

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

Scene: Olympic Games - Montreal, 1976 - July 21 - 24

Subject: South African Hospitality and Information Center
SAN-ROC's efforts in support of South Africa's
expulsion from World Sporting Federations
ACOA presence
All day seminar on Apartheid and Sport

A Report by Raphael Gould

In view of the tremendous amount of interest and controversy generated by the withdrawal of 29 African nations, plus Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Guyana from the Olympic Games, all stories relating to South Africa created a tremendous stir in Montreal and extensive coverage in the media there.

Jean-Claude Ganga, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa, seized every opportunity to state publicly the circumstances leading to the withdrawal of the African nations. The salient points often overlooked or distorted are that the crisis situation relating to the New Zealand Rugby Tour was not a last minute eruption at the Games but had been a subject of controversy for many months.

Even at the eleventh hour realistic reasonable alternatives were being offered by the Supreme Council of Sport representing the African nations amounting to less than withdrawal of the New Zealand Olympic team; the cessation of the New Zealand Rugby tour would be acceptable. New Zealand authorities remained adamant, and would not interfere.

Wednesday, July 21--

It was not easy to locate the South African Hospitality and Information Centre. In light of the adverse publicity South Africa apparently wished to maintain a low profile. A handful of demonstrators showed outside the Laurentian Hotel and was actually outnumbered by the media; about 35 press, radio, and TV. First, picketing and leafletting, then an interesting confrontation between Ed Sloan, President of the Quebec Council of Peace, and the manager of the hotel who tried unsuccessfully to bar our

entrance to the hotel. The Centre had to close its doors to all. This was a top story on TV that night, and in the papers the next day. Ed Sloan called the demonstration and organized the seminar the next day; a very capable man indeed.

Thursday, July 22--

All day seminar on Apartheid and Sport. Ten a.m. to 6 p.m. Total attendance about 100. Average attendance at any one time--35. Many of those present were representing various Canadian peace and social action groups based in Toronto and Montreal. First there were presentations from representatives of organizations. Several from SAN-ROC spoke. Much attention and appreciation was expressed that ACCA had seen fit to participate. Then the floor was opened for discussion. Finally resolutions were introduced for action and/or acceptance by the seminar for release to the press after the close of the seminar. At the seminar Jean-Claude Ganga delivered an impassioned plea for the total isolation of South Africa as the most effective means to bring about an end to apartheid. The media was in and out throughout the day. At one point, the seminar received the news that South Africa had been expelled by the International Amateur Athletic Federation from all participation in track and field. The TV cameras happened to be present to record the jubilant reception of the news which became the top story on TV that evening. ACOA's voice was heard outside the room via two radio interviews. ACOA also set up a remote control hook-up with National Black Radio Network in the U.S. which resulted in members of SAN-ROC being interviewed from the seminar.

Coinciding with each Olympic Games, world federations meet and vote upon national membership eligibility in different amateur sports. South Africa's membership in these bodies has been a subject of great controversy for years, because of its practices of racial discrimination in athletics. At present, South Africa is barred, suspended or expelled from: Soccer (earlier in the week, South Africa, after years of suspension, had been expelled) track and field, table tennis, volley-ball, weight-lifting, cycling, wrestling among others.

The first step toward disqualification is suspension which prohibits team participation with South Africa but permits individual play. Where there is persistent violation of the rules which forbid racial discrimination, expulsion orders that there be no sports contact at all.

The vote of the IAAF (track and field) to expel South Africa was not expected, and viewed as a tremendous step forward in the struggle against apartheid in sport. It was agreed that this was achieved by virtue of a secret rather than open ballot for which SAN-ROC had been working arduously behind the scenes.

Prime Minister Trudeau on TV that night expressed sympathy and understanding for the African nations who felt compelled to leave, and intimated that the situation might have been avoided through more flexibility on the part of New Zealand.

It now appears that New Zealand will not be invited to the Commonwealth Games to take place in Canada next year to open the way for African participation.

Friday, July 23--

Visit to the Olympic Village--outside--tight security.

Delivered some letters for SAN-ROC. Had an opportunity to speak briefly with representatives of the Olympic delegations of East Germany and Jamaica; also chatted with a few American track and field athletes, mostly black, at the practice track. Difficult to get through--totally absorbed with the challenges immediately before them; or depressed with the defeats behind them. Ed Moses, who later received a gold medal for his world shattering time in the 400 meter hurdles, asked me to get in touch with him after the Games. He attends Morehouse College in Atlanta.

More leafletting at the Laurentian that evening.

Saturday, July 24--

Delivered press releases to AP, UPI, New York Times, George Houser's statement opposing US women gymnast tour of South Africa scheduled to begin on July 28,

before the closing of the Olympic Games. The statement was picked up by Reuters Agency. Delivered letter to Dr. Harold Henning's hqtrs--urging a vote for the expulsion of South Africa from the world swimming federation. Dr. Henning is the U.S. representative and chairperson of that body. Swimming Federation is scheduled to meet on Wednesday, July 28.

After the sound and fury caused by the Africans' unexpected mass departure from the Olympics, it is my opinion that the solidarity and sacrifice entailed in their action will be better understood and respected; and that should similar situations be allowed to arise in the future, they will be taken much more seriously. Even more important are the actions by the different world federations of sport which will have a continuing and lasting impact on South Africa and the international community. In this area too much cannot be said in praise of the organization, the tactics, the thorough research and preparation, and the plain hard work of SAN-ROC.

It is excellent news that the U.S. Gymnast Federation has postponed indefinitely the South African tour of American women gymnasts. It is lamentable that they chose to use the rather flimsy excuse that "no qualified coaches could be found" rather than standing on the principle of opposition to racial discrimination. A critical letter has been sent to the federation.

South Africa, under widespread international pressure, undoubtedly will continue to grant small concessions to placate the anti-apartheid forces. It will become increasingly difficult to get across to the general public that the government of South Africa is still committed to the fundamental structure and concepts of apartheid.