

HONORARY GRADUATE

Sir Robin William Renwick

Robin William Renwick was born on 13 December 1937 in York, England, of Scottish parents. He was educated at St Paul's School, London and at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he took first-class honours in the History Tripos and won the Newling Prize. Thereafter he studied at the University of Paris (Sorbonne). In 1965 he married Anne Colette Giudicelli. They have one son and one daughter. From 1956 to 1958 Robin Renwick served in the British Army. In 1963 he entered Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service. He served successively in Senegal, India and Paris. From 1978 to 1980 he was Head of the Rhodesia Department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In 1980 he was appointed Political Adviser to the Governor of Rhodesia, Lord Soames. After serving in Washington and as the Under-Secretary responsible for relations with the European Community in the Foreign Office, he was appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador in South Africa in August 1987. Sir Robin was made a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) in 1980 and a Knight Commander of the Order (KCMG) in 1989. When he leaves South Africa in May this year, he will assume his post in Washington as Her Majesty's Ambassador in the United States of America - the highest appointment in the British Foreign Service.

From the time he took up his appointment as Ambassador in South Africa, Sir Robin has been tireless in establishing contacts with all sections of the South African community. He has been instrumental in persuading the British Government to provide considerable financial assistance to many organizations working in the fields of race relations, education and job creation.

British aid to Black South Africans has increased enormously over the last three years, largely due to the work of Sir Robin and the confidence he inspired in successive Overseas Development Aid Ministers, first Christopher Patten and now Lynda Chalker, towards support for undergraduates at South African rather than British universities, thereby enabling the number of students supported to increase. Aid for postgraduate courses and specialist training has continued to be provided at universities in the United Kingdom. Sir Robin has been responsible for raising the profile of the British Council from an administrative office to an education centre open to the entire community. This year about twelve hundred Black South Africans have been supported in higher education by the British Government. Last year the Helen Suzman Leadership Awards programme was launched, and the first group of twenty students left in September 1990 for postgraduate study at British universities for one year. Next year an additional sixty scholarship awards for Black undergraduate women students at Wits will be provided under the Helen Suzman British Government Award Scheme, for which the British Government will contribute R250 000 annually for three years. There is no doubt that Sir Robin's personal interest in educational programmes has contributed to their growth. All in all, the aid programme to Black South Africans has grown from £1 200 000 in 1986/87 to £8 500 000 in 1990-91, and it will be around £10 000 000 in

1991/92. This is in addition to the £3 000 000 a year the British Government contributes to the EC Positive Measures Programme. Sir Robin's close personal interest has led to British aid supporting leading South African non-governmental organizations such as Operation Hunger, READ, Promat and the Urban Foundation. Promat's new independent teacher training college, which is linked to Wits, might not have got off the ground without Sir Robin's strong support and British financial help from the outset. Similarly, the Urban Foundation's Home Loan Guarantee Scheme had its origins in discussion between Dr Jan Steyn and Sir Robin Renwick, which led to strong support from the British, German, Swiss and Japanese Governments. These were just some of the instances where the guarantee of British Government funding persuaded others to make a contribution. The redevelopment of the Alexandra Health Clinic is another.

Sir Robin has encouraged United Kingdom firms to undertake social-responsibility programmes. He has lent his support to a number of community-development projects, which are now being assisted through schemes administered by the British Embassy. There are some three hundred community projects of this kind throughout the country, many in remote rural areas which no other foreign-aid programme reaches. These projects include a community centre in the Red Location in Port Elizabeth; a self-help manufacturing project in the squatter areas of the Cape Flats; an Aids education project in Soweto; the community-based health clinic in Alexandra Township; an old peoples' home in Soweto; covered markets to encourage Black enterprise in Katlehong on the East Rand and in Atteridgeville outside Pretoria; classroom building for community schools in rural areas in Natal; advice offices in rural areas; and an ecology project in Msinga in rural Natal.

Sir Robin's contacts with all sections of the South African community have resulted in valuable work in the field of race relations. In support of those working courageously for the same goals inside South Africa, he campaigned for the unbanning of Black political organizations and against censorship, states of emergency and other forms of repression and also for the release of political prisoners and of detainees, and the return of exiles. He has radically improved contacts between the British Government and the Black community in South Africa. Through him, Mrs Thatcher, as Prime Minister, met Dr Nelson Mandela, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Mr Thabo Mbeki, Mrs Albertina Sisulu, Mr Azar Cachalia, Mr Titus Mafolo, Chief Minister Enos Mabusela and Mr Aggrey Klaaste, Mr Khulu Sibiya and Ms Nomavenda Mathiane in 1989 and 1990.

Also as a result of Sir Robin's efforts, British Cabinet ministers and other political leaders have met a wide range of members of the South African Cabinet and of other prominent politicians, and many community leaders. Perhaps even more important for the new South Africa have been the many meetings he has initiated between political leaders of the country and people from different political camps, many of whom had only recently been released from prison or returned from exile.

In the past four years Sir Robin has played an important role in South African affairs, including timely interventions such as the request for clemency at the highest level for the 'Sharville Six', and ensuring the presence of British Embassy observers at key human-rights trials

such as the Delmas treason trial and the trials of the 'Uppington 25' and of Mr Moses Mayekiso and others.

On a broader level, Sir Robin made a major personal contribution to peace in southern Africa. As head of the Foreign Office's Rhodesia Department from 1978 to 1980, he was a key figure in the Lancaster House negotiations, and then, as Lord Soames's Political Adviser, he helped implement the new Constitution and bring Zimbabwe to independence. In the case of Namibia, he encouraged the South African Government to pursue negotiations, and he played an important role during difficult periods, such as the SWAPO incursion in March 1989 and the South African 'Intercept' saga later in the year. He has been actively involved in the process towards negotiations leading to a non-racial democracy in this country.

Sir Robin has made no bones about his attitude to apartheid, isolation and disinvestment. Speaking at the Annual General Meeting of the Urban Foundation in August 1988, he said: 'As far as Britain is concerned, we do not believe in disengagement. We do not intend to walk off the pitch. We are determined to help to defeat apartheid and we intend to demonstrate that we too do not lack staying power. It must be obvious to all of you that South Africa may be approaching a further turning point with its relations to the outside world. We do not believe in your isolation, but we cannot prevent you from isolating yourselves. Whether you do end up more or less isolated, will depend on what happens here. You will all, I think, be familiar with the old English saying - "If you want to get out of a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging".'

In the address that he gave at the graduation ceremony at this university in May 1989, he said: 'Self-defeating strategy number one is isolation. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa has been bedevilled not by positive activism here on the part of those who really are oppressed and whose efforts undoubtedly have been crucial in producing change, but by the sort of mindless activism, driven mainly from overseas, which holds that the best thing to do with a university like this, is to boycott it.' He went on to say: 'A university like this one with its proud record of resistance to apartheid, deserves support, not ostracism through some half-baked academic boycott. And increasing support is what this university and the other universities struggling for change here are going to get from us.'

Sir Robin's sojourn in South Africa has produced many positive results. For his singular contributions to the education of the underprivileged, to social welfare and community-development projects, to the advancement of community relations and the peaceful progress of southern Africa, Sir Robin is deserving of the gratitude of all the people of South Africa. As an expression of that gratitude and as a mark of esteem, what more appropriate gesture can there be than a bestowal on him of its highest honour, that of the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa* by this university, which holds dear the ideals which he has sought to advance? The University will indeed thereby be honouring itself by so honouring Sir Robin as his term of office in South Africa draws to a close.