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AFRICA AND THE MONTREAL OLYMPICS

Zimbabwe Review interviews Arnold Selby

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Arnold Selby in your younger days you were an active sportsman, among others you were vice-captain of the Johannesburg Harriers cross country team in 1939 and also held a number of boxing titles. However, as you were opposed to all forms of racism you left active sport to devote your energy and time to the South African liberation struggle. As a sportsman and as a fighter for your country's liberation how do you view the refusal of Africa to participate in the Montreal Olympics?

Arnold Selby

In view of the circumstances it was the only stand Africa could take, a correct and principled stand. African sports stars cannot be expected to compete for olympic honours and at the same time take a racist slap in the face. And this is precisely what the New Zealand participation meant for all Africa.

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In spite of world public opinion and in defiance of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity there are still countries which maintain sporting links with apartheid South Africa. Why is it that New Zealand is singled out in this particular instance?

Arnold Selby

The facts of this case are that with the approaching games in Montreal New Zealand had scheduled a rugby tour for South Africa. Wellington was warned internationally, by Africa and by the ever mounting opposition of the anti racist forces in New Zealand itself that such a tour would not be tolerated by the African states. Racism and its institutional expression

in the apartheid crime and in the settler regime clique in Rhodesia has absolutely nothing in common and is in every way directly opposed to the Olympic ideal which sets out to bring together athletes from all over the world to compete in honest, open and unfettered competition. The African non-participation would not have happened had New Zealand abided by this very fine ideal.

At a press conference in Geneva the Nigerian Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid, Leslie O. Harriman, said that New Zealand had provoked the African boycott because Wellington had made a political issue of sporting relations with South Africa. He said that the New Zealand government had issued a statement supporting sports links with South Africa and Prime Minister Robert Muldoon had ignored appeals from African sports organisations. Mr. Leslie O. Harriman pointed out that the New Zealand government made a central issue of its sports links with South Africa during the general election.

Mr. Cris de Broglie, secretary of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, said that everything had been done to urge New Zealand to reach a compromise. But Wellington refused to condemn the New Zealand rugby tour of South Africa.

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It has been said that singling out New Zealand has let others who have sports relations with South Africa off the hook. How do you see this?

Arnold Selby

No one has been let off the hook for co-operating with the apartheid crime. All those who play with apartheid are under constant attack. They are under attack both internationally and by their own anti-apartheid and anti-racist forces.

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Can you elucidate?

Arnold Selby

Certainly. For instance a spokesman of the International Cycling Federation said that the International Olympic Committee had banned about 15 amateur cyclists from seven countries from taking part in the Montreal Olympics because they had raced in South Africa last year. They came from Ireland, Italy, the United States, France, Canada, Portugal and Britain.

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Those were cyclists. What about the others?

Arnold Selby

One must look at this as being in the process of struggle the general struggle for the liquidation of the apartheid crime. In the sports field it is a struggle to have racist South Africa banned from all international competition such as was

done in international cycling.

This is a long process. For instance it took 29 years to have South Africa expelled from international weight lifting. It is only now that the non-black South African Athletics Union has been expelled from the International Amateur Athletics Federation on a joint Soviet-Senegalese-Sudan motion.

Under the system of one-man-one-vote South Africa would have been kicked out of the IAAF a long time ago. Using the old colonial privilege of having eight votes each to the new countries' one vote each South Africa's friends such as West Germany, Britain, the U.S.A. and France have managed to prevent apartheid from being expelled from international athletics for many years.

This is a great victory for anti-racism in international athletics for it means an end to athletes from Western Europe and the U.S.A. from taking part in competition in South Africa.

One must not look at this struggle simply as lobbying at sports conferences, taking it to the United Nations and the OAU. This and the success it achieves is determined by the liberation struggle in South Africa itself combined with the activities of the anti-apartheid movements and anti-racist movements in the countries which maintain sports links with apartheid as well as a firm alliance with the socialist countries and the states of Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The first serious attempt to make South African racist sport a leper in international competition was in 1946 - that is 30 years ago.

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1946? Why not before then?

Arnold Selby

In 1946 the prerequisites were there for taking the fight to this stage. These prerequisites were brought about as a result of the crushing defeat of Hitler fascism. This was a defeat for racism on a world scale and, excepting South Africa, it became very difficult for states and organisations to proclaim racism as official doctrine. Racism, however, was not liquidated and the racists hoped, and still hope, to make a come back through South Africa.

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You mentioned "old colonial privilege" do you maintain that sports links which some western countries have with South Africa are colonial in character?

Arnold Selby

Most certainly. This comes out when one looks at traditional sports links with racists South Africa. At the time of the British Empire when Britain kept out her imperialist rivals sports ties between the white elite of the Empire - Britain, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa were very close indeed

particularly in rugby and cricket. It should also not be missed that close ties with West Germany after the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949 and the signing of the secret agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and South Africa on nuclear co-operation in 1951 also flowed into the sports arena. France is co-operating closely with South Africa in the nuclear field and so we see co-operation in sports too.

However, these links are being weakened by the liberation struggle in South Africa itself backed by the international solidarity movement.

The fight to exclude racist South Africa from international sport has involved many thousands of people in mass militant struggle, for instance in Britain against the 1969 South African rugby tour and the 1970 South African cricket tour. Another case in point is that the New Zealand rugby team had to be virtually smuggled out of the country to avoid angry anti-racist demonstrators.

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A leading article in the London Times stated that other countries of the Arab world, Asia, Latin America and black America did not back the African withdrawal from the Montreal Olympics. The same leader also implied that the African states allowed themselves to be manipulated by the anti-apartheid lobbyists. What do you say to that?

Arnold Selby

I read that particular leader and it bristles with typical colonial contempt for the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America and at the same time snipes at the solidarity actions of the anti-apartheid movements in the western countries. The leader itself sows seeds of disunity and seeks to sow discord in the growing alliance between the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and other sections of the international solidarity movement.

This unity was certainly evident in the backing for the joint Soviet-Senegalese-Sudan motion which threw South Africa out of international athletes.

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What did Africa expect to achieve by insisting "If New Zealand stays we go"?

Arnold Selby

Of course, I cannot speak for Africa. She is quite capable of speaking for herself. But from the attitude of Africa and the events which followed it is not wrong to surmise. It certainly seems as if Africa did not want the games to be broken up. The Olympics are basically a festival promoting the cause of

peace and friendship among the peoples. Any cancellation of the Olympics can only serve the enemies of peace - the racists and those who wish to put the clock back. It would not take much research and analysis to find that the most reactionary elements and rabid racists in the world today would very much like to see the Olympics disrupted.

In the first place because of the racist insult she has had thrown at her through New Zealand's participation in the Olympics, Africa wanted to demonstrate that she is a force in world sports and will not tolerate any racist insults and old colonial hang overs. She wanted to clearly demonstrate that she is not prepared to play with those who play with apartheid.

I consider that the African action was very much in line with the international demand to step up the struggle for the complete isolation of apartheid sports.

That racism is seeking to regain lost positions in sports can be seen by an uninvited delegation of 55 servants of apartheid in Montreal with unlimited funds at their disposal.

This South African racist delegation spent its time slandering the Olympics and Olympic ideal. They are spending vast sums enticing Olympic sportsmen to come to the land of apartheid for competition. They have managed to lure the U.S. ~~gymnastic~~ gymnastic team to agree to compete there.

But the last word has by no means been spoken and the struggle goes on. Inspired by the African stand the international solidarity movement will strike harder blows at the apartheid crime in the international arena and my beloved fellow countrymen will step up their struggle at home until our country is completely liberated.

Editor's note: Shortly after the Zimbabwe Review had taken this interview news came through the both South Africa and Rhodesia had been expelled from the world swimming body FINA and the U.S.A. gymnastic stars have put aside their intention tour South Africa. The pressure must be kept up until South Africa and Rhodesia are booted out of everything everywhere.

1 = New Zealand

The Zimbabwe Review
Organ of the ANC
of Zimbabwe
108 Lerin
PSF 241 CDR
Tel. 22 001 81 Ex. 320