

# Visit to South Africa

by Bhupinder Singh Liddar

In a world where freedom is becoming increasingly rare, our country today is a symbol of the expansion of freedom, of the upholding of freedom of religion and free enterprise, sustained by equal rights before an independent judiciary.

This statement by the State President of South Africa, P.W. Botha, at the opening session of the "Parliament" boggles the mind, filled as it is with the television images of violence, riot and general unrest that has gripped that unhappy country. The President was not speaking to the foreign news media but to the elected white parliamentarians of the Republic of South Africa.

Referring to the victims of violence and unrest, the State President further stated in that same speech, "Allow me once again to express my sympathy with the suffering of all those affected" — knowing full well that more than half of those were Blacks killed by police.

These are some examples of what has come to be termed double-speak or "Bothaspeak!"

An opportunity presented itself to me recently to travel to this land where Botha-as-freedom contrasts sharply with Black unrest. Where does the reality lie? Having been born in Kenya and having spent many years there, as well as in independent Zimbabwe, I felt a compelling desire to seek an answer to this question. I knew I did not have to go to South Africa to know what "apartheid" was all about. We experienced shades of it in Kenya and up until recently Rhodesia operated the same regime under Ian Smith. Separateness along racial lines — separate schools, separate residential areas, separate cemeteries, separate hospitals, and disparities such as higher wages for the Whites than non-Whites for the same job — and certain jobs (including that of writing parking tickets) reserved for Whites!

The most deceptive argument presented by the pro-status quo South Africa observers is that the situation is "complicated," and that one really has to go to South Africa to fully understand it. This line of appeal was used to invite Canadian parliamentarians and business leaders to show them the "good" life of the African. Many were convinced of the "civilizing" efforts of the South African regime and of its righteousness.

## Tourist in South Africa

It was from Harare that I flew to Johannesburg by Air Zimbabwe. There are frequent daily flights by Air Zimbabwe and South African Airways between the major cities

of these neighboring states. An active South African commercial office exists in Harare in a building decked with a South African flag. There is also considerable cooperation between the railways of the two countries, because of geo-historical factors.

The man who sat next to me was a young white student of pharmacy in South Africa who had been visiting friends and relatives in Zimbabwe. He and his family belong to those who, upon Zimbabwe attaining independence, decided to pack up and head south. He seemed concerned that about 3,500 Whites were leaving South Africa every month as a result of recent unrest. What were his impressions of Zimbabwe? He was impressed with the progress Zimbabwe had been able to make and the cordial race relations that existed. A number of South African Whites were concerned about being conscripted into the army to fight yet another liberation army and were contemplating returning to Zimbabwe. A familiar experience of talking with white South Africans outside their country is the degree of misinformation they can accumulate and disseminate.

This young white pharmacy student told me confidently that all universities were open to all races. Technically he was right, except that a non-White who wishes to attend a predominantly white university has to obtain a ministerial permit. A couple of days later I read in the papers that the Minister of Education had declared four universities now open to all races, thereby dropping the permit requirement to gain entry. There remain other universities, however, to which non-Whites still cannot gain admission. Discrimination permeates education at the primary and secondary school levels too. For instance in the 1983-84 fiscal year, per capita spending was approximately \$992 for Whites, \$653 for Indians, \$341 for Coloreds and \$141 for Blacks. This disparity in spending on education leads to obvious results released recently on illiteracy rates for South Africans over the age of fifteen: 33 percent for Blacks, 15.5 percent for Coloreds, 7.6 percent for Indians and 0.72 percent for whites. While this progressive announcement was being made, another report appeared alongside, stating that "the quota system which pegs the number or percentage of other race's students which may be admitted to white universities will still remain in force."

The South African government has strategically designated residential areas along racial lines, so that it makes it

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