

SHORT TRIBUTE TO TONY LEON, MP, LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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AS1996-1-12-5

JOHANNESBURG, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1996

Having publicly paid my tribute to the Leader of the Democratic Party, Tony Leon, in an Open Letter to newspapers, I have nothing further to add to that tribute.

Those of us who accepted the invitation to be at this birthday party have done so as a tribute to a political leader of outstanding leadership qualities. A leader who has moral courage. A leader who refuses to be brow-beaten. A leader who cannot be easily intimidated by any force on earth. A leader who achieved a position of the leadership of an important political party so early in his life precisely because of all these outstanding qualities. He is certainly one of the foremost leaders of the new generation of South Africans. At such an early age he has certainly made his mark as a contributor to the protection and consolidation of democracy and of liberal ideals.

I feel that I should apologise to Tony Leon for embarrassing him with the last paragraph of my tribute to him in the media when I stated that: "I have been enriched by absorbing the culture and ways of the English and of Afrikaners, and on Mr Leon's birthday, I wish to present him with the enriching offer to become, in culture and in ways, a black African, if you so wish, a Zulu."

Because of the misinterpretations of what I meant as published in the media, let me say that I never meant that Mr Leon becomes a poor carbon copy of a Mangosuthu Buthelezi. All I am saying as an African of Zulu extraction is that I wish I could see the same acculturation that we Africans have gone through amongst our fellow compatriots with a western background, which has enriched us because of our absorption of the cultures of our western compatriots. We black people also have a lot to offer far beyond Ubuntu-Botho. For wrong reasons, for example, Dr Hendrick Verwoerd wanted Fort Hare University to become an ethnic University. He imposed eight years of learning on us in the vernacular because he said institutions like Fort Hare University made we blacks into "black Englishmen." He deprecated our going through this acculturation. Anyone who knows me cannot mistake me for a black Englishman. But I am equally proud of the English, Jewish, Afrikaner, Greek, Portuguese etc. heritage which is part of me because of that acculturation. When I made the statement that I offer Mr Leon to become enriched also through African culture, whether it be Zulu, Sotho or Tswana, I meant no more than just that.

Congratulations for reaching this threshold with a whole vista of challenges to which I feel certain you will be equal. South Africa is fortunate to have as one of its current and new generation leaders someone of your calibre. This is the reason we are here to say: "Happy Birthday", great son of South Africa. We salute you.

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