

# Boycotts proven effective in Third World

by Geoff Martin

Canadian corporate involvement in South Africa is partly responsible for the worsening conditions in that country, according to Joanne Cag, an Oxfam staffperson who

specializes in providing information on the role of multinational corporations in the world.

In addressing a meeting of eight Atlantic university newspapers' delegates at St. John's Newfound-

land this past weekend, Ms. Cag described the plight of blacks in South Africa and what student newspapers and alternative media can do to contribute to social change in the country.

Discussion centred around the need for student media to use advertising boycotts, investigative reporting, and coverage of international events to increase public awareness and put pressure on government policy decisions.

During the seminar, information was provided by Cag on the present situation in the Republic of South Africa. The primary objectionable aspect of the present regime in that country is the policy of apartheid, which is a doctrine providing for the segregated development of the races and has been the official functioning policy since 1948. At present, the country's population consists of 4.8 million whites, 20 million blacks and 2 million 'coloureds' (people of mixed race).

Ms. Cag paid special attention to the involvement of foreign corporations and governments as the primary reason for the resistance of the government to any sort of moderation. According to Cag, apartheid has become very successful in South Africa through legislation which established institutions such as the Bantu labour laws, segregation of blacks from whites through the "township" and "homeland" systems, and white control of black education and government.

The Bantu labour laws provide for maximum legal wages for blacks (which are about 1/5 the wage of whites in the same jobs). Also, there is a dual system in the areas of job safety, education, working conditions and grievance procedures.

In 1954, as an example, Cag said the government assigned every black in South Africa to citizenship in one of nine "Tribal homelands", which are scattered throughout the area known as South Africa and ostensibly designed to provide "black independence" and self-rule.

According to the United Nations Commission on South Africa, living conditions in these areas are unbearable, in contrast to the standard of the white minority. Also important are the Pass Laws, which require each black or coloured to carry pass books, listing personal data and government approval to be outside of their "homeland". Through this, the government is able to regulate the labour supply and maintain the system of migrant labour which is so important to multinational corporations.

Another interesting aspect of apartheid policy in the country is the Bantu Education Act of 1953. In Cag's words, "All Bantu education was placed under the control of the Minister of Education in order to phase out missionary and teacher training for blacks in order to limit their ability to help themselves...Schooling for whites is free at present, while it costs money for blacks thereby making it inaccessible to most." As a result, 70 per cent of all blacks have an education level below grade 3, and 21 per cent have no formal schooling at all. In addition over 40 per cent of all blacks are considered illiterate.

However, as Cag was quick to point out, this has not happened without a significant struggle on the part of the oppressed black majority. "The struggle has been based in the Trade Union Movement and popular organisations which have been active though they are illegal."

Two of the most influential black organisations are the South African Conference of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the African National Congress (ANC).

SACTU, which started working 28 years ago and is dedicated to peaceful change, came to a large confrontation with the government at Sharpsville in 1960, in which black protests over the issue of equal wages left 69 blacks dead and 178 wounded. "As the 1960's progressed, there was an increase in black consciousness similar to the situation which developed in the United States," said Cag. "This culminated in the Student protest in the high schools and the Soweto uprising, which was over two years of massive demonstrations. Estimates of demonstrators killed by security forces range from 1000 to 6000."

After Sharpsville, 1960, there was what Cag termed a "corporate shiver" in North America which resulted in the withdrawal of \$193 million in foreign capital. Also, there were widely-supported motions in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council in the period from 1964 to 1968. Though Canada has traditionally supported UN resolutions, we have been less willing to take other action in our relations with South Africa, said Cag, adding that "Canada still maintains preferential trade agreements with South Africa, and though Canada does not send military weapons, we do sell various components used for military purposes."

"After Soweto, there was a major exodus of young people with the border line states becoming majority ruled (Angola, for example)," she said. "As of late, the ANC has started a violent campaign against the corporate and government assets which perpetuate apartheid. "In 1979, there were 2 incidents of sabotage, then 12 in 1980, and a jump to 254 in 1981.

"Unfortunately, it is not easy to determine the extent of corporate involvement in a country like South Africa, and there is also a great amount of debate as to how much influence or power the corporation actually has in the present government policy."

Cag stressed the fact there has been a shortage of publicity about South Africa, pointing to the fact that much of the Canadian media is influenced by corporations which may have investments in South Africa. "How many of you," she asked the group of delegates, "realize that 1982 is officially the United Nations Year for Sanctions against South Africa? It hasn't been very well publicised; it isn't like the 'Year of the Child'."

Cag said there is no doubt that western governments, including Canada, do have a large amount of influence in the actions of a government like that in South Africa. As recently as this month, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (which are UN 'Special Organisations') 'voted' to provide loans totalling 1.7 billion dollars to South Africa. "Though the majority of nations are against any sort of loan to South Africa, the loan will go through because the US contributes around half of the budget of the IMF, which gives it voting control over where the money goes," remarked Cag.

## Boycotts proven effective

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Recently, a furor has arisen in Canadian University Press (CUP) over the issue of whether or not member newspapers should boycott the advertising of companies whose activities are objectionable to the staffs of the papers and opposed to the statement of principles of CUP.

The issue recently came up due to a De Beers advertisement submitted to Campus Plus, the CUP-owned advertising agency.

De Beers has a world monopoly on diamonds and operates in South Africa, which contains almost all the world's diamond reserves.

Of over 45 CUP papers who have sent the diamond advertisement, only a minority, including

the Dalhousie Gazette, voted to boycott it because of moral opposition on the question of the boycott.

The vote of the Gazette staff was 8 for, 1 against, and 1 abstention on the question of the boycott.

As for the Gazette, five other Canadian organisations have been boycotted by the staff. Four of the major Canadian chartered banks, including the Bank of Montreal, Imperial Bank of Commerce, Bank of Nova Scotia and the Royal Bank of Canada, have been boycotted due to their investments and loans to the government of the Republic of South Africa.

Also, advertisements from the

Université de Moncton have been boycotted by the Gazette staff because of the university's treatment of a number of students who had occupied the Administration building last year. The university refused to readmit a number of students without explanation, which is tantamount to expulsion in that students are 'blacklisted' from other universities.

The Toronto Dominion Bank was originally on the boycott list but the Gazette staff reversed the boycott decision when the bank issued a statement pledging not to fund the government of South Africa or any projects in South Africa.

## Why boycott? - opinion

by Geoff Martin

The question of whether a company should be boycotted for their actions in South Africa or elsewhere has been on a lot of minds lately, in and out of student newspapers in Canada.

The question is both a moral one and one of effectiveness. What sort of moral statement is made when a student newspaper supports a company like De Beers by running advertisements for their products? Clearly (and I don't think there is any room for debate on this issue), when a paper runs an advertisement which is designed to sell the products of a company, then the paper is a part of the sales process which helps to keep the company operating.

The argument which is often used against boycotting is "someone else will only advertise for the company if we don't". However, the same argument could rationalize any action no matter how hideous, including murder, mass

murder, etc., i.e., "Someone else would have worked in the Nazi chamber if I didn't." Papers must take responsibility for all the advertising they run.

According to Joanne Cag of the St. John's Oxfam office, ad boycotts are simply another part of editorial policy. "What you are doing with a boycott policy is making a statement like any other in your paper, whether it be in the news, editorial, arts or features sections," she said.

Not only are boycotts morally sound, but they also work. Contrary to popular belief, they do not worsen the situation of the people in the exploited country. To quote from the policy statement of the Eight Annual Conference (in 1963) of the South African Conference of Trade Unions (SACTU), "The working people of South Africa (read blacks) do not eat imported food or wear imported clothes; nor do we benefit from the export of South African mealies, wool, wine or gold. To our friends abroad we

say that trafficking in the fruits of Apartheid can never be in the interests of the workers who suffer under Apartheid."

In addition to this, Ms. Cag related several examples of effective boycotts. In the case of the Nestle Borden/Gage baby formula scandal, spoiled baby formula (with English instructions) was unloaded in the Third World. Consumer/advertising boycotts of the companies have caused a drastic decrease in the sale of formula in the poorer countries, and have led to legislation by many Third World governments.

Ms. Cag told an engaging story about a British Columbia liquor store strike when just before one store finally closed there was not a bottle of liquor to be seen except for the dusty bottles of Chilean and South African wines.

This really does put pressure on the governments involved, as they are very dependent on foreign trade revenue. The problem so far with a boycott of South Africa, Cag told us, is that it can be difficult to pinpoint irresponsible corporations and then convince people to boycott their products and advertisements. "The Nestle boycott was easier, but South Africa will take a good deal more pressure and a lot more solidarity against the regime and its supporters."

Also commonly heard is the argument that "You can't just boycott one company, so where do you draw the line?" The answer is that you don't draw the line until all objectionable advertising is eliminated. A paper such as the Gazette has no special power over companies that do not advertise with us, but we can apply pressure to ones that do.

Have a look at the advertisements in the paper this week, and drop in and let us know what you think, including ads you do not like.



These two ads, De Beers and Southern Comfort, have become the object of boycotts. De Beers for its financial interests in the apartheid South Africa, and Southern Comfort for its stereotypical portrayal of blacks.