CRISIS OF APARTHEID:

The Canadian response. By Dan O'Meara
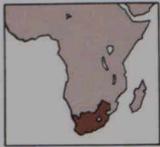
In late 1985 Canadian External Affairs Minister, Joe Clark, announced that "the challenge that now faces the government of Canada is to take practical steps to bring a peaceful end to apartheid" in South Africa.

■ The Mulroney government has taken stronger action against South Africa than any of its predecessors. Mr. Clark implemented limited sanctions in September last year, warning twice "that Canada is prepared to invoke total sanctions" unless there "is tangible movement away from apartheid," and even envisaged a situation in which "Canada will be left with no resort but to end our relations absolutely." Both warnings were repeated in the Prime Minister's October statement to the United Nations General Assembly.

Canada played a key role in the establishment of the Commonwealth "Eminent Persons Group," set up to encourage democratization in South Africa. Further policy developments are on hold until this Group submits its report. Since the report can only be negative, Canada will be under pressure to put its money where its mouth is.

Tougher action can indeed be expected. If Canadian policy is to have a real impact, however, it needs to be based on a *strategy* with three clear components:
■ an understanding of the political dynamics inside South Africa;
■ a sense of what kinds of intervention will most weaken the apartheid regime while strengthening its victims both inside South Africa and in the subcontinent; and,
■ an awareness of how a Canadian policy package might fit into a wider international strategy against apartheid.

Political Dynamics

Any programme of reform by the South African government would have to appease five very different political audiences: the black population, the ultra-right, the security forces, organized business, and the international community. None of these is monolithic; each contains widely divergent political viewpoints, but each is a major actor in the current crisis.

Most importantly, the government would need to win sufficient active support from within the black population to end the urban revolt. Such is the anger – and scent of looming power – in the black community, however, that even conservative black leaders could safely settle for nothing less than 'one person/one vote,' requiring the total and rapid dismantling of apartheid.

At the opposite side of the political spectrum are the ultra-right groups, estimated to enjoy the support of one-third of the white population. These groups have been arming themselves to resist what they term "the betrayal of the white man." The strongest among them have formed local vigilante/militia groups to patrol white areas.

Any reforms would also have to convince the security forces that their power would remain intact. This is a complex issue. There are deep political divisions in the army, an issue raised publicly by the generals as long ago as 1981. The commanders of the police and army are already the most important force in the key decision-making institutions, and their power under the current regime is widening. There is, on the other hand, strong support for the ultra-right in the middle and lower ranks of the police force and in the professional core of the South African military. The various sectors within the security forces can be expected to cling to a very hard line.

South African business and foreign investors, concerned about the profound radicalization of black politics, are desperate for a solution – any solution – which will restore stability. Long the major beneficiary of cheap labour, and ensconced in a cosy alliance with P.W. Botha between 1979 and 1984, business leaders are growing more and more insistent on the need for change. However, organized business remains strongly opposed to the idea of 'one person/one vote' in a unitary state. The federalist proposals they favour are seen, in the eyes of black political groups, as an attempt to secure white domination through constitutional tinkering. Moreover, business has made much noise and done much lobbying, but has used precious little of its real economic power against the government.

The final and most diffuse of these audiences is the international community. It ranges from NGOs, churches and trade unions, to western governments. The peculiar structure of the South African economy renders it very sensitive to international pressure. The country does not have the capacity to produce the technology, the capital equipment, and the intermediate goods without which there is no industry in South Africa. These are all imported and are paid for – as in any third world country – by mineral and agricultural exports, as well as by foreign investment in, and loans to, South Africa. Escalating economic sanctions severely limit the regime's capacity to finance the vast edifice of apartheid. In March 1986, the former Chairman of the giant Anglo-American Corporation declared that disinvestment measures, initiated by non-government sources, were already hurting the South African economy. Looming international sanctions present a profound threat to the regime.

President Botha's government is unable to appease all five of these audiences, particularly and most importantly the first two. Indeed it is doubtful if any white government could begin to dismantle apartheid without provoking armed revolt from the ultra-right and, possibly, a sergeants' *coup d'etat* from within the security forces. Because it has exhausted its political options, the regime is beginning to unravel to a degree not appreciated in Western countries.

South Africa today is living through one of those rare mo-