Targeting Canada: Apartheid’s Friends on the Offensive

David Galbraith

A video tape distributed to all Canadian MPs: a full page ad in a Calgary newspaper during the Olympics; a series of small public meetings in the Maritimes. Each by itself might be merely another in the seemingly endless barrage of pro-apartheid propaganda which opponents of apartheid have been combating for years. But cumulatively a more sinister pattern can be discerned: we seem to be in the midst of a much more coherent initiative to influence key sectors of Canadian public opinion by the South African government and its local supporters than we have witnessed for some time.

Journalistic Sleaze from Washington to Johannesburg

The correspondence of the new order of apartheid apologist is the video “The ANC Method. Violence,” allegedly written and directed by the well-known right-wing press hack per Stien and sometime Trotsky candidate Peter Worthington. Its timing could hardly have been more carefully considered. The day before Oliver Tambo’s long awaited visit to Ottawa, copies of the tape, and an accompanying booklet, were delivered to all federal MPs. Moreover, in its release also coincided with a major series of newspaper ads run by the South African embassy, which were explicitly directed against the Tambo visit (see, eg, Globe and Mail, Aug. 28, 1987).

Tambo’s reception in Ottawa suggests that this campaign was not entirely ineffective. Many observ- ers were caught off guard by the chilly climate of his discussions with Clark and Mulroney (see SARS, II, 2). Mulroney’s earlier visit to the front-line states had, after all, led some to expect that Tambo would receive a rather sympathetic hearing. Instead, he was subjected to a series of tired harangues on “violence” and “communism.”

That these are precisely the themes of the video is obviously more than coincidental. The video attempts, with single-minded, almost obsessive insistence, to assimilate the ANC to the twin spectres of “international communism,” and its corollary, “terrorism.” We are warned at the beginning that “[t]he following video contains material which may offend sensitive viewers.” And it would be hard to find anyone who could watch without horror the gruesome sequences of “blackmail” killings (ignoring a fine art in the visual presentation of a ghastly fascination. This is, then, the central rhetorical device of the tape: to equate opposition to the Pretoria regime, from the ANC, the UDF, the churches, and the international community, with a defence of the most shocking violence.

What Tambo attempted was to destroy what this thought were the institutional pillars of a socialist tradition. Instead she has provided the opportunity for that tradition to sharpen its stance, becoming more affirmative in new terms. If radical culture in Britain now offers something of a socialist state, it also shows a dynamism that is absent of any vestiges of co-operation. Thatchism has toughened the cultural grounds of opposition.

Joan Davies is a member of the Borderlines collective.
The ANC has more representation in Soviet Front Organisations than any of the other terrorist organisations in the world.

SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY
CONTROL OF THE A.N.C.

- The ANC has been so thoroughly infiltrated by the SACPF that the two are virtually synonymous."
- "The decision could be taken by the ANC without the concurrence and approval of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party. Most major developments were in fact initiated by the Central Committee,"
- "The SACPF is a constituent element of the ANC."
- "The SACPF has three basic elements."
- "The South African Front has three basic elements."

Why Us?
But why should the South Africans suddenly be so concerned about Canada? The answer probably lies in the increasingly prominent role which Canada has assumed in recent years in international debates around apartheid. Although the solidarity movement has frequently criticized the limitations and the contradictions in the Canadian government's policies on this issue, it remains acerbically clear that Pretoria's refusal even to enter into those limited responses with Canada, particularly when they are compared to the more friendly and constructive relations betweenCanada and Washington. While it's unlikely to be entertained, the South African government believes it possible to reverse completely those measures, it is clear that a more aggressive propaganda campaign can both inhibit their further exploration and undermine any possible Canadian
movement towards support or recognition of the ANC. In order to achieve these goals, specific constituencies have been targeted for attention. Within the business community, the South Africans will probably attempt to undermine the effect of the sanctions campaign by working in cooperation with such right-wing organizations as the Fraser Institute to promote the view that sanctions are both ineffective and harmful, and that they inhibit the already existing "reform" policies of the state.

In the more public spheres of Canadian political life, the regime and its supporters will emphasize its "reform" initiatives, and attempt to link any opposition, be it from the ANC or the churches, to the twin shibboleths of "terrorism" and "communism." Here, for the moment, they are likely to target the Conservative Party itself, and its political constituencies, in order to keep up pressure on Mulroney and Clark. This apparent targeting of opinion leaders in smaller communities with substantial Tory support is the more probable explanation for the recent upsurge in pre-apartheid meetings and submissions to local newspapers in the Maritimes (see What’s the Word, Feb., 1988). As it underlines the point, Glenn Bobb’s final speaking engagement in Canada was to have been in Sept Isles, the centre of Maloney’s own constituency, a play blocked only by the vigorous response of local trade unionists. Some aspects of this orientation could well change, however, depending on the outcome of the anticipated federal election campaign.

More recently, the issue of media manipulation was central to the meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers, held in Toronto at the beginning of August. In an attempt to deflect attention from renewed demands for tougher sanctions, External Affairs hired consultants to organize an anti-apartheid cultural festival, took out full page ads in newspapers, and pushed questions of censorship and propaganda to the head of the agenda in meetings of the ministers. None of this was very successful in its primary purpose — to convey the impression of activity without undertaking new commitments to further isolate Pretoria. But it did prompt a round of ads from the Limonay and a boost from De Kock, Botha’s successor, of his success in influencing the Tory caucus.

In the future, other groups with consistent anti-apartheid records, such as Canadian churches, may well find themselves on the receiving end of propaganda campaigns of varying sophistication, as argued by the forged South African Council of Churches pamphlet. We shouldn’t rule out the possibility that apartheid’s defenders will strive to exploit already existing divisions within the churches over a wide spectrum of questions concerning social policy to their own advantage.

What should be clear is that the apartheid regime believes that the State of Emergency has opened up a window of opportunity for it to begin to influence the terms on which discussion takes place and policy is formed. Clearly, it will not simply seek to "defend" apartheid. That option was written off long ago, except in relation to the most marginal constituencies. Instead, it will continually stress its commitment to "reform." How far it will succeed in this object will depend on a series of factors. Although Canadian opponents of apartheid cannot directly influence the course of events within South Africa, which is, of course, ultimately where these questions will be answered, we can, and should be prepared to respond more aggressively and with greater sophistication to what is, in certain respects, a new situation.

David Gallbraith is a Toronto-based graduate student and a member of the Southern African Report collective.


Dear Editor:

I’m writing in response to the bold-type preface to Ingrid Mayhoffer’s essay on Nicaraguan pre-revolutionary art (Fall/Winter 1987/88). The editor starts off by announcing:

Several authors — for example, Judith Doyle in Impulse — have written of art in contemporary Nicaragua as if revolutionary practice emerged out of a timeless present. As this article indicates, the struggle for a people’s art — indeed, for any art — goes back to the origins of colonisation...

The snippet is signed "I.D. — Ina Davies, Pre-1959." I, Ina Davies, I presume. If Ina Davies has actually read the "Culture of Nicaragua" issue of Impulse which I edited in 1984, he could hardly have failed to notice that it consisted entirely of writing and artworks by Nicaraguan authors and artists; poetry, fiction, critical essays, interviews, drawings and photographs. My only contribution to it as a writer was a half-page introduction in which I said that "We are publishing Nicaraguan work rather than second-hand reports to give a more direct view of the new culture in Nicaragua, following the long dictatorship." The issues included many pre-revolutionary texts by, amongst others, Ruben Dario (who died in 1916), a 1929 short story by Augusto Sandino, and a poem by Leonel Rivas, who died during the insurrectional war. I mention only three names cited in Ingrid Mayhoffer’s essay. There are many more. The issue includes detailed biographical notes for each contributor. An essay by Rosario Muñoz and an interview with Sergio Ramírez provide historical perspectives on Nicaraguan culture.

The issue is not (and never claimed to be) comprehensive, but myself and my co-editors Jorge Lorazo and Adriana Angel spent months in both Nicaragua and Canada, finding, compiling, selecting and translating texts which were previously unavailable in English. Art Director Carole White won two international awards for her intelligent design, working closely with Nicaraguan original artworks. It was a unique project for a Toronto art magazine to undertake, conceived to complement essays like Ingrid Mayhoffer’s by providing access to artists’ productions.

I’m particularly irritated by Ina Davies’ misrepresentation of the Nicaraguan issue of Impulse because it is out of print and it is therefore rather difficult for the readers of BorderLines to judge the matter for themselves. I’ve enclosed a copy for the Editorial Board to take a look at. I’m sorry I can’t do the same for your readers. I think they’d find it of interest.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Doyle