



House of Lords

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Dear Mr Pogrund

Thank you for your letter of August 19 which, because of the postal strike, only reached me this morning. I was interested and pleased to know that you are writing about Robert Sobukwe - a remarkable person.

I am afraid that after such a length of time I cannot give you a very full description of my visit to him, although parts of it remain very vividly in my mind: but I will do my best to answer the various questions you have asked me.

We met in his compound on Robin Island. Compared with the cells of the other prisoners (not that he was officially described as a prisoner), and even the relative comfort (the wrong word but I hope you understand what I mean by it) of Nelson Mandela's quarters, Sobukwe lived in luxury. He had decent and fairly spacious living quarters, with a desk and plenty of books. He also had a yard which gave him ample room for exercise, and a glorious view across the water, to Table Mountain. I am afraid that this occasioned a tactless remark on my part. As we were strolling up and down the yard I remarked on the beauty of the view and said that at least he should draw some comfort from that. He replied "I suppose you are right: but you may not realise how much I long to see what the view looks like from beyond the wire enclosure. Yet I know I shall never be able to see it".

I suppose I spent something like an hour or an hour and a half with him. We spoke mainly about the political situation both in South Africa and in Britain, and also about his conditions of living. He was relatively well-informed, and, like Mandela, showed no bitterness. But he appeared devoid of hope, and resigned to staying on Robin Island in definitely. The only thing of significance that I remember he said to me was that he had lost his Faith. We did not have a chance of pursuing this in any depth, but it seemed to me that this was due to the fact that he saw no opportunity ahead of him for pursuing his work in South Africa or to helping to create a juster and more peaceful society. I am sure that in your work you will have sound and interesting views on this. For all that his goodness came through very clearly.



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The reason for my visit was as follows. I had over the years developed a curious relationship with Vorster, and was able to speak very frankly with him. During the course of one conversation Sobukwe and Mandela came up and I chided him for his inhumanity towards them. He replied that they were in fact kept in admirable conditions and told me that if I doubted this, I should go and see for myself. As a result he arranged for me to go down to Robin Island and spend a day talking to the two of them.

If I can be of any further help please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Walston

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Robert Sobukwe Papers

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