the ANC underground. My wife, Shelagh, had also been in touch with Howard Barrell about her book "Who's Who in South African Politics" which she was busy updating for the next edition. Howard had contact with the ANC in Lusaka and had assisted her to obtain biographical information about its leaders in exile. By July 1985 Howard had moved to Harare.

During our holiday in Harare my wife and I decided to contact Howard. We met on the terrace of a Harare department store for tea and snacks. It was a relaxed and friendly get-together in an environment that was still very much "Rhodesian". Howard added a touch intrigue to our discussion when he suddenly warned us not to raise our voices because he had recognised a member of the Zimbabwean intelligence services who was sitting two tables away from us. During our discussion, my wife and I broached the topic of contact with the ANC leadership in Lusaka. I inquired whether he thought that the ANC leaders in Lusaka might be receptive towards a meeting with the PFP leadership. The purpose would be to have discussions and exchange views about the political way forward in South Africa. Even though I was the vice chairman of the Federal Executive Committee of the PFP, I had no mandate from the party to arrange such a meeting. The discussions were therefore purely exploratory, and Howard undertook to "test the temperature" in Lusaka. I envisaged that a small group from the PFP leadership could travel to Lusaka for the meeting but that I would first discuss this possibility with the party leader, Dr van Zyl Slabbert to establish whether the party would support such a meeting.

I told Howard that on my return to South Africa I would meet with Dr van Zyl Slabbert to discuss the idea. Howard would do the same with the ANC leadership in Lusaka. We agreed that this whole matter would be dealt with in the strictest confidence and that no one else should know about it. We agreed that if both the PFP and ANC leadership were positive about a meeting in Lusaka, then it would be necessary to have a preliminary meeting of ANC and PFP representatives in Harare to discuss logistics and agree on an agenda for the Lusaka meeting. Howard was willing to arrange such an initial Harare meeting.

We were all conscious of the political sensitivity and potential controversy around this initiative within South Africa and that the South African security

police were likely to monitor us or tap Howard's, or even my phone, if they were to become aware of our plans. We just assumed that visits to Zimbabwe were monitored and that Howard was on the radar screens of the South African security police. We therefore agreed that we would in future communicate via my wife Shelagh through code language. As the latest edition of Shelagh's book was about to be published, we agreed that we would proceed on the basis that our Harare discussions over tea had centred on a possible launch of Shelagh's book in Harare. Howard would find out for us "whether a book launch in Harare was feasible," i.e. whether a meeting between PFP and ANC was feasible and communicate with us accordingly. Where the information was sensitive, we would communicate by telegram or telex.

Back at home in Durban I was keen to brief Dr Slabbert in Cape Town about the meeting with Howard Barrell but nervous about doing so over the phone. I therefore flew from Durban to Cape Town during the parliamentary recess for the sole purpose of briefing him face to face. He was very positive and supportive of the initiative and subsequently also obtained the support of Colin Eglin, the deputy leader of the PFP and Alex Boraine, chairman of the Federal Council of the party. We agreed that the four of us, constituting the senior leadership of the PFP, would keep our discussions about a Lusaka meeting confidential and that if such a meeting materialised, we would participate as the PFP delegation. No one else in the PFP was to be informed about this initiative. The risk of the initiative failing was just too great if other party colleagues were to hear of it. We assumed that if the government was to become aware of the plans it would prevent us from travelling to Lusaka.

I then informed Howard Barrell in Harare that the reaction from Dr van Zyl Slabbert and the other two PFP colleagues had been positive and that from the PFP side I had a mandate to meet with the ANC in Harare for preparatory discussions. On 28 August we received a letter from Harare, which Howard had addressed to Shelagh (see attached copy of the original). Amongst others the letter stated:

*"I am very pleased to hear your book is being well received there. It can only be a valuable intervention in the situation. As to how it will be received up here: I am not yet able to say; I have made one or two appropriate enquiries, but have not yet received the kind of judgment I feel I can rely on; I would hope to be in touch with you in a month or two on this (given the way Ravan moves in such mysterious ways its wonders to perform. That should be adequate timing)."*

It was clear that the ANC in Lusaka was positive about meeting the PFP but a firm decision would take some time. Not long after that, on 4 September 1985, I received a telegram from Howard addressed to my wife at my parliamentary address with the following content (copy attached):

*"Strong view your book will be well received here please send to be here between September sixteen and eighteen when Im available stop confirm immediately this possible phone or telex regards Howard"*

Now we knew: the preliminary meeting was to take place in Harare between September 16th and 18<sup>th</sup>. Ten days later I flew to Harare to stay with my parents in law in the suburb of Gun Hill. I phoned Howard to let him know that I was in Harare and to find out what the arrangements were. He told me that I would be meeting with someone from Lusaka on the 17<sup>th</sup> and that he would pick me up from my parents-in-law's place shortly after lunch to take me to the venue. On 17 September, he arrived on a motorbike and we drove, with me on the back of the motorbike, to a suburban house some fifteen minutes away. We had taken many turns and driven around many blocks, so I had no idea in what part of Harare we were. Only the roof of the house was visible from the road because of the high garden wall. Someone opened the high gate and let us into the premises.

In the house, sitting in the lounge, were Howard's wife Jenny, Thabo Mbeki and Chris Hani. Mbeki and Hani had a beer in front of them and Howard brought another quart bottle and a glass for me. The discussions were very relaxed with Thabo Mbeki being the most forthcoming, relaxed, and witty. Chris Hani was more withdrawn, almost as though he was assessing me. They asked me about impressions of the recent political developments in South Africa and we had an interesting general discussion about politics and about developments in South Africa, the details of which I do not recall. The one issue that I do recall related to how long it would take to defeat apartheid. I was of the view that the change would only occur well after the year 2000. Chris Hani smiled at me and confidently told me that I was wrong and that apartheid would be defeated before the end of the century, i.e., before 2000.

We agreed that the PFP delegation would consist of Van Zyl Slabbert, Eglin, Borraine, and I, and that we would meet with an ANC leadership group in Lusaka on 12 October 1985. An informal agenda was agreed upon. As a lead-in for the day's discussions, each delegation would make a presentation, which would set out its analysis of the current political situation in South Africa and about expected future developments. The presentations would also explain how the PFP and ANC thought their political programs could address the South African political deadlock. The Lusaka meeting would clearly not be about negotiations but about political discussions following the presentations made by each delegation. We agreed that no information about the Lusaka meeting should be made public and that communication would be channelled through Howard where possible. After a relaxed dinner served by Jenny Barrell, Howard took me back to Gun Hill on his motorbike.

Back in Cape Town I briefed Slabbert and we started planning the Lusaka trip. It was awkward to withhold information about the Lusaka initiative from other PFP colleagues but the risk of the visit aborting as a result was too great. Borraine and I would fly from Cape Town via Johannesburg to Lusaka while Slabbert and Eglin would arrive in Lusaka on their way back from Europe. Colin Eglin must have contacted his former parliamentary colleague and head of Anglo American Corporation in Zambia, Dr Zach de Beer, to assist with logistical arrangements because I received three telegrams from Zach de Beer on 4 October relating to arrangements at our arrival at the airport in

Lusaka. One matter that appeared to have irritated Zach de Beer related to a possible appointment for the PFP delegation with the Zambian President, Dr Kenneth Kaunda. Slabbert, Eglin, Boraine, and I had earlier on agreed that we would attempt to arrange a courtesy call to the President but I cannot recall how that was to happen. From one of the telegrams received from Zach de Beer on 4 October 1985 he expressed some irritation about a meeting with President Kaunda which had been arranged without going through Anglo American channels. In the telegram, the original of which was addressed to Colin Eglin and copied to me (copy attached), Zach de Beer stated:

*“Apparently without your knowledge, Peter Gastrow must have been in contact with State House and I am now informed that Wilted Phiri will be reporting directly to him regarding the meeting. Unfortunately, my usual contact is a little put out, for reasons which I will explain when we meet. Am advised that they will be given appointment but communication will not be through us.*

*Regards*

*Before I make any comment would you please tell me what the position is as seen from your point of view.*

*Z J de Beer”*

I do not recall the circumstances surrounding the appointment that was made with State House but am under the impression that Dr Slabbert handled that personally through the ANC. Fact is that the arrangements for the Lusaka trip were all in place and I breathed a sigh of relief that nothing had leaked about the trip by the time that we left Johannesburg airport for Lusaka on 11 October 1985.

After checking into our hotel and linking up with Slabbert and Eglin we joined some of the ANC representatives for drinks at the Lusaka residence of the head of Anglo American Corporation in Zambia, who at the time was Dr Zach de Beer. He was out of the country but had made his residence and liquor cabinet available to us. The casual get-together served its purpose, namely to enable us to get to know each other and to socialise with individuals who were to be part of serious discussions on the next day.

The meeting between the two delegations on the next day, Saturday 12 October, was fascinating and relaxed, but at the same time intense. Thabo Mbeki was the head of the ANC delegation. Some of the others present were Mac Maharaj, Alfred Nzo, Thozamile Botha, and Steve Tshwete. We met in a safe ANC house with high garden walls. The discussions had to end during the afternoon but we agreed that we would meet again on Sunday morning, 13<sup>th</sup> October, to finalise a joint statement. There was no time to do so on Saturday afternoon 12<sup>th</sup> October, as we and the ANC delegation, had an appointment at State House to meet with President Kaunda. At the State House meeting, Dr Kaunda was very positive about the Lusaka meeting and encouraged both the ANC and PFP to continue with such meetings and discussions. The two delegations thereafter proceeded to enjoy a relaxed and noisy dinner at a sports or country club somewhere in Lusaka.

By Saturday afternoon Eglin and Slabbert started to receive phone calls from South Africa that suggested that the South African media had become aware of the Lusaka visit.

On Sunday morning, 13 October, the two delegations met again for about an hour during which Colin Eglin and Mac Maharaj shuttled back and forth with drafts of a joint statement before it was eventually finalised. The ANC thought it unnecessary to sign the statement but the parties agreed that Mac Maharaj should insert a last-minute hand written sentence relating to the release of Nelson Mandela. The joint statement, as copied from the original (attached), reads as follows:

***Joint Statement of the African National Congress and the  
Progressive Federal Party***

*Members of the Executive of the A.N.C. and the P.F.P. met for a day on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October and discussed a wide range of issues relevant to the current South African situation.*

*Apartheid lies at the heart of the present crisis. Both sides share the urgent need to dismantle Apartheid and to establish a united, non-racial, democratic South Africa. Both are deeply concerned to conserve the natural and human resources of our country and to remove one of the most potent factors affecting the stability of the whole Southern African region.*

*Areas of differences were discussed in a frank and cordial atmosphere. In particular there were differences on the role and centrality of the armed struggle in bringing about fundamental change.*

*On the question of a national convention as a basis for devising a constitution for a united, non-racial, democratic South Africa, the PFP explained its position that such a convention could only take place when certain conditions were met. The ANC stated that it does not consider that there has come into being at the present moment a climate under which it can begin to consider a negotiated resolution of the crisis. At the same time the ANC does not rule out for all time either a convention as a means of devising a constitution or negotiations as a means of resolving the crisis. Both believe that one of the urgent issues is to secure unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners and detainees.*

*Both sides agreed that the meeting was extremely useful and if necessary would happen again.*

*Lusaka  
13.10.1985*

The flight back to South Africa was uneventful but because the media appeared to be aware of our visit, Dr Slabbert arranged for a press conference to be held at the Johannesburg airport on our return. The attached photo was taken at the press conference at Johannesburg airport on Sunday 13 October 1985.

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