

# Africa Night combines culture and politics

The objectives and functions of the annual event Africa Night are broader than our more specific initiative in the African National Congress (ANC) African Support Group. However, almost every year, the proceedings at Africa Week and the Night of the main events have complemented and will continue to complement several of our objectives. The night of November 28th was no exception.

There were proportionately more cultural events on Southern Africa than on any other single nation on the continent. The opening event, which included a national anthem for the night, was, for instance, wholly devoted to South Africa, and involved some of our active members. Other related cultural events on Southern Africa were quite consistent with our objective, namely to popularize the people's culture in the region in a democratic manner and in all other practical ways. Indeed, on the practical side, we put up an impressive display of literature of direct relevance to the theme



of the night — the African Woman. So much for self-praise: let us now turn to the somewhat

unexpected. In an excellent address, the Guest Speaker, Elizabeth Bagaya,

Uganda's Ambassador to the U.S., analyzed the predicament of the African woman under the current world crisis with an unusual perception as well as style. She aptly emphasized five major hazards, namely:

1) Natural disasters, which dislocate families and especially take a proportionately heavier toll on women and children;

2) Adverse terms of trade for primary products, which adversely affect agricultural women;

3) Entrenched and outdated pro-patriarchal cultures, which oppress women;

4) Liberation struggles, which put a special burden on women to keep the family unit as well as perform combat in the most difficult of all circumstances;

5) The economy of labour reserves, where men have to migrate to look for jobs and the task of maintaining the household is left exclusively to women.

We discovered rather amazingly that while the five scenarios analyzed by the Guest Speaker were common to most parts of the African continent,

including South Africa, the last two mentioned were most unique to Southern Africa. Indeed, on the question of exploitation of women under the migrant labour system, the Guest Speaker used the classic example of Lesotho (all surrounded by South Africa) to illustrate her point. We hope to pursue these and many other burning issues in South Africa and invite others to join our plight.

Finally, the otherwise peaceful weekend for the African Students' Association and the Dalhousie community was punctuated by disasters elsewhere, such as the failure of democratic elections in Haiti, and the now-familiar airline disasters as in the case of the South Korean Airlines. Indeed, the worst airline disaster of this year to date was that of the South African Airlines (flight 295), which coincided with the Africa Night and out of which 159 passengers are feared dead!

**ANC — South Africa Support Group, Documentation Section**

## No yellow (or red) brick road

The destination may be the same, but the routes assuredly are not. That was the message of Doug Meggison, a Dalhousie nursing student, speaking on behalf of the Communist Party of Canada.

His talk to a small but attentive audience in SUB 314 was an eloquent critique of the New Democratic Party, Canada's other self-proclaimed socialist party.

Armed with histories of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (now the NDP) and the Canadian Communist Party, Mr. Meggison compared and contrasted the two groups, especially in the larger context of Social Democracy vs. Revolutionary Socialism.

In reviewing how Social Democratic parties actually behaved on coming to power, Mr. Meggison questioned their claim to being parties earnestly seeking peace. The Socialist Party of Spain recently reneged on its election promise to remove US military installations. Britain's Labour Party supported America's genocidal war in Vietnam. Most shamefully of all, in 1914, Social Democratic parties all over Europe voted to enter that cataclysmic land-grab known as World War I. They chose country over class allegiance, scorning Marx's plea for workers of the world to unite.

Mr. Meggison criticized the NDP for its simplistic understanding of the nature of socialism. "Socialism is not merely a moral category; it is a fundamental reordering of society based on public ownership of the means of production. You're not going to get there by maybe nationalizing one bank."

The charge is not a new one for the NDP, who have been dismissed by many in the far left as Liberals-in-a-hurry. From a Marxist perspective, political change is not enough. Reforming the government does not reform the state.

Mr. Meggison accused the NDP of being ultimately a party of naive compromisers, hoping to heal deep economic wounds with social welfare band-aids. He likened their calls for reform to charity drives for the homeless. "There can be no authentic social justice without economic justice," he asserted.

"My greatest fear is that the NDP will get elected and inherit such a vast economic mess that they will be helpless from the start. That would hurt all of us and give a tragically wrong impression of what socialism is really about."

Mr. Meggison then undertook to explain what socialism, as envisioned by Marx, is all about. He waxed metaphysical. Socialism means a qualitative, not

merely quantitative, betterment of life. Socialism means peace, freedom, and prosperity. The abolition of economic exploitation shall inevitably give rise to a social condition conducive to the free development of all.

Would that it were true! Can anyone really believe, after reviewing how communist parties have behaved on coming to power, that oppression ends with the overthrow of the ruling class? Cambodia's Khmer Rouge party practiced genocide on its own people, massacring more than two million before being driven out by the armed forces of North Vietnam — its socialist neighbour.

Stalin was not one to compromise. When he saw rural collectivization as a historical necessity, he did not stop until one whole class was indeed abolished. In human terms, this ideological course meant the outright murder of millions of individuals and a systematic policy of famine which left millions more dead. At what point is one allowed to weigh revisionist compromise with revolutionary integrity?

Marxism has been used for incalculable good in providing scientific discipline to the study of economics. It has been used for incalculable evil when magnified into an absolute, all-embracing worldview which

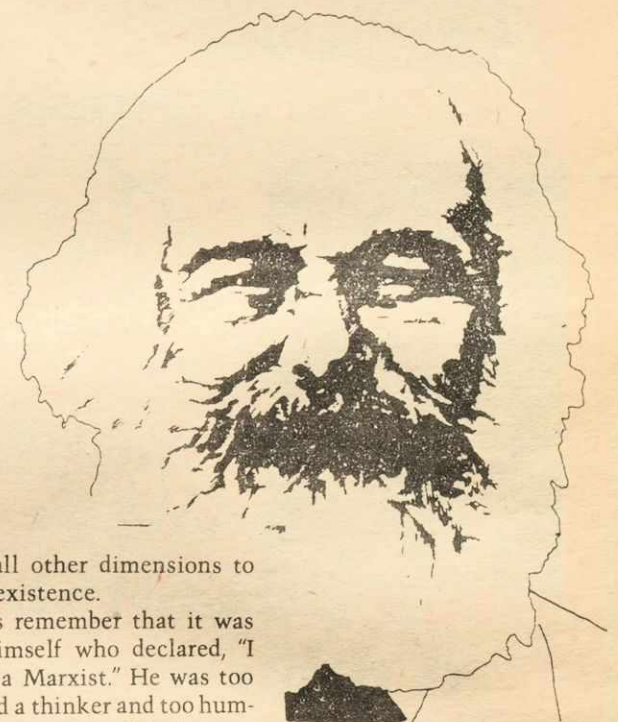
denies all other dimensions to human existence.

Let us remember that it was Marx himself who declared, "I am not a Marxist." He was too profound a thinker and too humble a man to present his views as Divine Doctrine. Would Marx even consider the Soviet Union, now celebrating its 70th anniversary, the consummate realization of his socialist dream? Or would he consider it such a betrayal of his ideals as to constitute a nightmare?

George Orwell, who lived and died for Revolutionary Socialism, had no doubts on that score. Read *Animal Farm*.

Eventually one must leave off theorizing. Comparing Sweden, the quintessential Social Democratic state, and the Soviet Union, one has to wonder which population actually enjoys a better quality of life. "Nature of the state" be damned! Who's happier?

Because that, as Mr. Meggison ably demonstrated, is what socialism is all about: "a condi-



tion for the free development of all". Socialism is a means to an end, after all, and the end is not utopia but basic human fulfillment.

One emerges from Mr. Meggison's lecture aware that there is no yellow brick road to socialism. To achieve any measure of social and economic justice in this country will take more time, innovation, and struggle than the NDP (at least publicly) concedes. If, at the same time, one understands why involvement in the Communist Party is the road less travelled by, one appreciates that Doug Meggison and comrades are fellow travellers indeed.

**by David Deaton**