

THE CRICKETING MERCENARIES

by Sam Ramsamy

"Collaboration with, rather than isolation of, the enemy, in order to give apartheid a face-lift, cannot be in the best interests of West Indian players or West Indian cricket, if for no other reason than that the very forces responsible for the impoverishment and oppression of the South African peoples are the very same forces responsible for the underdevelopment of the Caribbean, namely American and British imperialism."

Workers' Party of Jamaica

Apartheid sport, isolated from nearly all international participation, is now fighting for its survival.

International sport is very important to racist South Africa. More important than in any other country in the world. Besides using sport as an avenue to create respectability for apartheid, South Africa also uses sport to unite the whites into a fervour of racist patriotism.

Recently several West Indian cricketers were lured to South Africa to be used as court jesters to boost the flagging morale of apartheid's white electorate. The all-black West Indian opposition playing all-white South African national sides was an ideal environment to stir the white rulers to ecstatic chauvinism.

The West Indian team which was relatively mediocre by international

standards was being acclaimed as the greatest side ever to visit South Africa. Employers were asked to do their utmost to enable their staff to watch the matches. The apartheid regime's minister in charge of sport congratulated the organisers on "their tremendous success" and appealed "to all South Africans to do what is practical to support the successful initiative of the (white) South African Cricket Union."

Although sportsmen from developing countries are easy prey for western entrepreneurs not many suspected that West Indian cricketers would ever play in apartheid South Africa.

As soon as the cricketers landed in South Africa compassionate stories were circulating the world over, that their choice was between playing in South Africa and starving. One of the West Indian cricketers

even asked, "When you see your wife and children don't have enough to eat what do you do?" Another stated, "if someone is prepared to give me money to feed my children, buy them clothing and myself a motor car I will not go." That these cricketers were attracted by highly inflated appearance fees is certainly true. That they accepted the offers because their families were starving is an utter and blatant lie.

Anyone who might consider pardoning them because of inspiration they might have received from the ancient saying "forgive them, for they know not what they do," will only be absolving these collaborators from treachery. "It is an act of treachery to the black people of South Africa who cry out for help for relief from the indignities and suffering of apartheid and the repression of the regime which upholds it," said Sir Sridath Ramphal, Commonwealth Secretary-General. Any mediocre cricketer who is given 150 000 dollars for a five week tour knows what he is being paid for. No country will spend 4 million dollars to attract a bunch of mediocre cricketers if it is not of national importance. The seven month secret negotiations which preceded the tour is sufficient evidence in itself that every player was fully aware of the implications of participating in South Africa. Only a week before their arrival in South Africa several of the cricketers denied any knowledge of the tour. One of them, Lawrence Rowe, even deceived and misled Mr. Alan Rae, President of the West Indies Cricket Board of Control, about his stand, causing Mr. Rae to make an embarrassing and premature declaration of gratitude. This deception was termed "vicious and heinous" by Jamaica's Minister of Youth and Community Development, Mr. Errol Anderson.

Even one of South Africa's white newspapers stated that the tour had become a major media event. The newspaper went on to say, "this is an important sporting event, and an even more important political event."

The usual band of South Africa's over-

seas supporters defined the West Indian cricket tour as a victory for sport and a defeat for those who wished to bring politics into sport. The sports lesson which emerged from this tour was that lies are elevated to moral acceptability and deceit is legitimised. And as for bringing politics into sport it seems that it is perfectly in order for the apartheid regime, whose sole aim is to maintain white domination, to underwrite the tour.

It seems obvious that English county cricket grounds were important venues for recruitment and finalising contracts. White South African cricketers attached to English county cricket, no doubt, played a crucial part in the negotiations. Their role is being conveniently suppressed because of the possibility of reprisals. It is also strongly suspected that an international hotel chain acted as conduits to channel money to certain West Indian islands and facilitated communication with South Africa. One English cricketer is reported to have approached Malcolm Marshall of Barbados, the West Indian fast bowler, to tour South Africa with a promise of an extremely huge appearance fee. Marshall declined to go. So did Barbadians Desmond Haynes and Hartley Alleyne. Foad Bacchus of Guyana and Winston Davis of St Vincent and Windward Island withdrew earlier.

A few years ago top West Indian cricketers, Viv Richards of Antigua and Clive Lloyd of Guyana were virtually given an open cheque to appear in South Africa but these offers were rejected with the contempt they deserved. Lloyd said, "there was no way I would go there under the present system and that was my final word."

There was world-wide condemnation of the tour. Clive Lloyd, the West Indian captain said that it was a major setback for the people who are trying to get rid of the apartheid system. He accepted that "the money was very tempting, but that was not all in life."

The West Indies Cricket Board of Control immediately banned the cricketers



for life and several West Indian Governments stated that the cricketers would not be allowed to enter their countries. The Grenada Government said that the money earned by these cricketers should be confiscated and handed to the ANC and SWAPO. Mr. Michael Manley, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, called the cricketers "traitors to the liberation struggle of the South African people." Mr. Malcom Fraser, Prime Minister of Australia, a strong supporter of the sports boycott campaign, announced that Australia would refuse entry to any player who plays representative cricket in South Africa.

Inside South Africa black trade unions, student groups and sports bodies affiliated to the anti-apartheid South African Council on Sport (SACOS) called for a mass boycott of the matches. SACOS condemned the cricketers for accepting the degrading status of "Honorary White". An AZAPO spokesman said "We will try and meet these fellows and impress upon them that their mercenary tour is retrogressive to our liberation struggle."

Whether these mercenaries will ever be exposed to the daily humiliations that black South Africans are subjected to is

another matter. The apartheid regime has nominated a liaison officer to facilitate all their travel and accommodation arrangements. Besides, as one white South African newspaper put it, "Unfortunately they haven't been able to see much, if anything except airports, hotels and cricket crowds." The regime's liaison officer also ensured that these collaborators were fully occupied with electronic games during any spare time they had.

The West Indian Team consisted of:

Barbados

Collis King, Emmerson Trotman, Franklyn Stephenson, Alvin Greenidge, Sylvester Clarke, Ezra Moseley, David Murray, Gregory Armstrong, Albert Padmore.

Jamaica

Richard Austin, Lawrence Rowe, Everton Mattis, Ray Wynter

Guyana

Colin Croft, Alvin Kalicharan.

Trinidad and Tobago

Bernard Julien.

Leeward Island

Derrick Parry.