

An insider's view of South Africa

by Leslie Ragan

As a member of Students for Ending Apartheid I recently interviewed a citizen from South Africa who is residing in Grinnell. The citizen felt uncomfortable using their real name because of the laws in South Africa that prohibit publicly speaking against the apartheid government.

Question: Could you first tell us how long you lived in South Africa before coming to Grinnell?

South African Citizen: All of my life until 1982 — about 21 years.

Question: What are the laws that you have mentioned about speaking in public against the South African government?

Answer: The Open Assemblies Act (OAA) which prohibits open meetings. The sentence is a minimum of 5 years.

Question: Are there still visible resistance movements, things that the OAA would sanction against, things you might see Europeans or American participating in?

Answer: Definitely, in 1978 almost all of the Fort Hare students were arrested. They were holding a meeting in the stadium to discuss an indefinite boycott of classes. This was in protest of the inferior education nationwide.

Question: What are some other prevalent techniques that the government uses to control the people?

Answer: Curfews, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. in many townships, road blocks on most highways on a regular basis, and especially following bombings.

Question: Following demonstrations as well?

Answer: Demonstrations are controlled by the riot police.

Question: Have you ever been in a riot?

Answer: Many times. One of which in 1982 when students were protesting on the 21st anniversary of the Republic of South Africa. Students marched to the police station and attempted to burn the flag whereupon the police ordered them not to proceed across a certain point. Students proceeded to cross the line and the police started firing into the crowd. Everyone ran away throwing rocks and missiles at the police. One of my friends was shot in the arm.

Question: Were you arrested?

Answer: No. Only those who went to the hospital including one who had leg amputated. Also those who were arrested immediately.

Question: Have you ever been arrested?

Answer: Yes, Once. We were about 40 students in two cells. We were not subjected to any torture except that the room was very little, and food was hard corn shoved under the door.

Question: How long were you there?

Answer: About 12 days. And then no charges were brought against us.

Question: Are the oppressed united?

Answer: United as far as they believe in the common enemy, but not in regards to the methodologies.

Question: Are there antagonistic groups working against the blacks?

Answer: A lot. The Resistance Movement whose aim is to keep South Africa white. Afrikaanse Students Bond composed of white university students who feel that the government is being too lenient with the militant blacks. They have demonstrations of power and write papers which say that no blacks should be citizens.

Question: Are these groups strong?

Answer: They are influential, but I am not sure exactly how many people are in them. There was a clash between militant white students and racist ones at the University of Witwatersrand. It was a physical battle on the eve of the prime minister's speech at that university, which is one of the

Question: Turning to education, what do you perceive of that situation?

Answer: It is free and compulsory for whites. This means that very few white students do not finish high school. But see, the government spends five times as much on white education than black education. Black schools are very ill-equipped. I, of course, attended a black school. But there are a few desegregated schools, about 10. For blacks, education is neither free nor compulsory, with the result that many a youth leave school at a tender age to work in the industries.

Question: So schools are segregated. What are some other places that segregation is prevalent?

Answer: Churches, restaurants, toilets, hotels, benches at train stations, beaches, buses, everything you can think of except some grocery stores in the cities.

Question: What are the penalties for breaking these rules?

Answer: Getting arrested, but I do not know the specific penalties.

Question: How about concerts? Are they segregated?

Answer: Yes, except when foreign artists come. The government does not want to make a bad image on the performers because when these performers come back to Europe and the U.S. they might say bad things in public. This is also why in large cities there is less segregation because tourists do not usually go anywhere besides the cities. There is a ban on foreign artists by the blacks.

Question: Who gets banned?

Answer: All foreign artists are requested not to come. They are

on the other hand John McEnroe, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Lionel Richie have respected the ban. The artists, especially when popular, raise a lot of money. But

political activists have been killed in detention.

Question: Do you think that student political activists who oppose apartheid should organize in the

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some who break the ban do not. The O'Jays made a loss and Ray Charles was stoned. I mean a lot of people tried to pelt him with rocks and many people were arrested.

Question: Are there many black artists from South Africa?

Answer: Yes, many with an international following. Miriam Makeba was banned from Carnegie Hall because her music was too political.

Question: How is black employment in general?

Answer: Mining and manufacturing are the principal employers. Over 90 percent of the mining is done by blacks. [\$175 is the average salary for black miners. It is \$1,025 for white miners]. Most black employees in the mines are not from South Africa, for the corporations can get foreign labor for even less pay. There are also a lot of accidents and very little compensation for the families of the hurt or deceased.

Question: Is black unemployment high?

Answer: Yes, very high, but I have no statistics. There were more than 8,000 strikes by the black labor force last year. Most strikes came about by way of trade unions, which are unregistered and therefore illegal. It is very hard for black unions to get registered.

Question: So there are legal white unions?

Answer: Yes. All white unions are legal. Dr. Neil Aggett was a white medical practitioner who became the leader of one of the strongest predominantly black unions. But he got murdered while in detention.

Question: So there are a lot of politically related deaths?

Answer: A lot of students and

United States?

Answer: Yes. Especially because it would not be possible to have such a group in South Africa. Divestment has been advocated and still is being advocated by every major black leader of repute in South Africa. For instance Dr. Albert Luthuli the late president of the A.N.C. African National Congress], and Nobel Prize winner appealed strongly to both the U.S. and Britain to divest from South Africa in order to accelerate the tide of change. The recent Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu lost his passport for advocating divestment whilst in Denmark. Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela, and other reputable spokespeople for divestment. Polls taken in South Africa are unrepresentative and laughable because the people cannot openly express their views without the threat of punishment by the government.

Question: Moving closer to our home, what U.S. presidential candidate would win in your opinion most facilitate an end to the inhumanity in South Africa?

Answer: Definitely Reagan is not desired. His policy towards South Africa has been viewed as directed against the advancement of blacks in South Africa. When Carter lost the election there was a nationwide disappointment because he was viewed as a positive influence in the course of the struggle in South Africa. Thus, right now I side with the people who definitely favor any other candidate than Reagan. This is in the hope that he or she would restore the progress initiated by the previous Carter administration in the form of sanctions and concerted effort of the U.N. against South Africa.

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most liberal in South Africa. This was a sequel to a resolution to ban the flag that was adopted by the Student Representative Council. Subsequent to that, the president of the SRC was up for arrest, but he skipped the country because the penalty would have been very high — maybe a life sentence.

perceived as diverting from the real issues and gives the artist the wrong impression of racist South Africa.

Question: Who for example has violated the ban?

Answer: Frank Sinatra, Chick Corea, Jimmy Cliff, the O'Jays, Ray Charles, Jimmy Connors. But



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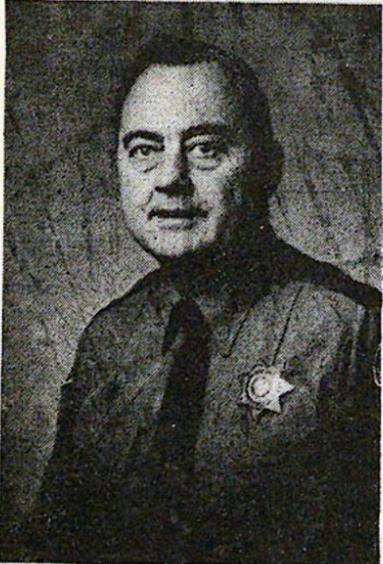
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