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DESTABILIZATION OF THE FRONTLINE STATES OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, 1980-1987

by Dan O'Meara

INTRODUCTION

The 1987 Commonwealth summit in Vancouver was dominated by the *apartheid* issue. In place of further sanctions against South Africa, Britain advocated increased assistance to the six Frontline States (see box). Although devastated by over a decade of South African destabilization, these countries themselves sharply reject any attempt to delink aid from sanctions. President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia urged the Commonwealth not to "just fatten us up so the Boers can come and slaughter us."¹

TWO GROUPINGS USED IN THIS PAPER

A. Frontline States

- Angola
- Botswana
- Mozambique
- Tanzania
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe

B. SADCC Member States

- all 6 Frontline States, plus
- Lesotho
- Malawi
- Swaziland

Canada has played a leading international role on the *apartheid* issue since 1985. Limited sanctions have been imposed against South Africa, and the government seems convinced that the crisis of *apartheid* threatens the entire Southern African region.

However Canadian policy has also sought to move in concert with "our major partners" — specifically the US and UK — and the government now confronts what Tory MP Walter McLean has called "a crisis of nerve."² The Reagan and Thatcher governments are not going to support effective sanctions against Pretoria. Canada is faced with the uncomfortable choice of joining — with more than just rhetoric — the Third World Commonwealth countries on this issue, or of losing much credibility.

In making such choices however, it is crucial to understand the evolving pattern and objectives of Pretoria's destabilization policies, and to grasp their place in the ongoing domestic crisis of *apartheid*.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOTAL STRATEGY

Between 1978 and 1984 South Africa's domestic and regional policies were consistently hinged around a coherent Total Strategy. The Total Strategy responded to four crucial developments in the 1970s:

- 1) The defeat of Portuguese colonialism and independence of Angola and Mozambique under socialist governments in 1975 — followed by the debacle of South Africa's 1975/6 invasion of Angola;
- 2) the re-emergence of large-scale black opposition inside South Africa;
- 3) the appearance of deep structural faults in South Africa's economy;
- 4) Pretoria's increasing isolation.

Together these developments precipitated a prolonged political crisis and John Vorster's eventual replacement as prime minister by P.W. Botha in September 1978. Based on a new political collaboration between the military and large corporations, the

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