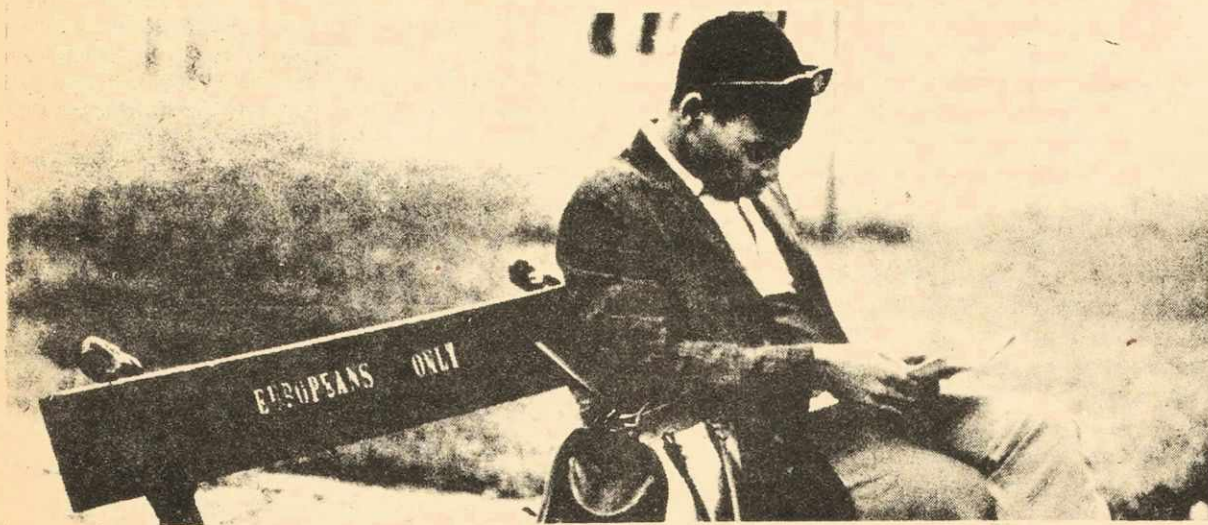


South Africa: an Atlantic issue



If caught sitting on this "Europeans only" bench in South Africa, this man could be jailed for 20 days.

by James MacLean

Atlantic Canadians can help the non-white population of South Africa in its efforts to attain majority rule. The ways in which they can help may be small, but are nevertheless significant. This point was made by two black South African nationalist leaders recently in Halifax.

Kate Molale and Mpho Thoeabale of the African National Congress of South Africa called on Canadians to end all trade relations with that country. They said that here in Atlantic Canada the public can put pressure on the provincial governments to stop the sale of South African wines and spirits, and noted that this step has already been taken by the government of Saskatchewan. They also urged Atlantic Cana-

A member of the South African Government has described the wives and children of African workers as "superfluous appendages".

dians to withdraw their money from banks which make loans to the government of South Africa. The South African leaders named the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the Bank of Montreal, the Bank of Nova Scotia, the Royal Bank, and the Toronto Dominion Bank as those which are involved in making such loans.

Kate Molale attempted to correct a common misconception about foreign investment and trade with South Africa. She pointed out that the benefits of this investment and trade are not reaped by the country's over 20 million non-whites, as many people believe. Within South Africa the benefits go only to the white minority (17% of the population). The economic boom of the last decade has widened rather than narrowed the income gap between white and black. Continuing trade relations serve to legitimize and reinforce the power of the racist regime, she said.

Mpho Thoeabale was a student leader in the black township of Soweto at the time of the

demonstrations there last summer. She gave a chilling account of her arrest and torture by the South African police. Thoeabale managed to escape from South Africa and now works with the African National Congress. Founded in 1912, the ANC is the principal political organization seeking majority rule in the republic. It is banned inside South Africa and its leadership is now in exile.

Canadian Companies in South Africa

The South African women pointed out a fact which many Atlantic Canadians will understand; that large corporations often show little concern for the human cost involved in their pursuit of profit. The average income of black South Africans is only 5% that of white South Africans, and the low wages paid to the black worker mean high profits for those who own the companies. Canadian corporations (which are in fact largely owned by American businessmen) like Falconbridge, Massey-Ferguson, Ford, and Alcan are for this reason deeply involved in South Africa.

The Alcan workers of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland, are familiar with the human cost of that company's pursuit of profit. They have experienced the low wages, the lock-outs, and the industrial disease. But these Newfoundlanders are not the only ones who suffer at the hands of Alcan. Alcan also has a plant in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. In 1973 the

Ottawa Citizen reported that the firm paid 703 of its 706 black workers wages which were below the "poverty datum line" — a term used in South Africa to indicate the lowest possible income required to live at subsistence level.

The condition of the majority population in South Africa is bad, and it is getting worse. The white minority of 17% has claimed for itself a full 86.3% of the land (including all the areas with industry and the best agriculture land). The blacks here do not have the vote or any other political rights. Their movements are strictly regulated by a system of internal passports. Many of them are crowded into ghettos or "townships" bordering the white cities, where they must be employed or risk being deported to impoverished reservations. A rigid system of

"the government is making the Post Office an example for the wage and price restraints."

After the strike, the business newspaper the *Financial Post* saw as problems the lack of good management and a military-like atmosphere in the workplace, mentioning that a large number of ex-servicemen held supervisory or managerial positions. It noted that "many of the buildings, as Mackasey* says, are like penitentiaries" (13 Dec 75).

High turnover rates are further indications of these problems. Assessed in 1975, they were 71% yearly in Vancouver, 50% in Toronto and here in the Atlantic Provinces about 20%.

Management of the Post Office

What kind of an enterprise do these observations point to? A closer look at the workings of the Post Office reveals the following:

- The increase in postal rates will bring in 200 million new dollars to Post Canada, but this will not even cover the \$500 million deficit it was running even for 1975.
- In the 5 years from 1971 to 1975, mail volume has increased 13%, revenues 20%, the departmental deficit 385%, while productivity

* then Postmaster General

racial segregation and discrimination called "apartheid" denies them, among other things, access to facilities like restaurants and movie theatres in the cities.

Destruction of Black Family

One of the most shocking features of life in contemporary South Africa is the systematic destruction of the black family. A member of the South African government has described the wives and children of African workers as "superfluous appendages". Unemployed women, children and old people are deported to reservations called "Bantustans", where they live without means of supporting themselves and without such basic amenities as medical care. The majority of children in these reservations die before the age of five, often from starvation. The South African government has during the last decade and a half deported several million persons to these areas, and the programme of deportation is continuing. The aim of the government is to deport all blacks who

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are not serving the white economy. Black male workers in the "white" area of South Africa who have not been deported are commonly kept in barracks, where often six or seven of them must share a small room while they try to support themselves and their deported families.

The disturbances in South Africa in recent months are only a response to these conditions. Any form of resistance to the regime has been met with brutally repressive measures. It has been estimated that up to a thousand young blacks, many of them elementary school children, were massacred during the demonstrations last year. Others have been detained without charges, and there have been many reports of torture and unexplained deaths in the prisons.

About 175 persons attended the public address given by the representatives of the African National Congress in Halifax. Speakers from the floor presented resolutions urging provincial governments to withdraw South African products from liquor stores in the region, and urging individual Atlantic Canadians to close their accounts in those banks which deal with the South African government. There was no disagreement with these resolutions from the audience.

Kate Molale and Mpho Thoeabale have appealed to Atlantic Canadians not to turn their eyes away from one of the most deplorable cases of the disregard for fundamental human rights in the world today. Canadian banks and corporations are profiting from this situation; the provincial governments in our region continue to deal with those who are responsible for it. The actions which we can take may be small, but the leaders of the black community in South Africa consider them important.

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one year after the original incident, no grievance placed under Article 29 has been resolved.

The CUPW mistrusts the Post Office management because, it feels, management has not honoured this article on technological

"many of the buildings ... are like penitentiaries"

change, called by its own former postmaster general the most advanced of its kind in labour law. This article was supposed to be one of the significant gains of the long and bitter national strike of 1975.

Postal strike of 1975

Automation — along with wages — was also a central issue in the fall-winter dispute two years ago which cost the Post Office \$20 million, the unions \$60 million in lost wages, and the direct mail and marketing industry between \$73 and \$95 million.

The dispute ended on December 2, 1975, after 42 days of strike, when 51.8% of union members voted to return to work. "No doubt about it," said one of those who crossed the picket lines,

has declined 20%.

- In the 10 years since 1967, productivity in the Post Office declined 25% to 331 pieces of mail per man hour from 443 pieces — "despite partial introduction of an automation programme hailed as the most sophisticated in the world" (FP 5 Feb 77).

- The P.O.'s financial experts underestimated the department's loss in 1972 by \$122 million and in 1973 by \$194 million. The *Financial Times* notes ironically that "their record has

"No doubt about it... the government is making the Post Office an example for the wage and price restraints."

improved somewhat: in 1974, they underestimated their actual loss by \$44 million and in the last fiscal year, were \$50 million under the final figure".

- Since 1962, there has been an average of close to one change of Postmaster General a year.

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