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REPORT ON ECC TOUR OF CANADA DONE BY ECC MEMBER PAULA HATHORN

I have recently returned from an ECC tour which was hosted by Oxfam-Canada. It was a tiring but exciting and stimulating eighteen days. I returned very inspired by the fact that there are groups of people in towns across Canada who are committed to working for change in South Africa, a place that is half way across the world and very abstract to them.

Oxfam-Canada is an international development organisation, and they attempt to deal with the causes of underdevelopment as well as their symptoms. In Southern Africa much of their work would be providing aid and being involved in development projects, but they also focus on South Africa's role in causing and maintaining poverty in the sub-continent. Oxfam-Canada invited an ECC person to participate in the launch of their two year focus on Militarism and Development, specifically to look at the relationship between militarism and development in Southern Africa.

During the tour I spoke in different towns in Canada: Victoria and Vancouver on the West Coast; and Hamilton, Kitchener, London, Ottawa, Kingston, Peterborough and Toronto in the province of Ontario. I gave 18 public talks, spoke to 11 high school classes, gave 12 newspaper/magazine interviews, 9 radio interviews and 4 television interviews (2 of them live), as well as a number of meetings with individuals. Most of the time inbetween was spent travelling. On the whole people knew little about the extent of conscription in SA and had lots of questions about both the conscription area and broader issues. Canadians seem able to identify with an anti-conscription campaign because many of the American Vietnam war resisters wound up seeking refuge in Canada. Many people were also intrigued to meet a white South African involved in progressive work. I had been warned that I might be the target of some racist anti-white types but there was surprisingly little of this.

I was fortunate to be able to attend and address a conference on Angola. The conference aimed to "strengthen the Canadian response to the economic and humanitarian needs of Angola" and it was called to "widen the network of Canadians involved in education and development in Angola". It gave me an opportunity to speak about ECC's response to the war in Angola, and to meet Angolans and hear about their country.

Another particularly valuable aspect of the tour was the amount of work that I did in high schools. The pupils were interested and responsive, and many of the classes were keen on having a practical response which can be followed up by the local Oxfam branch and/or the teacher.

I am going to skimp on the report of the actual tour and focus on what I see as the gains of the tours, now that I have had the privilege of going on one. I think it is often difficult for us sitting in our local ECC branch in South Africa to get any

sense of the value of sending members on tours.

GAINS

* Builds public awareness in Canada around the situation in South Africa. This is especially important now that SA doesn't feature much on the tv screens

* impart information about SA to activists and to the public. e.g. in Canada audiences were shocked at the length of service conscripts here are obliged to do.

* act as a dynamo for the anti-apartheid groups. They are isolated from work inside SA. and it is a boost for them to meet people personally. It makes their work feel more real and meaningful.

* the more we are able to feed and dynamise groups overseas, then the more effective they are able to be in their work. If Canadians feel strongly about apartheid in SA they can pressurise their government to put pressure on the South African government. Canada can also try and influence other governments to do likewise. This adds to the international pressure on SA to change, and is an important component of the forces which could ultimately bring about an end to apartheid.

* internationally it is difficult for people to believe that there are whites involved in the struggle for change. A real, live progressive white does a lot to build an understanding of non-racialism.

* when ECC runs campaigns/actions we can call on organisations internationally to support us and this can add depth and legitimacy to our work here.

* if/when ECC experiences repression we can mobilise international protest because of our contact. This increases the cost of the repression for the South African government.

* ECC becomes part of an international struggle against injustice and militarisation. We tend to feel isolated and it is valuable to place ourselves into the context of global militarisation.

* It gives us an opportunity to learn from the work of other organisations. to share resources and ideas.

LOSSES

* perhaps it is a security risk for the person going

* if we are caught up in a big campaign and it is difficult for us to release someone.

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