

Taking sides in South Africa

by Eileen Harper
The Canadian Council

For international Co-operation held a conference in Montreal in February. The highlight of the conference came Friday night (February 27) when speakers from Southern Africa addressed the issue of apartheid and stressed the need for sanctions. Among the guest speakers were Alan Boesak of South Africa, Teodato Hungwana of Mozambique and Thabo Mbeki also from South Africa.

Alan Boesak urged the International community to take a strong stance against apartheid. "We must take

sides," he stated. Boesak's words powerfully reflected the black struggle in South Africa — "There is a civil war going on in South Africa. Yes, we are been imprisoned, Yes we are been detained without trial and yes we are been tortured. There is a war going on and We cannot remain neutral", he continued "For to remain neutral is to already have taken sides."

Boesak described the destruction and suffering caused by the State of Emergency, where black schools and homes have been attacked by South African police. Thousands of children have been imprisoned and even infants have been killed by police

tear-gas. "We are tired of fighting with stones — little black children are been killed in the streets — the mothers are crying — for they do not if their children are dead or if they are missing. And if they are missing, where they have fled."

Boesak challenged Margret Thatcher's argument that sanctions would hurt the people and cause suffering. "Our people are suffering NOW, and they have suffered for many years. I would like to ask Mrs. Thatcher 'Where have you been for all this time? That you did not know this?'" Boesak concluded that sanctions can "shorten the period of suffering" provided that they are enforced now.

Teodato Hunwana described South Africa's military attack on Mozambique and how this aggression has caused thousands of death in his country. He described Mozambique as a strong link in the struggle against apartheid. Canada can support countries like Mozambique in the struggle against apartheid. The benefits for strengthening Mozambique's economy (for example) are twofold — 1) It would indirectly weaken South Africa's economic control over neighbouring countries, and 2) It would strengthen Mozambique's defenses against South Africa.

Thabo Mbeki described the situation in South Africa as one

which "is not only a matter for moral concern" but one which demands "political and economic action". Because of South Africa's economic dependency on foreign investment, its military function would seriously be affected if its "economic supports were cut off".

All three speakers made a strong argument for sanctions against South Africa, and were strongly applauded by the participants at the conference. As a Canadian participant, I came away from the conference feeling that Canada must take strong action for sanctions against South Africa. Moral support is not enough.



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