

REPORT ON CANADIAN TOUR

1) At the request of the Women's Section, I joined a tour of Quebec which had been organised by a group of women, with the aim of helping Canadian women to forge links of solidarity with women of other countries, and as a preliminary to celebrating International Women's Day on March 8th.

The women organisers were members of groups sponsoring the tour. These were:

Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development & Peace

YMCA, International programme

CREDI - Lanaudiere (Regional Committee for International Development Education)

Centre Pastorale en Monde Ouvrier (Workers' Pastoral Centre)

La Vie en Rose (A woman's magazine).

Development and Peace, launched by Canada's Bishops in 1967, has the goal of promoting solidarity between Canadians and people of the third world. Support is given to hundreds of projects - educational, development, socio-economic.

The concern of all the women organisers is primarily the lives of women in Third World countries, and this includes the oppressed women of South Africa.

The organisers approached the Quebec Government for assistance. They paid the fares of the three other women. In my case, as I was a member of the ANC, they felt they could not sponsor my fare, but gave a donation instead.

Because of their respectable and religious connections the organisers were able to present the tour in a wider way than would have been possible without these connections.

2) The tour started on February 10th, intended to last one month. I missed the first ten days, arriving on 20th.

The ANC had been contacted in October 1984. The possibility of obtaining a delegate from South Africa was discussed both with Joe Saloojee, our Canadian representative, and Ruth Mompoti. The organisers wanted Dorothy Nyebe, and a month later it was agreed that she should be asked. At the same time they said someone else should come if she could not, but it was a long time before they heard that her passport had been refused..

Despite their firm wish for Dorothy, I feel our organisation should have anticipated this and made arrangements for a substitute. I know last-minute attempts were made to get someone else from Africa, the USA - even Australia and Europe. People can't just leave their jobs and work and respond to an immediate request to undertake such a tour. In my own case - and I was a last resort - it was an unusual set of circumstances that made it possible for me to respond.

I felt this showed a lack of understanding of the importance of this tour, and was pleased that I was able to 'stand-in' for those who could not go.

3) We were two Spanish-speaking women and two English-speaking in a French-speaking province. The other delegates were:

Petite Peredo from the Philippines

Rosario Iberra from Nicaragua

Teresa, A Mayan woman from Guatamala

Generally we travelled together, but sometimes split into two different groups.

4) We spoke at meetings and to groups of women in Montreal, Joliette, St Gabriel, Shawinigan, Quebec city, Victoriaville, Drummondville, Sherbrooke, St Hyacinthe, Trois Rivieres and Hull. We often spoke at two or three meetings a day. It was strenuous. I finally went on to Toronto, & spoke at a meeting there.

The groups we addressed were mainly of working-class women, organised in community and self-help organisations. In the towns we did address more middle-class audiences, but the emphasis throughout was on women in lower-income groups.

For example. Women's Centres in poorer areas, an Association of Immigrant Workers, Women who had come together for co-operative food-buying, a club where low-income people could get a free lunch every day, Single-parent ~~XXXXXX~~ families ('Chef de Famille') and trade union women. As can be imagined, the women in most of these groups knew absolutely nothing about South Africa, - some didnt know it was a country, they thought it was a region, and asked which country in South Africa I cam from. They had never heard of apartheid, Nelson Mandela (they hadnt even heard of Greenham Common) and with such groups it was necessary to start with very basic explanations.

However, they re4sponded remarkably, and in the discussions asked pertinent questions.

A usual form of meeting was that we would sit around a long table, or in a circle in a room, and each introduce ourselves and what we did. Each of us four women would speak (with interpreters), then there was discussion. Sometimes we split into two groups, then switched over, to allow more time for discussions.

The women were interested to establish ways in which their own lives could be said to be comparable with women in South Africa, and despite the great differences we always established a feeling that women everywhere have some problems that are similar: eg, low pay, the poorest jobs, the problem of the 'double-work' - home and fxamily & a job; the problem of frequently being left as the sole support of their children; the feeling of women lacking power.

At every single meeting someone would ask 'What can we do?' and while I listed the many activities they could engage in, I feel that it would be good to follow-up with leaflets and propaganda which the tour organisers would distribute to the various groups. At each meeting there was a 'Solidarity Box' into which people put donations, and at the end the money was divided equally between us four women for our organisations.

I was also asked to join a panel of speakers at a symposium on Women and Development in Africa, organised at the Montreal University by the Mouvement des Etudiants Africaine. My contribution here was very well-received.

I also spoke at two anti-apartheid meetings without the other delegates.

I also did a number of radio and press interviews, a long interview with the magaine La Vie en Rose; and in addition we were taken to meet the heads of the Government departments in Quebec who had helped finance the tour.

At the co9nclusion of the tour, we four women met together with our interpreters, to ask each other questions about ourselves and our countries that had not arisen during the tour. The next day we had an evaluation of the tour, followed by a general assessment and discussion on ideas for the future.

I tentatively put forward a suggestion which I give further on in this report.

- 5) **SOME GENERAL COMMENTS.** First, the tour was excellently organised and every detail was attended to. We were met with the utmost hospitality and kindness, and I cannot priase too much the arrangements that were made for our personal needs and comfort.

We four women, our ages ranging from 22 to almost 70, became marvellous companions, and parted in tears. I feel that we should try to establish some more permanent links with, particularly, the women of Nicaragua, and also with the struggles of women in Guatamala and the Phillipines.

We finished the tour with an International Women's Day concert and party that was a most joyous occasion, with performers of all nationalites and a very mixed audience. We four women wach made a very short speech, and I taught the

the audience to shout Amandla - Ngwetu!

At the final discussions - a follow-up on the general assessment of the tour and suggestions for the future, the women organisers expressed their ~~like~~ pleasure at the outcome of the tour and felt it was a most positive and worthwhile experience for us all.

The suggestions made about future activities were these:

Teresa, who described in her speeches the horrific brutality exercised by the state against women in the villages, said she would like to see a general campaign against violence against women. She would take back to her people the things she had learned about our countries and would like them to work more closely with women of other countries.

Petite suggested a newsletter to inform all groups - a follow-up.

I suggested that we might launch a campaign focussing on some individual women. My suggestion was that we should select, say, four or six women (Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Mandela, Barbara Hogan, and others), prepare posters and leaflets, and launch a campaign for FREE THESE WOMEN.

My experience was that women in countries that know so little about South Africa find it easier to focus on individuals and their personal conditions and experiences than to speak in general terms.

At the end of the tour the organisers arranged to change my ticket (at their expense) to visit Toronto, where I met ANC members and supporters in our office there and spoke at two meetings, as well as doing two press interviews.

A note about our women organisers. Three of the women, one of whom I stayed with, had visited South Africa last year and met Dorothy Nyembe (hence their idea to invite her.) While in SA they had visited two Bantustans, been to Soweto and Crossroads, and met very well-informed people. I was amazed at the up-to-date and excellent extent of their knowledge about SA. They are complete supporters of the ANC, and in fact I could not find any differences between them and myself on any political question that we discussed. I feel we have some wonderful allies among these Catholic organisations and should cherish them.

I enjoyed the tour immensely, and was pleased that I had been able to respond to the last-minute request to go. I feel it was very valuable to us.

(A further note: Dorothy Nyembe came with us in the form of a poster pinned to a cloth, wherever we went, and took her place in an empty chair. This of course, afforded a good starting opportunity to explain the apartheid regime.)

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