

# Apartheid: virus of hate

by Jon Romalo

"Apartheid is a virus... it is racism, and South Africa is exporting it."

Thus began an impassioned lecture here December 12 by South African journalist Khaba Mkhize. Speaking at the University's International Student Centre, Mkhize was on campus as part of a three month Canadian tour.

Mkhize explained that certain distortions in the Canadian (and other Western countries') media have the effect of being positive propaganda for the South African government.

"A recent story in the *Globe and Mail* described a trial involving the United Democratic Front [UDF]," Mkhize said, and although the UDF is composed of blacks, whites, Indians and coloureds, the story mentioned only blacks, referring to the UDF as a "pro-black" organization. While

the UDF is a staunch opponent of apartheid, the word apartheid was never mentioned.

Nor did it appear in a recent Reuters (a wire service) story about the African National Congress, or ANC. "It said that the 'black' ANC is being harassed, exiled tortured and killed because they oppose racism. The story says they were black, never mentioning apartheid, and so South Africa admits that there isn't anyone who is opposed to apartheid — that is the propaganda," explained Mkhize.

"People ask me here: are there any white people who are against apartheid? I say there are plenty. Lately 150 young persons refused their required military service."

"Each of these vocal, prominent resisters represents 1,000 silent others who do not want to defend apartheid either. Yet people outside South Africa, even the writers of these news stories, are not aware of this. They slot in 'pro-

black', 'black', 'anti-black', and so on, and it's not the whole story."

Mkhize then discussed the grisly 'necklacing' incidents, which were widely reported here, where victims were burned with rubber tires around their necks. "It is a horrible death, but you were never told why it happened, but merely shown images of barbarians burning each other."

Mkhize explained that after four persons had planned an attack on a government building, three of them were trapped in a fire, the other one missing it, arriving late. At the funeral for the two that died, the badly wounded survivor accused the fourth man as having sold them out. "In desperation, the crowd attacked this man using the most convenient weapon, a tire, to burn him.

"This isolated incident was dangerously overplayed in the media; there were some 90 riot deaths reported this year, and none of them by necklacing. Because of that one incident, many people outside South Africa feel that we do not deserve help, do not deserve political emancipation."

Mkhize's criticism of the press was not limited to stories about South Africa. He described several stories about Olympic sprinter Ben Johnson.

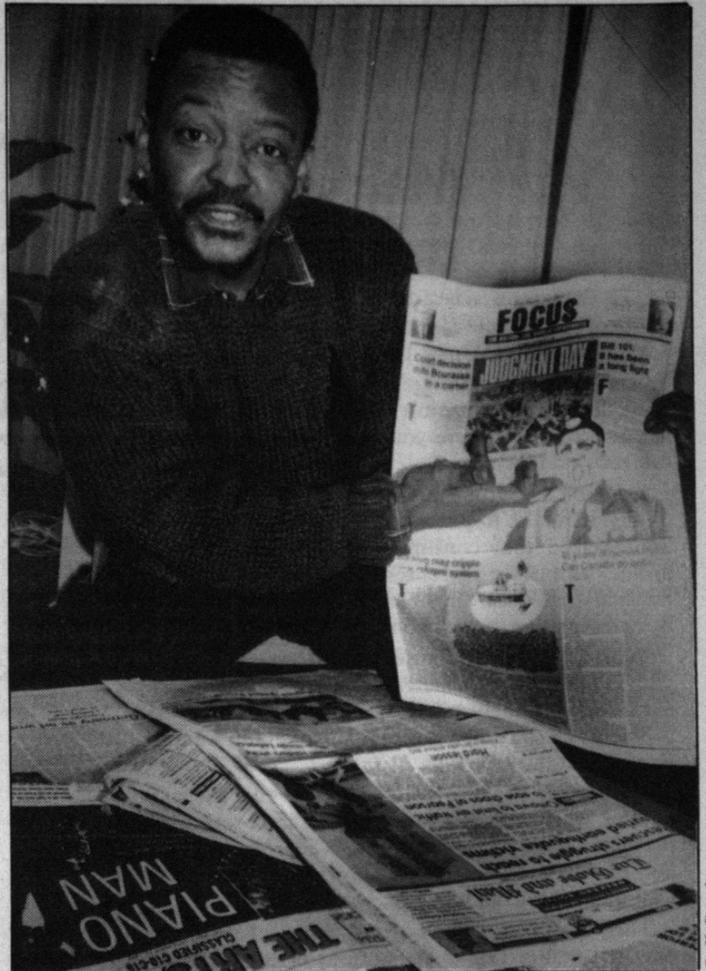
"A great Canadian until the steroid episode, when he suddenly became the Jamaican-born Ben Johnson. It is subtle, subconscious propaganda — why must he not be Canadian?"

Another aspect of the Canadian media that Mkhize found disturbing was the recent tendency to compare the situation of Canada's native peoples to that of non-whites under apartheid in South Africa.

"A few years ago apartheid was compared to Nazism, and now the South African government has cleverly picked up on the Canadian native issue to counter that. This issue has been very well built up, but it is a comparison that is very much unfair," said Mkhize.

"I spoke with the Metis chief Stephenson, who had himself discussed the matter with South African ambassador Glen Babb. The chief told me that he encouraged the Canadian government to look at their [the Canadian natives'] problems and at the South African problem."

"In several interviews here I have stressed that the two situations are not comparable, but the interviewers did not want to print



South African journalist Khaba Mkhize lecturing on the spread of racism in the Canadian press. The outlaw writer appeared at the International Centre in early December during a North American speaking tour.

Jeff Cowley

that. At a native demonstration in Winnipeg on December 10, a *Winnipeg Sun* reporter wanted me to say that the situation of the native people was like apartheid. I disagreed, but he printed nothing of what I said.

"I told him that I had seen news stories and advertisements about the Lubicon's protests against the oil pipeline. Their chief Ben Ominayak said 'I don't want my people to be moved,' and the government said 'we need this pipeline, it is of national interest — oil.'"

"In South Africa, Solomon Khize told the government, 'I don't want my people to be moved. Our ancestors' graves are there, and we don't appreciate being moved for ideological considerations.' They were being forced off their land because a white settlement had sprung up nearby.

"At the end of the day, what happened to Ben Ominayak? There was communication, consultation, champagne crackled."

"For Solomon Khize, what happened? A gun crackled, a bullet snuffed out his life."

In addition to his critical analysis of the Canadian media, Mkhize also gave insight into the situation of his own newspaper, *The Echo*, a weekly in the South African

city Pietermaritzburg.

Faced with increased unrest in the black townships, the South African government introduced severe limitations on all news media within its borders in June of 1986.

"At the paper we didn't know what we would do; nearly all our stories were of violence in the townships, and we could not accept the idea of waking up on day and there being no more apartheid, no more violence.

"We had no story of Charles and Diana or a big polo match to replace news from the townships, so I went to the library and got some books. I ran large photographs of Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin and others, simply to remind people that we live under a dictatorship."

Press restrictions in South Africa disallow the reporting of anything that might discourage investment in the country, such as strikes, boycotts and sanctions, according to Mkhize. Also, the media can only report on security police action in the townships using official police press releases, and these are often delayed, diminishing newsworthiness, and they rarely include people's names.

"It is like body-count reporting. Just numbers of persons killed, anonymous, and one doesn't know which side lost people," said Mkhize.

In response to the press restriction, Mkhize's paper runs a page of poetry, a kind of fictionalized account of real events. "We use code words and phrases, and everyone reading knows who is being spoken of. The UDF are called 'comrades', and the security police are identified by their vehicles, Toyota Cressidas," explained Mkhize.

"The physical oppression is there, but the mental oppression is over," Mkhize said.

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