

NC/SM

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FOR PUBLICATION

Dear Sir,

THE REASON FOR OPPOSITION TO THE SALE OF "INSTRUMENTS OF VIOLENCE"
TO THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT

NUSAS has been roundly berated for calling on the Commonwealth Students' Conference to resolve itself against the supply of arms to South Africa, but much of the criticism has been unfounded, or based on false or usually emotional premises.,

It is worthwhile examining the reasons for the opposition to arms sales since these have tended to be lost in the excitement of attacking NUSAS. There are a number of reasons which I shall first list and then deal with individually.

- (1) South Africa does not need arms.
- (2) Provision of arms to South Africa is likely to provoke rather than; deter communist neo-colonial incursions.
- (3) South Africa needs many things more urgently than arms.
- (4) The Nationalist Government does not really want the arms.

(1) SOUTH AFRICA DOES NOT NEED ARMS

South Africa is indisputably the strongest military power in Africa - she has sufficient equipment, and sufficient productive capacity to resist almost any internal dissent or external incursion. A stockpile of military equipment to the value of over R2,000 million exists.

(2) PROVISION OF ARMS TO SOUTH AFRICA IS LIKELY TO PROMOTE RATHER THAN DETER COMMUNIST NEO COLONIAL INCURSION

The arms in question in the proposed deal with Britain are maritime arms for external defence against Soviet expansion in the Indian Ocean - or so we are told. First, it is worth noting that the United States of America sees no Soviet threat in the Indian Ocean. And the United States of America of all people is aware of that bogey "the Communist threat". Mr Heath was unsuccessful in persuading Mr Nixon of the danger, and it is worth reflecting on this.

Second, it is worth noting that Mr Denis Healey ex Labour Secretary for Defence is of the opinion that the provision of maritime or any arms to South Africa is more likely to promote the expansion of Soviet influence, in the remainder of Africa. The greatest weapon the communists have, he said, is apartheid.

From these two points, brief put as they are, one may argue that the Soviet threat is not as extensive as it is made out to be, and that supplying arms to South Africa is likely to encourage, not deter, Soviet influence and expansion.

(3) SOUTH AFRICA NEEDS MANY THINGS MORE URGENTLY THAN ARMS

Government spending on arms has reached enormous heights. Over the last decade it has doubled and quadrupled and the huge stockpile which already exist ensures military pre-eminence in Africa. Two points should be noted.

At one stage it was proposed to spend R350 million on arms - it takes little stretch of the imagination to see what good effects the spending of this amount of money could have on say housing, education, and health services - where these either do not exist or are wholly inadequate amongst the black people of South Africa.

- (a) It is conditions within South Africa which have sparked opposition to South Africa - apartheid conditions - and it is these which desperately need spending on a large scale to resolve, and which if resolved will lead to a decline in hostility and less need to stockpile weapons.
- (b) Dialogue and contact with other African countries will be discouraged and not encouraged, if South Africa by her military strength places them in a position of fear. The nations of Africa are already in fear - of apartheid and South Africa's internal policies - stockpiling of arms will simply make the position worse.

(4) THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT DOES NOT REALLY NEED THE ARMS

It has become clear that South Africa does not need arms - certainly not as an urgent priority - but it can also be contested that the Nationalist Government does not really want the arms either. Implicit reference to this have been made within that Government and the recent decline in the amount of arms required, seem to establish this.

What then is the object of the exercise?

It seems clear to me that the Nationalist Government is seeking the recognition and tacit endorsement of the apartheid status quo which the supply of arms by a government as respectable as that of Britain would generate. 'If even arms can be given to the Nationalists then they, and conditions in South Africa cannot be so bad after all' - is the sort of remark the Government is trying to promote.

So it is endorsement, and the entrenchment of apartheid which it would imply that is the crux of the arms issue. NUSAS is opposed to apartheid, believes, in the need for urgent change within South Africa, and is therefore opposed to the supply of 'instruments of violence'.

Two further brief points are of note:-

A man in a dispute who is able to use violent instruments, is more likely to use these to resolve a dispute, than if he does not have them. South Africa is already a society in which violence has been institutionalised to an inordinate degree - anything which will encourage further such institutionalised violence is unlikely to lead to the resolution of problems and the achievement of a sane and just society.

Yours faithfully,

NEVILLE CURTIS,
PRESIDENT.