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My dear Oliver,

This letter will be a surprise, no doubt. I have not been much given to letter writing, the American telephone system being a pretty good substitute.

So I begin with diffidence. When those to whom I have neglected to write are old friends and comrades who from adversity have in the end ascended to the world

stage, that seems all the more reason for diffidence. However, Sylvester Stein (Zena's elder brother whom you probably know best in his latest role as

fundraiser) tells me that you have returned from the hospital in Stockholm and are feeling receptive to communications of a personal and domestic kind.

Forgive the format. Having it typed should relieve you of the strain of reading my handwriting.

First, let me begin with what is proper and expected but deeply felt, which is my happiness and Zena's that you are well again. Seldom as we have met over the past three decades, that was enough to keep alive our knowledge of your kindness, warmth and firm but gentle morality, qualities that among leaders in the world are even rarer than they are among humanity at large.

That assessment has something to do with the fact that I tell anyone who will listen, for what it is worth, that in South Africa we have an unprecedented possibility (and one that may not recur) for a negotiated settlement and peace. I say that for many reasons, but not least for the unMarxist one that I know the human qualities of yourself and Nelson and

Walter. Do not think that I am placing too heavy a burden on you all in the form of unrealizable expectations --you need do no more than be yourselves. In that you need no instruction. After so many steadfast years in exiled struggle or in captivity, how could you do otherwise?

Zena and I had our first intimation that you were making good progress when, toward the end of March, Walter and Nelson were able to see us. Not in prison! Not even in Soweto! but in the new ANC offices in Pritchard Street!

The offices were as yet barely furnished, but queues of seemingly important people were already waiting. Walter took us in, and at once got us all at our ease and into a personal conversation, despite an interval of 35 years.

Walter quickly turned me away from the topics of the day, and insisted we start with serious things like grandchildren. Since we had just returned from Europe, we asked news of you. He led us into another room to show us how good you looked in a large photograph of you and Nelson in Stockholm. (Today, May 22, I see the same picture on the front cover of Sechaba.) I had hardly time to look, however, before someone jumped up from behind a desk saying Mervyn! That was Kathie. He made me happy to think that he so easily penetrated the mists of 35 years.

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I actually had some business with Nelson. Just before his release, Columbia University had laid on a special ceremony for the awarding of a

honorary doctoral degree to the recent jailbird President Vaclav Havel. As

I watched Ted Koppel cover the television story of the release from Victor Verster, I thought why not Nelson likewise. The University will have a

special ceremony for him, as they did for Havel, whenever he can come. That

made me pleased to be at Columbia. The Trustees of the University agreed unanimously and at once. You may remember that the Trustees disinvested and before that, when Desmond Tutu was still restricted in his movements and

uncrowned, he too was given an honorary doctorate. Special about that affair was the way the capping took place. The Chairman of the Board (Arthur Krim, a

longtime supporter of the anti-apartheid struggle) and the President of the

University (Michael Sovern) flew together to South Africa to do it. This was only the third time that a degree was conferred off campus since Columbia was

founded more than 200 years ago.

Nelson's impending visit has just been announced. It now seems doubtful

that the honoris causae ceremony will take place on this visit. Quite properly, of course, the judgments about what he does and where he goes must

be primarily political. In an overcrowded schedule, a choice between say, the

black colleges now inviting him and Columbia is really quite tricky. At any

rate, we should all be pleased that every group in the country with a stake in

symbolic opposition to apartheid--and that is a great many--is scrambling to

get a piece of Nelson's coattails. Perhaps for many the spirit is more devout

than it looks--like worshippers who want to touch the hem of the Pope's robes-

-but some say that among the scramblers are a few sharp operators . What all this does for the movement is only good, however. For much of America, Nelson is endowed with charisma in the true sense of personal grace.

Our trip to South Africa was memorable. Our first night in Jo'burg (the night before we visited Nelson and Walter), Selma and Jules Browde (no better hosts anywhere) took us with Nadine Gordimer to a cocktail party to welcome Mary Benson. (I was impressed, upon checking our bookshelves on our return, to find five books by her there.) There we met Joel Joffe, just back

from exile in London too. Wilton Mkayi had returned with Walter from the years in prison (next day he led the postal workers down Eloff Street in a protest against privatisation). Ilsa Fischer and her husband (Tim Wilson) and Ruth Fischer and her husband (Michael Rice) were there, and a dozen others whom we knew from the old days. Tim Wilson, incidentally, is now superintendent of the Alexandra Health Center. [You may remember that Zena and I, with Michael Hathorn and Margaret Cormack, began our careers and had our South African heyday there as a medical collective. Michael, I remember, was our delegate for the Freedom Charter and brought the basic material on health to the drafting committee--more far-reaching than can fly now, I think. Working together with us at various times and in various ways were Alfred Nzo, Health Inspector, Robert Resha, social worker, Tennyson Makiwane sheltering as a clerk, both Mazekele parents and Helen Navid, whose banning led also to my dismissal--that's another story.]

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At the party we learned from Ilsa that my cousin Violet Weinberg had already left, her exile in Dar-es-Salaam for Lusaka and would be back in a few days. She was, when we saw her, in vastly better spirits for her return to her old house to join Sheila and Sheila's teen-age son Mark. There again we met old friends (among them Yusef Cachalia and Miriam and Willie Hepner).

The day before, Helen Joseph had had her 86th birthday party, and she too was visited and honored by all and sundry including Nelson and Walter. Also, while we were in Johannesburg, David Kitson with Norma visited Durban with a view to resettling there. For some reason, although David was not harassed by the authorities, Norma was sharply restricted in the duration of her stay. For those of us who were his friends, the unpretentious, matter-of-fact David has been torn by conflicts that seem not out of place in a Greek tragedy, but that do seem out of place for him.

Our brief visit to Soweto was in company with Selma, who had got involved in the electricity bill strike there and was called in because a crisis was brewing. The puppet Soweto municipal council, induced to act by the Transvaal Provincial Administrator and backed by the relevant Government Ministers, were insisting on payment of a backlog of up to 12 years. They even threatened to cut off the electricity supply. Can they be more incendiary?

To me, the most interesting thing about the affair were the allies

working with Selma, on the spot, in Soweto, in addition to the full-time and dedicated electricity ombudsman her group employed. One was a fairly high official of ESCOM. He was a "ware Afrikaner," fully committed to ESCOM as an organization, yet equally committed to a solution that would help the people of Soweto. He is, I imagine, a verligte nationalist who fully accepts the de

Klerk line and more. The other ally we visited was: the 76 (?) year old Ellen Kuzwayo, that strong and rugged ex-school teacher who founded the Women's

League of Soweto (or so I think it is called). She gave good and unhurried advice, even though she was then packing to leave in a couple of hours for

Boston, to give an address about women's issues.

We did not manage to see our old friend Zeke ('skia Mphahlele) who was away. He is fulltime in Soweto working for FUNDA (something to do with African cultures, I suspect) and presumably retired from the African Studies

Department at Wits.

From Johannesburg we went on to see a mix of friends, relatives, colleagues and comrades in Cape Town and Durban. We did not rise to bearding

Roley Arenstein to try and fathom his mesalliance with Gatsha Buthalizi. Perhaps you know the wise Jerry Coovadia. He is Professor of Pediatrics in

Durban, brilliant, a founder of NAMDA. Few others we met will be known to you, I think. Mostly they are of a younger generation than ours.

Many of the new politically active generation--those we met are in the

health field--are vital, intelligent, articulate and thoughtful. They give one hope. Among them is the President of NAMDA, Diliza Mji. Diliza is a surgeon, the son of Diliza senior and Seko, and the son-in-law of Ben Magubane. I first had a visit from Diliza Junior, to my great confusion, in 1984. The man who arrived was no M'dala. On my previous acquaintance with

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him, he was in utero. He stayed with us in our Johannesburg house together with Seko during the first several months of his life. Diliza senior's prolonged absence was because of a secret ANC mission that you will no doubt remember.

This time in Durban, Diliza Junior immediately got Zena and me out on the streets to march with him (on behalf of NAMDA) at the head of a protest against budget cuts, with apartheid of course thrown in. The 3,000 hospital workers ranged from cleaners to professors. So we can thank apartheid for this mixer, and for the unique mix of health workers assembled in a common political purpose.

How wonderfully spirited people are on such occasions. Toytoying, singing, joy overwhelms misery and fear. The most surprising thing was a

sign of a new South Africa from the other side. A provincial hospital representative received the strong representations of Diliza on behalf of the marchers. In reply to his speech, she accepted virtually every demand as

just. Zena and I kept on saying to each other how easy desegregation of medical care would be for the authorities; they could earn the world's approbation and relieve the worst excesses of discrimination without doing anything fundamental. (Today, still May 22, we have the news that after a

NEHAWU strike the Minister has recognized the union and undertaken to desegregate the health services.) One slightly embarrassing outcome of the

protest march for Zena and me was that the newspaper photographs and interviews of the march announced our arrival in Durban to various friends and relatives before we did.

During our visit, the Inkatha violence was at its height and the police riots at Sebokeng took place. That was really disturbing. While we were talking with Nelson, he had been on the phone making arrangements with Buthelezi for the not-to-occur joint meeting in Zululand. The behavior of Gatsha was quite expected by many people. One of these was a disinter

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senior white doctor we met at the medical school. He had known Gatsha from his childhood in Zululand, and said Gatsha had always been insecure, manipulative and somewhat paranoid.

For many engaged in the daily struggle, those disturbing problems of violence and mistrust shadowed the fairer prospect on the horizon. Some

seemed to lose faith in the existence of what are clearly unprecedented possibilities. Among whites, many consenting so-called "liberals" were already

carping. I doubt that many are aware--or if aware they are beginning to forget--that a genuine accommodation demands more than passive acceptance.

Perhaps such weakness should be forgiven. Every time of transition, whether great or small, is naturally a time of uncertainty about future roles

, of fearful anticipations, of unreal or unrealizable aspirations, of realistic maneuvering for position and power, of anxieties about the unknown. But I

found these passive liberal reactions too reminiscent of the same old white

South Africa we have known and despaired of. On our side of the fence, the

problems are newer and more interesting. One must learn a fresh vocabulary

for the routines of grassroots democracy. This is not representative

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democracy, but more like the model of ancient Athens; everyone in the polis could have a say and had a direct vote on every issue before it. I suspect that the system may afford some opportunities for opportunists.

We left South Africa for Maputo to fulfil what was the primary and ultimate object of our trip. This was to attend a weeklong International Workshop on Health in Southern Africa. This was the fourth in a series initiated by CHISA (to remind you, the Committee for Health in Southern Africa that we started here in 1984). The first three were in New York. At the third, the ANC Health Secretariat and NAMDA people met for the first time.

With all the excitement and solidarity that engendered, all decided on the spot that the next meeting should be in Southern Africa. Then the inside organizations and the ANC could be fully represented. Later on, we got the Minister of Health of Mozambique interested and he undertook to host the next meeting.

To bring about the Maputo meeting, we all wrestled mightily with organization and communication across three continents, many countries and even more organizations. As the time came nearer, with major funding sources disappearing like South American radicals and plans far from complete, I began to fear disaster.

Against all the augurs, though, the conference proved to be a small triumph for the liberation movement. It could not, of course, have been a more propitious time. Getting on for 80 or 90 people from South Africa represented all the opposition health groups (who had themselves never before met together). From the ANC health secretariat in Lusaka 35 came. There were representatives of several Frontline States (including Namibia), about 8 from the U.K., and just over 20 from CHISA in the United States (six were the

invitees of the Ministry of Health in Mozambique).

I'm glad to be able to tell you that the high credibility of the ANC was a major steadying influence. All these many groups and many people formed a Joseph's coat of opinions. Yet solidarity overcame conflict and anxiety, and sustained rationality. The result appears in two documents. One, the "Declaration on Health in Southern Africa", sets out the principles for health and health services in the post-apartheid state. The other, the "Statement on HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa", confronts the epidemic situation for South Africa.

This is not a letter with an agenda. I can't forbear to say, however, that Zena and I (we have continued working together as epidemiologists over the years) see the AIDS epidemic as a central concern. On this subject Zena is the real authority, but we agree entirely that it could be the most critical immediate contingency facing the movement, more so than Natal violence, or police riots, or unemployment, or all the chronic diseases like tuberculosis, malnutrition and the rest (perhaps excepting the AWB).

The HIV epidemic may look like a smallish cloud right now, say one per cent of the adult black population. (One per cent is small only relatively, e.g., to Central Africa. For tuberculosis, say, a one per cent rate is

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devastating for a population). But the indications are that the frequency is doubling about every 8 1/2 months. If that rate continues, it will be only three or four years before Johannesburg is like Kampala. In Kampala, on e adult (aged 13 to 49 years) in every four is infected, a sort of ghost town with thousands of Dorian Grays waiting to be felled by the corrupting virus . Projections are only that, and the available data in South Africa are by no means adequate, but the predictions I mention are the best we have.

If the epidemic does go unchecked at that rate, we obviously face calamity. The government alone has the necessary resources but does n ot deploy them. Even if it did, however, it would be ineffective in prevention, and nothing outside of prevention can stave off the advancing epidemic. I n South Africa we learned that the liberation movement alone, and the ANC in particular, has a voice which will reach the people who need to hear.

Everyone says that the government's educational messages (such as the y are) have no credibility at all among the people, and are simply laughed to sco rn.

As I see it, the Statement on AIDS was the special triumph of the Maputo meeting. In essence, it proposes that the liberation movement places th e AIDS epidemic on its agenda as a national priority. In doing so, government fu nds will have to be released or commanded by the movement to make a timel y attack on the problem. So it was a lift when Stephen Tshwete (who gave a maste rly review of the problems and programs of transition) made it clear that he understood the message and would do all he could to place the Declarati on on the agenda of the ANC Executive.

Enough of Maputo. In the weeks since we returned to New York, we have been catching up. But we have had time for some old jailbirds as guests . We had Hugh Lewin and family here for a week; exiled they lived first in Lond

on,  
now in Harare--fine people. Just before, we were visited by Renfrew Christie,  
who, like Hugh, also served 7 years but about 15 years later. He's an entertaining young man, who is newly appointed Professor and Dean of Research at the University of the Western Cape.

What do your doctors say about your return to activity? Can we expect to see you travelling soon? Will you be visiting South Africa perhaps? Or here? I very much hope so. For my part, I have another South African visit in the offing in July. NAMDA has billed me to speak at their Annual Conference, and after that do a stint on human rights and health. I shall find that a very demanding subject. Human rights is something I do things about, but I am not much used to thinking and writing about.

One more question: Zena and I were trying to reconstruct our first contacts with you and Nelson and the ANC Youth League. For us, it began with Diliza who I reckon came to Wits, an unreconstructed African nationalist from Fort Hare, in 1947. Aside from that, in both our minds one evening at the Douglas Smit Hostel for African students stands out. Nelson and I think Mpeche spoke and I did too. I suspect you were there, Michael Hathorn and Margaret and perhaps Joe Slovo. For us, it was very intense and moving.

Minds opened, one felt, and perhaps some flowered. Am I right that you were already qualified in law, and that Nelson was a law student at Wits and also

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articled with you? Zena began to raise these questions because Vogue h  
as  
asked her to do an interview about South Africa and the liberation move  
ment  
and Nelson in particular. She does not think she is the right person but is  
pondering the issue anyway. She was touched to pick up the Penguin edit  
ion of  
"Nelsonalia" or "Mandelisma" and there to find your preface (1st edition)  
followed by Ruth First's (2nd edition).

My letter has turned into a lengthy excursion. Think what the crusty,  
taciturn Duke of Wellington would say. He once apologized for a three-p  
age  
letter, saying he had not had time to make it short. So I'll pass up details  
of family and the contingencies of daily life in New York. I'll note only  
that Ida turns 40 later this year! She is an urban anthropologist involved  
with the classic problems of class, race and poverty, Associate Professor  
at  
Hunter College the City University of New York, and has boys of eight (Phi  
lip)  
and 18 months (Jonah). Ezra will turn 38 later this year, is a research  
psychiatrist and epidemiologist with a reputation for his work among the  
homeless and chronic mental disorder, and has a girl of five (Leah) and  
a boy  
of two (Eli, after Eli Weinberg). Ruth is coming up 36, is a computer  
scientist and a Sufi, and has a boy of two (Saajid).

With fond regards to Adelaide and you from both Zena and me.

P.S. I'll send you the Maputo Declarations, etc. under separate cover,  
in case you find the subject of any interest.

P.P.S. This letter has covered so much ground that I am thinking of  
sending copies to a select few who might find something of  
interest in it.

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