

CURRENTS

Volume 3, No.4

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

Summer 1986

URB0010
1901.C00012

Only

DISPLAY

CANADIAN ORIGINS OF APARTHEID?

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system

Race relations in
Canadian municipalities

Minority police
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selection procedures

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Canada: the impact of
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Published by THE URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS



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CURRENTS: Readings in Race Relations is the quarterly magazine of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations formed in July 1975 "to promote a stable and healthy multiracial environment in the community," is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers from all sectors of the community.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for the visible minorities. It works toward encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multi-racial population through programmes of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It is also focusing its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

The work of the organization is carried out through working committees such as: Educational Institutions; Legislation; Media; Law Enforcement.

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The subscription rate is \$20.00 per year, \$30.00 for institutions.

Membership fees to join the Urban Alliance on Race Relations are:

Students & Senior Citizens	\$ 5.00
General Membership	\$20.00
Sustaining Membership	\$50.00 & over

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Articles offered for publication are welcome. They should be typewritten, double spaced, with adequate margins for notation.

All enquiries about advertising should be directed to the Editor.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

International Standard Serial Number
ISSN 0715-7045.

2nd Class Mail Registration Number 5972.
September 1986

Apartheid in Canada and South Africa

With the worsening situation in South Africa, Canadians appear to be unanimous in their commitment that they and their Government should do everything in their power to hasten the dismantling of the apartheid system in South Africa. Perhaps no other global issue has attained such a level of awareness and consensus among Canadians than that of anti-apartheid. Rarely has our Government received such an unequivocal message from the populace regarding the position it should take on this issue.

Yet at the same time Canadians find it hard to confront and to deal with a history of racist policies and acts which many would view in the same critical terms. Canadians, it seems, have an uncanny ability to misunderstand, misinterpret and dismiss the facts of racial discrimination in Canada, and to persist in clinging to the myths and illusions of Canada as a harmonious, culturally pluralistic society. In so doing, we are in danger of developing an undeclared apartheid which may not be as easy to identify as the declared apartheid of South Africa, but the consequences are really not so different.

The term apartheid has become synonymous with South Africa. This issue of *Currents* suggests that the term can be associated with Canada, and, uncomfortably, in rather too many contexts.

The first article in fact raises the disturbing question as to whether South Africa's apartheid system had its origins in Canada, and whether the Canadian government aided and abetted the establishment of South African apartheid based upon its experience with the Native Indian population.



Photo by Ozell Bonds Jr.

At the recent Arts Against Apartheid rally, Chief Art Solomon was asked to officially welcome Bishop Desmond Tutu to Toronto out of respect for Canada's first people, the Native Canadians. Chief Solomon extended a sacred braid of sweetgrass to Bishop Tutu which symbolizes peace.

The second article, in summarizing the situation of the Native population in Canada, draws similarities with the treatment of Blacks in South Africa.

The mounting evidence of racial discrimination in Canada has repeatedly been documented. Other articles in this issue demonstrate the extent of racial bias and stereotyping in the Canadian media, and the segregation and exclusion of visible minorities in our police forces and in the health system. These are a few examples of

just how deep the gulf is between the illusion of Canada as the peaceable kingdom and the pervasive reality of racism in all aspects of Canadian life.

While we expect our Government to impose meaningful sanctions and to have a strong voice on the world stage in effecting change in South Africa, let us be equally forthright in removing the barriers to racial discrimination in Canada.

Tim Rees

The Canadian origins of South African Apartheid?

The parallels between the South African Coloured Reserves and the Canadian Indian Reserves seem too similar to have been independent inventions ... there are marked similarities between the two systems.¹

Michèle DuCharme

Comparisons of the treatment of Natives in Canada and Blacks in South Africa are neither unfounded nor exaggerated. Both situations have been termed "creations of armed colonialism".² Both have extensive policies and laws which regulate the lives of each country's indigenous peoples, and both serve to impose parallel situations of economic and social deprivation and powerlessness on reserve/homeland inhabitants.

However, government documents from the Public Archives in Ottawa suggest an even closer link between the policies and practices of the two countries.

According to information obtained by Ron Bourgeault, of the Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan, South African government officials visited Canada at different times over a 15-year period from 1948 to 1963 in order to tour Indian reserves and industrial schools in the west.

For example, as late as July, 1962, the South African High Commissioner, W. Dirkse-van-Schalkwyk, visited selected Indian reserves in Western Canada. Judging by the contents of the government documents on this visit, it would appear that the Federal government was eager to help van-Schalkwyk in any way that it could.

According to a memo from J.D. Minnis, Manitoba's Assistant Regional Supervisor to Indian Affairs, it seems

likely that one of the first stops the South African High Commissioner made was at the Brokenhead Reserve at Fort Alexander, Manitoba on July 6, 1962. Minnis wrote that "during the trip, His Excellency showed keen interest, and asked innumerable questions concerning the origins, status and customs of the Indian people on these reserves; their form of Band Government, and the social problems prevalent amongst them; and the relationship of our administration to them."³

Van-Schalkwyk also visited both the Sarcee Indian Reserve as well as the Morley Indian Residential School in Alberta on or around July 9, 1962. The other two visits that are mentioned were to Beardy's Reserve, Duck Lake Agency, Saskatchewan and to the Ermineskin Reserve, Hobberence Agency in Alberta.

In reviewing the contents of the government file entitled "Liaison Union of South African Native Affairs", one cannot help but wonder about the deeper implications implied by this close-knit relationship, albeit "liaison" between Canada and South Africa. It is difficult to know just how extensive these ties are as some of the material in this file cannot be released without clearance from External Affairs. Attached to this file is the following information: "To enable this file to be made available to researchers it has been necessary for IAND (Indian and

Northern Development) officials to exclude some material in accordance with Cabinet Directive No. 46 of 7 June 1973."⁴

Bourgeault has noted that roughly a dozen letters, including at least one piece relating to what was then called Rhodesia, were removed from the file. The reasons behind this action were not disclosed, although Bourgeault has suggested that language may have been one possible factor, if it was considered to be derogatory or inflammatory. Whether or not it was offensive to South Africans or Native Canadians is open to speculation.

In any event, these government documents raise some provocative and urgent questions. Is it merely coincidental that South African Government officials began to take an active interest in Canadian Indian reserves shortly after the National Party Government came into power in 1948 on the promises of white rule? To what extent was the information the South African Government gleaned from Canada applied to the policies of this new government? Is it significant that a program was implemented in the early 60's to refashion colonial-era reserves into 10 national states called bantustans "in which every black in South Africa was assigned nationality whether he lived there or not,"⁵ around the same time that the South African High Commissioner was touring our Canadian reserves? And finally, did Canada establish a state-to-state relationship with South Africa? If so, how much of the turmoil which exists in South Africa today bears the classified seal of Canadian contribution to apartheid?

1. Peter Carstens, "Coercion and Change", in R. Ossenbergs (ed.) *Canadian Society*, Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1971, p.132.
2. Michael Valpy, *Globe and Mail*, April, 1986.
3. J.D. Minnis, "Liaison Union of South African Native Affairs" (1949-1962), Ottawa: Public Archives, July 6, 1962.
4. Indian and Northern Development, from a note attached to the file "Liaison Union of South African Affairs" (1949-1962), Ottawa: Public Archives, July 6, 1962.
5. Valpy, *op. cit.*

