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ANC Workshops

(August 30, 1991)

We have produced an educational kit entitled Understanding the A.N.C. The planning, research and production of this kit was made possible by a grant from Partnership Africa Canada, and we are very grateful for this vital and necessary form of assistance to the African National Congress. The main purpose in producing this educational kit was to conduct a series of workshops on the role of the African National Congress in the present stage of the struggle against apartheid and its efforts geared towards the establishment of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic free South Africa.

Topics covered in the Understanding the A.N.C. kit include current issues such as: The Charter of Women's Rights; A Bill of Rights for a New South Africa; The A.N.C. and Sanctions; The Strategy and Tactics of the A.N.C.; The Programme of Action; Formulating a Democratic Economic Policy; The Illegitimacy of the South African Apartheid Regime; Psychological Effects of Apartheid; Towards a Common Perception of Violence in the Transitional Period; Roots of the Transvaal War; A.N.C. on the Environment; and The Canadian Grassroots Support for the Struggle Against Apartheid.

The workshops began in February, 1991 and have mainly been conducted by Peter Mahlangu, the former A.N.C. Chief Representative in Canada, and Jabu Dube, the Information Officer of the African National Congress in Canada. In every one of the workshops we have held so far, the participatory role and assistance of the local anti-apartheid activists and A.N.C. members in their capacity as resource persons have been crucial in determining the success and effectiveness of these workshops in all the regions we have visited to date.

In Vancouver, Peter Mahlangu addressed a public forum (approximately one hundred and fifty people), touching on the current issues and political events as they continue to unfold in apartheid South Africa. After the public forum, the audience dispersed into several specific issue-oriented workshop groups with the view of reconvening at plenary session to report back and to table specific questions and responses that had emerged from the different workshop sessions. The overall impressions drawn from this forum were that:

- (i) violence and destabilization of the black communities in South Africa have become areas of concern for anti-apartheid activists;
- (ii) the reporting of violence in the Canadian media was distorted and tended to portray it as "black on black" violence motivated by tribal or ethnic conflicts between Zulus and Xhosas;

- (iii) the role of the apartheid state (ie, its army and police) in covertly promoting and supporting such violence was often overlooked in preference for the oversimplified erroneous view of tribal bloodletting among blacks;
- (iv) the struggle for national liberation as led by the A.N.C. is a struggle to establish a non-racial, non-sexist democratic and unitary state, wherein universal adult franchise - one person one vote - becomes the democratic right of every South African citizen;
- (v) the struggle for national liberation must be seen as inextricably bound with the struggle for women's emancipation;
- (vi) the A.N.C.'s Bill of Rights was seen as a comprehensive working document that could serve as a useful guideline for the drawing up of a new, broader, representative document - "the Bill of Rights" written by the people of South Africa;
- (vii) on the question of the economic policy for a future post-apartheid democratic South Africa, there were some who agreed with the A.N.C.'s view of the "mixed-economy" whereby the public and the private sectors of the national economy are operating interdependently and in support of one another; however, there were others who saw the main objective of the South African revolution as the defeat of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist economy; and, finally
- (viii) there emerged a strong consensus for the re-examination of the strategy and tactics of Canadian grass-roots anti-apartheid groups in confronting new challenges emanating from the fluid, fast-changing political events in South Africa. In other words, the support of grass-roots Canadian organizations must not only address itself to the defeat or dismantling of apartheid, but must also begin to be relevant to the basic need of the South African people to build, in a concrete fashion, democracy or strong democratic structures on the ground.

Having had a successful public workshop in Vancouver, Peter Mahlangu spent the two remaining days in British Columbia conducting extensive workshop in several greater Vancouver-area schools. The number of students who participated in these sessions, which were attended with keen interest, varied from fifty to three hundred among the schools visited. Students raised similar questions to those that were posed at the public workshop conducted on the first day, but they seemed to be more concerned

about the brutalization and the impact of such violence upon the youth and students of South Africa. There was a great deal of discussion on the role of women and youth in the struggle to establish a post-apartheid, democratic, free and equal society in South Africa. Educational issues, such as the racism and obstacles inbuilt in the unequal, apartheid Bantu education curriculum that black students are forced to learn, were explored in detail by the students and the workshop leader.

In Calgary, Peter addressed an anti-apartheid rally (attended by approximately one hundred and twenty people) which included labour, church, student, non-governmental and solidarity groups of activists.

Following the rally there were workshops based on the Understanding the A.N.C. kit. According to Peter, he could not help but note the unsettling effect of the South African turmoil and violence upon our once-solid supporters, who were now being gripped by growing doubts concerning the prevalence of the so-called "black on black violence" and its implications for the establishment of a non-racial, united, democratic society. There were some during the plenary session who expressed anxiety about what kind of economy would a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa have in the event an African National Congress-led government comes to power. Others wanted to know what constitutional safeguards there would be for minorities - will these "safeguards" be entrenched in the new constitution of a democratic South Africa?

Arrangements were made for workshops in some Calgary schools during Peter's visit to the city. It is reported that close to two hundred and eighty high school students participated in these workshops.

Edmonton provided Mr. Mahlangu with an opportunity for wide-ranging discussions and contact with the Alberta Federation of Labour, including the Metro Labour Council. He was a special guest speaker at the University of Alberta, Graduate Student Association "Special Forum on South Africa" which was attended by five hundred students.

On the following days, workshops were conducted on campus as well as in several Edmonton high schools. Altogether, there were approximately four hundred and fifty students who took part in these workshops. The main thrust of the students' questions and concerns revolved around the issue: what can they do as students in Canada in order to help the oppressed people of South Africa. Some thought it wise to establish links and solidarity ties not only with the A.N.C. in Canada but also with similar students' groups based inside South Africa.

At the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Peter addressed a public forum on the crisis of legitimacy and the demise of the present-day apartheid regime in South Africa. Approximately five hundred people attended. The following two days (March 2nd and 3rd), workshops based on the A.N.C. kit were conducted by Peter, assisted by Don Kossick and other Saskatoon anti-apartheid activists. Students, labour, community and church groups participated in these workshops.

In Quebec, workshops were led by Jabu Dube. Starting in February, 1991, the first workshop in Montreal attracted seventy anti-apartheid activists and members of community groups. Topics dealt with included:

- (i) the Bill of Rights and negotiations;
- (ii) the struggle for the emancipation of women;
- (iii) sanctions and diplomatic isolation of the South African regime;
- (iv) violence and the destabilization of the black communities;
- (v) the role of Canadian grassroots support; and
- (vi) a democratic economic policy for South Africa.

The issues of the oppression of women and their struggle for emancipation were hotly debated and controversial, particularly when Ms Mandisa Fatyela (a workshop resource person) explained that the level of deprivation and oppression runs deep, in spite of the fact that black South African women are one of the main pillars of the struggle for national liberation. Women, Ms Fatyela observed, continue to be physically and sexually abused by autocratic and domineering men in their homes and places of work. Physical abuse of spouses by their husbands is so rampant that some women in South Africa have mistakenly come to associate it with their culture and falsely believe, contended the women's workshop resource person, that beatings of wives by their husbands is an expression of love on the part of the latter.

The Bill of Rights and constitutional arrangements workshop was led by Luthando, an A.N.C. member who is a law student at McGill University. He began by introducing for discussion a recently published copy of a working document entitled A Bill of Rights for a New South Africa; he also talked about another A.N.C. document called What is a Constitution. Mr. Luthando remarked that not only has the Bill of Rights document generated a great deal of interest inside and outside South Africa, but also this was the

first such document to ever come from South Africa. Participants at the workshop showed keen interest, particularly when issues of the application and enforcement aspects of the Bill of Rights were discussed. Some wondered loudly whether the "affirmative action" envisaged in the Bill of Rights could actually go farther than the mere legalistic aspects of the Bill or beyond the statement of intent; in other words, would this result in a Bill of Rights with real teeth that could guarantee actual freedoms to the people. Most participants in the "constitution" workshop seemed to agree that a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic constitution was the basic requirement for a post-apartheid, free and democratic South Africa. Others paid more attention to the "entrenchment of minority rights" in the new constitution. In their view, the "minority rights" question was seen to be of equal importance with the "majority rule" issue.

There was also keen interest amongst a number of participants in the "Economic Policy" workshop led by Jabu Dube. Questions raised on the economy were: what kind of an economy would a post-apartheid, democratic and free South Africa have? What about the nationalization question? How much nationalization and in what key industries would this be the case, if any? Is the mixed economy that is being talked about in the "economic policy" of the A.N.C. the equivalent of the "mixed-economy" of the capitalist state - if not, what would be the distinguishing features between the two positions? It was quite clear that the A.N.C.'s position on the economy could not be compatible with the mere "letting the market determine the economic levers" of the country through some thorough-going free enterprise system under capitalism. For the A.N.C., the nationalization of some aspects of big monopoly industries would become necessary, though not in a wholesale fashion, if we are to seriously address the economic disparities and injustices emanating from the ashes and the legacy of the crumbled old-order system (i.e., apartheid).

The issue of sanctions against South Africa was intensely debated at the workshop. Some people felt quite strongly that sanctions should be maintained until such time as an "irreversible" dismantling of the apartheid system has been achieved in reality, rather than through mere statements of intent on the part of De Klerk's regime. Others felt that De Klerk should be given the benefit of the doubt and encouragement for the "reforms" he has initiated so far.

Similar workshops were conducted by Mr. Dube in Quebec City (where one hundred and twenty people attended) and Trois Rivières (forty people in attendance). In both cities, we had an opportunity to meet with the deputy mayors, whom we briefed on the "current political situation" in South Africa. Following the

briefing sessions with the deputy mayors we held a news conference with the local print and television media.

In Ontario, workshops were conducted in Toronto (with one hundred participants) and at Queen's University in Kingston (involving fifty students and twenty-five anti-apartheid activists from the community). In London, thirty people attended an evening workshop.

Workshops are still to be organized in Windsor, Hamilton, Waterloo-Kitchener, Guelph, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Sudbury for the fall of 1991.

In the Atlantic region, we had very successful workshops both in Fredericton, New Brunswick and in Halifax, Nova Scotia, wherein close to one hundred and twenty people participated at the former and the latter had approximately one hundred community activists and students in attendance.

Atlantic areas in which we plan to have workshops this fall are Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. For these areas, we will include the most updated information (i.e., A.N.C. National Conference materials) in the working kit Understanding the A.N.C.