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Hypocrisy mars South African criticism

OTTAWA — In politics, alas, hypocrisy is its own reward. Take Joe Clark, for example.

There he was, making headlines once again spouting off at the Commonwealth foreign ministers' meeting in Australia.

How many times have Clark and his boss Brian Mulroney said Canada will keep the pressure on South Africa?

How often have Clark and Mulroney railed against South Africa, promising tougher economic action while our trade increases with that country?

And who can count the times that both Clark and Mulroney have offered the same empty rhetoric, taking a high moral tone while conveniently ignoring the sinners applauding this line?

South Africa's apartheid policies are, of course, indefensible.

But the treatment of dissenters by South Africa is certainly no worse than the treatment of dissenters in many of the countries we call our friends.

If Clark and Mulroney were committed to fair treatment, they would stop this sham of acting as if South Africa is not only the worst example of human abuse, which it isn't, but the only example.

But why bother, since pointing the finger at other human-rights abusers would cause social, economic and political problems?

On the other hand, since South Africa has no particular friends in the international field, attacking its inhumanity has the benefit of allowing our leaders to appear virtuous without upsetting any of their so-called friends.

If Clark were to be brutally honest he could begin by looking at the records of some of the countries sharing the stage with him in Australia.

He might start by asking Commonwealth Secretary-General Sunny Ramphal when

some of the political prisoners he personally ensconced in Guyana's jails are going to be released.

And while Clark sticks to his demand that South Africa must formally recognize the banned African National Congress, he might ask some of his fellow foreign ministers when they will allow opposition parties in their countries.

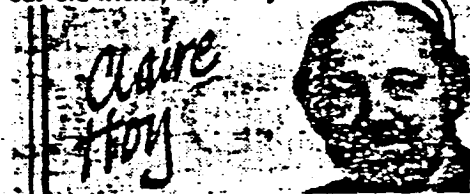
He need look no further than the representatives from Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Why not ask them why they have outlawed opposition and why they've filled their jails with political opponents?

Perhaps next time Clark calls on South Africa to free Nelson Mandela, he might ask the leaders from these other African countries to free prisoners languishing in their jails for the crime of holding a different point of view.

How is it that South Africa must be held to account for its horrid record on human rights while a sordid collection of despots and tinpot tyrants, many of them our close friends in the Commonwealth or the francophone, are allowed to murder and maim innocent civilians with impunity?

The answer of course gets us back to our old friend, hypocrisy.



Clark and Mulroney are not alone. Most other world leaders are part of this same game.

Just as attacking South Africa is any easy hit for a politician, it's also an easy hit for a journalist.

After all, calling for better treatment of people everywhere could be embarrassing.

If Canadian politicians and journalists started doing that, somebody might be unkind enough to ask about our treatment of our native people.

Better to deflect everybody's flaws by concentrating on South Africa.

It's the best way to appear moral without having to act it.