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**Canadian Conference in Solidarity with the
Liberation Struggles of the Peoples of Southern Africa
May 7-9, 1982
University of Ottawa**

A report to the directors of the
Canadian South Africa Society by:

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On the basis of my longstanding opposition to the policy of **apartheid**, and as a scholar interested in South Africa and currently teaching a course on its politics at McGill, I attended this conference as an individual delegate. My participation was undertaken in order to help maintain that essential dialogue — which the society also strives for — between all who are engaged in South African affairs. I am, however, unable to see any prospect for reasonable dialogue with either the African National Congress (ANC) or its Canadian allies, at least at the present time. On the contrary, I was struck by the

exclusiveness of the ANC's claims and the ideological rigidity of its spokesman, while I was also deeply disturbed by the political naïveté of the ANC's Canadian sponsors and supporters.

My remarks are based on the observations I was able to make at 3 of over 20 separate workshops, at 2 of the 3 plenaries, at an ecumenical church service on the morning of Sunday, 9th May, and at the literature tables in the main foyer of the Conference.

The organization and tone of the Conference:

The importance of this Conference should not be underestimated. It represents a milestone in pressure group activities in Canada — at least in the area of Canadian policy towards South Africa. It was well and carefully organised, the initial steps — at least at the formal level — having been taken in early December, 1981, when a "Preparatory Committee" comprising individuals representing approximately 60 organisations from across Canada met with representatives from the ANC, the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and the International Committee Against Apartheid, Racism and Colonialism in Southern Africa (ICSA), to pave the way for the May meeting.

In that period of 6 months, the organisers were able to bring together in Ottawa well over 500 people from all across Canada — from Victoria to Halifax. From what I could gather the participants were also almost all well educated, middle class Canadians, doubtless of varying affluence and income. It was obviously impossible to assess political outlook except in the most impressionistic way. For what it is worth I would say that there were about a hundred devout and dedicated Christians, some of them almost zealous in their intensity. Others of those attending were from university and intellectual circles — representative of Canada's radical intelligentsia. Again, there were many participants who are drawn by a strong sense of justice to situations such as the South African one, members of the numerous, small, voluntary protest groups one finds scattered across Canadian cities.

The Conference itself was a model of skilful organisation in its day to day running — availability of papers and organisers, the preparation of workshop rooms, the punctuality of meetings, etc. In the actual proceedings, this effective preparation was once again apparent. Chairman, resource people and rapporteurs at the workshops; the secretarial staff; and the chairing of the plenary all pointed to a carefully manipulated and led meeting culminating in the statements and a plan of action prepared well in advance. The Conference came to the conclusions that its organisers wanted it to come to. **It was not intended as a forum for debate and discussion, but as an instrument to mobilize — across Canada — a network in support of the ANC and SWAPO in their activities in international diplomacy, the United Nations and Southern Africa.**

The Conference Flyer and the Manipulation of Participants

It is instructive to examine the Conference flyer as an instance of this kind of manipulative activity, reminiscent of the "Popular Front" of the 1930's, as a means of drawing in a wide range of support, including highly respected churches, scholars and individuals.

The official title of the Conference was, ostensibly, non-partisan and all-embracing, i.e., "Canadian Conference in Solidarity with the Liberation Struggles of the Peoples of South Africa" — in short, a meeting

designed to bring together all Canadians opposed to White domination and prepared to use extra-Parliamentary or unconstitutional means to bring it to an end. The map on the cover of the conference flyer carries a superscription clarifying the meaning of the word "solidarity": "Solidarity is not an act of charity but mutual aid between forces fighting for the same objectives". This is a statement attributed elsewhere in the conference literature to President Samora Machel. Both its source and a careful reading of it reveal a wealth of meaning and innuendo. Effectively, this slogan proposes an alliance between ideologically likeminded groups in Canada and Southern Africa regarding goals, strategies and actions in the overthrow of "monopoly capitalism" and "racism" in both countries.

On the cover of the flyer are given the names of 5 Canadians — two of whom are well-known Canadian churchmen — David MacDonald, a former United Church Minister and a member of the Clark Cabinet in 1979 and Hugh McCullum, the editor of the United Church **Observer**, as well as Robert Gaulin of Quebec, the President of the C.E.Q., an influential and active union leader. A religious tone was set to a non-partisan meeting.

At the bottom of the front page however the ANC and SWAPO are identified as co-sponsors, in co-operation with ICSA. The latter organization's connections to the World Peace Council are well known, and the WPC, of course, is known to be the principal international front of the Communist Party of the USSR. On the inner pages of the flyer are lists of individual and organisational sponsors, including as the first on the list, no less a body than the "Anglican Church of Canada". It bears repeating that any politically and theologically sensitive observer would be both impressed by, and curious about, such sponsorship. "What is the Anglican Church of Canada doing in this company?" is the question likely to come to mind. Where does the Anglican Church in South Africa, or in England for that matter, stand on this issue? Have things gone so far in South Africa that the Anglican Church of Canada is constrained publicly to declare itself an ally of the ANC? In the kit which delegates were issued at registration, amongst a number of papers, was a single sheet of paper, with a brief note stating that "The National Program Committee, Anglican Church of Canada is a sponsor of the conference, a correction of the listed notation in the brochure". There is no apology and no categorical withdrawal of the Anglican Church as such, only an indication that the National Program Committee — presumably a relatively autonomous body in the hierarchy — is a sponsor.

This kind of dishonesty, and that is what it must frankly be called, is typical of Communist tactics. It is the kind of thing which led Orwell into his long crusade against Soviet fronts and their dupes, from 1936, when he first encountered it in Spain, to the publication of **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, when he showed how an entire political

system could be built on this sort of fraudulence. I have experienced the same kind of thing from Communists in South Africa and in the United States. It comes as no surprise to see exactly this sort of conduct in Canada; or to see, that the inexperienced and the naïve are once again dupes of this kind of duplicity.

The Conference Call inside the flyer, however, speaks more candidly of ANC and SWAPO as "leading the fight in southern Africa for freedom and independence, leading to a just and equitable society". The "Call" goes on to say, "their efforts deserve our strong, open and organized support", and to argue that "our task now is to mobilize support for the ANC (SA) and SWAPO on a Canadian-wide scale". Later the Conference Call declares its "...hope to bring together as wide a grouping of anti-apartheid forces in Canada as possible for mutual co-operation, encouragement, network building, and strategy planning". All opponents of apartheid in Canada then, are to come under the aegis of the ANC, and its Canadian allies.

The Conference Bibliography

In the actual administration of the Conference this attempt to manipulate participants is revealed in the material provided in the Conference Kit. In the Bibliography, for instance, there is no mention of Biko, of Tutu, of Black Consciousness, of PAC, of AZAPO, to say nothing of any other, less militant and more moderate perspectives. It is also striking that none of the writings of Martin Legassick, the well known South African Marxist, now in England, who has been denied a visa to South Africa by the Republic's government, were presented. The explanation is probably to be found in his Trotskyist leanings — unacceptable to the ANC sponsors. The literature tables had no material on FOSATU, a leading union movement in South Africa. The only movement publicized at the union level was SACTU — a largely moribund member of the Congress Alliance. This attempt — as it turned out extremely successful — of the Conference leadership to exclude all references to PAC and other organizations and movements reached its climax at the third and final plenary — dealt with below.

The Literature Tables:

There were at least 11 tables with one or more attendants at each table, displaying and offering for sale books, booklets, pamphlets, posters, buttons, magazines, newspapers, etc. The main tables were those of ANC, SWAPO, SACTU, SAEP (South African Education Project of the United Church of Canada), IDAFSA, Liberation Books of Montreal, and the CCSA (Canadians Concerned about South Africa — effectively an ANC front organisation).

In addition to the above organisations, there was material from the following groups: The Africa Fund (associated with the American Committee on Africa); SAAC (Southern African Action Coalition — based in

Vancouver); Bank Campaign News (produced by the TCLSA — the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa); CAR (Committee Against Racism, of Calgary and North Vancouver); an American Journal called **Southern Africa**, which is appealing for funds; and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (a body based in London, England).

Some of the table attendants were South Africans, but most were Canadians. At least some of these were enthusiastic recruiters, seeking to engage me in conversation and to enrol me in their cause; and one of them, urging a boycott of South African wines, could only reply to the comment that unemployment for grape pickers and other workers would inevitably harm them by saying that the ANC had called for this boycott.

The Workshops:

I was able to attend only 3 workshops out of more than 20. There were three consecutive workshop sessions. The first series met on the afternoon of Friday, 7th, under the overall heading of "Education and Information". There were six different sub-topics, each in a separate room with its own staff — chairman, rapporteur, and resource person or persons — the topics being, Struggles Inside South Africa, Labour, Economy, Politics, Military, and Media. On Saturday morning the workshops were concerned with Campaign, and here there were 5 different topics, Changing Policy, Bank & Pension, Media Ties, Financial Aid, and Political Prisoners. On Saturday afternoon the overarching theme was Interest Groups — with, again, 5 separate sub-sections dealing with Labour; Youth & Students; Women's Organisations; Religious Organisations; and Community Organisations.

There was thus a developmental character to these workshops. Those on the first day provided background information and clarification. The second series on Saturday morning developed approaches to be used in specific campaign areas. The third series dealt with the organisations to be established or used in the application of the campaign strategies worked out earlier.

Many of these workshops issued reports of up to 2 pages, and these, in accordance with the "Conference Procedure and Guidelines", issued by the Conference Executive, were reduced to the draft "Final Declaration" and draft "Plan of Action" which were presented to the Plenary on Sunday morning.

In the workshops I was able to attend there were interesting discussions and proposals. Participants urged action along the following lines: engaging tellers in discussion when closing an account at a bank; taking mortgage or loan applications to banks or financial institutions which had no South African connections, and informing managers of the reasons for such steps; focussing criticism on one particular bank, rather than making a general attack on all banks having relations with South Africa.

In another workshop questions were raised in regard to the following issues: how to deal with divisions in a congregation on the question of the church's taking a stand regarding South Africa; how to deal with hostility from those opposed to sanctions; the theological justification for the use of force (e.g. Canadian participation in both World Wars); the Christian imperative to act in such a way as to bring about social justice; the ineluctable logic of revolutionary violence in Southern Africa, and the concomitant Christian duty to attach oneself to that cause.

At a third workshop members dealt with such problems as the bias of the media in favour of South African government policy; the desirability of establishing alternative sources of information; how to cope with the question, "Have you been to South Africa?" when one has not and has no intention of doing so; Canadian tourism to South Africa; South African government advertising, etc.

The Ecumenical Church Service:

On Sunday morning an ecumenical church service took place from 9:00 to 10:00 at l'Eglise Sacre Coeur near the University of Ottawa campus. The format at the conclusion of the service was changed and, instead of the conventional money offering, members of the congregation participated in a rededication to Liberation. A large green strip of cloth about 30 feet long was unrolled and held up in front of the church. Selected members of the congregation then went up and pinned individual letters spelling out the word LIBERATION on the strip. Other members of the congregation then went to the front of the church and pinned ribbons — issued at the beginning of the service — to the banner, as a symbolic reaffirmation of their dedication to liberation. It was interesting to see devout Christians and well known Marxists participating together in this ceremony.

The message of Bishop Wood revealed the agonizing dilemmas of the clergyman who supports a military solution to the problems of political disorder and injustice. He spoke of those who have to kill in the name of love; of the tragic terrifying act of taking life, in which human beings find themselves playing God; of the tragedy of what it is to be human; of the responsibility — that would come with freedom — to rise above passions, hatreds and flaws; of the trust that was placed in the leaders of new nations; of the search for reconciliation in a land of justice; of human hope in the resurrection light.

The Three Plenary Sessions:

There were three plenary sessions of which I was able to attend the last two. The opening gathering was on Friday afternoon and was addressed by George Erasmus, President of the Dene nation. The second plenary was a major session on the evening of Friday, 7th May, where, in addition to statements from various Conference organizers, there was an address by Lennox Hinds, the Chairman of the New York meeting of October

1981, and then the two major speeches, one by Hidipo Hamutenya of SWAPO and the other by Alfred Nzo of the ANC. The third and final plenary took place from about 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, 9th. At this latter meeting the typed versions of Hamutenya's and Nzo's Friday speeches were made available (Appendices A & B); a draft "Final Declaration" (Appendix C); a draft "Plan of Action" (Appendix D); and numerous workshop reports. The final plenary revealed how successful this conference was in realizing the goals of the organizers.

David MacDonald was in the Chair (sharing it for only brief moments with Robert Gaulin) and he was effective in keeping the thrust of the Conference within the parameters that the organizers had clearly laid down in their initial planning. He presented the two working documents to the plenary — these had apparently been drawn up by the steering committee on the basis of the submissions from the workshops which had met during the preceding two days. The "Final Declaration" was passed by applause, apparently without major revision — either editorial or substantive, again in accordance with the "Conference Procedures and Guidelines". The Declaration is noteworthy for its very sharp attack on the Canadian government, on Canadian corporations and their policies, on the Western allies and on the Reagan administration in the United States. The ANC and SWAPO are identified as the liberation movements in their respective countries — no other South African body or movement, either in the country or outside it, is recognized.

There was considerably more discussion from the floor about the draft "Plan of Action" which was the next item submitted to the plenary. The response of the chair to four separate interventions regarding the status of the ANC was revealing of the purpose of this Conference.

The first of these four interventions was by a young woman from Montreal who, on behalf of an Anti-Apartheid committee which she represented, had issued invitations for an African Liberation Day rally to various South African movements, including PAC. She asked for clarification from the Chair as to why PAC was not mentioned in the "Plan of Action", and stressed the importance of the right of South Africans to make their own choices. The references to PAC were greeted with isolated and subdued hisses.

The second intervention of this kind called for the establishment of scholarship programmes within Canada, to be funded by the Conference and its sponsors. The establishment of such programmes within South Africa was categorically ruled out because it would involve working within the system. At the same time, the proposer raised the problem of identifying students worthy of support, and proposed that this difficulty could be overcome by confining scholarships to those who received clearance from and endorsement of ANC and SWAPO respectively. A young man from Victoria objected to this procedure, pointing to his acquaintance

with a young Black South African who was a supporter of AZAPO and who could thus be denied access to such scholarships. His suggestion that this restrictive clause be removed from the amendment was not accepted by the Chairman.

The third intervention was the attempt by a young Lutheran clergyman from the prairies to have the word "the" removed from before the words "legitimate representatives" in clause 3.) of page 1 of the Plan of Action. If this amendment had been carried, the phrasing would have read, "The Canadian government must therefore be pressured to recognize the ANC and SWAPO as legitimate representatives of the people of South Africa etc". The clearly expressed intention of this amendment was to recognize the diversity of South African political life, and, more particularly, the pluralistic and heterogeneous character of the opposition to apartheid. The chairman would not accept the amendment.

The fourth intervention occurred when a young man challenged the chair's policy and conduct in regard to the persistent exclusion of PAC, and called for an open debate on the matter in the plenary. Although he insisted that he himself was an ANC supporter, he thought it contrary to democratic principles that the PAC should be excluded in the way that it had been. The chairman simply ignored this intervention and went on as if it had not occurred. It is interesting in this regard to note that a motion to remove clause 5.) at the top of page 3, which calls on Canadians to "mount campaigns to stop the flow of South African racist propaganda in Canada..." was overwhelmingly defeated by voice vote. The mover argued that to include such a clause amounted to suppression of freedom of expression in Canada; the counterargument was that the material in question was essentially criminal in nature, given that **apartheid** had been declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations General Assembly. With the adoption of the slightly amended Plan of Action the plenary concluded with speeches by Alfred Nzo, the ANC's Secretary-General and Hidipo Hamutenya. I was able to stay for Nzo's final address in which he four times

indicated monopoly capitalism in Canada and its complicity in South African crimes, arguing at the same time that it was against the vital interests of the Canadian people. He explicitly pointed to the ANC's commitment to "armed revolutionary struggle" and concluded with the slogan, "On to Victory". Over 500 people in attendance gave this speech a standing ovation.

Conclusion:

The primary goal of this Conference was to establish the ANC in Canada, and in the minds of Canadians, as the sole legitimate vehicle for the aspirations of South African exiles and emigres. This attempt is part of a strategy aiming at the establishment of the ANC as the main movement or party which can claim to speak on behalf of the Blacks of South Africa, thereby excluding PAC, SAYRC, AZAPO, Inkatha and other Black movements.

The impact of this Conference will not be felt immediately. However over the coming months and years, Canada will see a mounting campaign at the community level, in educational institutions, in trade unions, in the media and in the churches, for divestment, boycott, economic sanctions, educational, sporting and cultural isolation, and a toughening of the Canadian government's stance towards South Africa in both rhetoric and practice.

Nevertheless, the ANC in Canada, and its Canadian allies may have made a serious mistake in attempting to exclude other organizations and movements from consideration as opponents of **apartheid**. For Canadians as individuals it may be acceptable in a situation such as South Africa, to support one political party to the exclusion of others. For non-partisan bodies such as churches, unions and student organisations whose claim to involvement is based upon their desire for social justice, such attachment to a particular program seriously undermines their credibility. This is especially so when they ally themselves with the ANC, whose statements and conduct in recent years make it clear that many of its leaders base their analyses, activities, strategies and alliances on Marxist-Leninist doctrines.

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