



MASSACHUSETTS CITIZENS AGAINST APARTHEID

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COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ANTI-APARTHEID GROUPS TO MEET WITH WBZ-TV TO OPPOSE SOUTH AFRICAN BOXING MATCH.

On September 6, 1979, representatives of Massachusetts Citizens Against Apartheid, The South African Solidarity Committee, the Boston Coalition Against Apartheid, as well as community leaders and media specialists, will be meeting with Mr. Sy Yanoff, General Manager of WBZ TV, to discuss the broadcasting of the boxing match between the black American John Tate and the white South African Gerrie Coetzee.

In a letter to Mr. Sy Yanoff, the MACAA stated: "It has become clear to us that the South African government wishes to use the occasion to present itself in a favorable and deceptive light. As concerned citizens of Massachusetts, representing the international and multi-ethnic communities in the state, we would not wish for WBZ TV to find itself, perhaps inadvertently, in the position of presenting a boxing match that will serve the interests of an immoral and illegitimate regime... (nor) to be identified by its viewers as a station insensitive to matters of racial justice."

Mr. Yates, Assistant Manager of WBZ TV, confirming the appointment to meet with Mr. Sy Yanoff, stated that NBC had not yet committed itself to broadcasting the fight. In meeting with Mr. Yanoff, community leaders and representatives of anti-apartheid movements are hopeful that WBZ TV will exercise its option not to carry the fight should NBC decide to honor its contractual obligations with Top Rank, Inc, the promoters. A spokesperson for MACAA stated that "we are hopeful that WBZ TV will signal to the nation that it will not serve to legitimize a regime with a record of human rights violations that has been compared to that of Nazi Germany. Quite frankly, though, we believe that should WBZ TV decide to carry the fight, a grass roots and student campaign will be launched that could very well tarnish WBZ TV's reputation as a station responsive to the needs of the multi-ethnic communities in Boston and Massachusetts."

The meeting was called as part of a national effort to oppose the fight. The match is one of a series of elimination bouts arranged by boxing promoter Robert Arum through the World Boxing Association, which is dominated by South African officials.

According to a report issued by the South African government's Department of Sport and Recreation, "Professional boxing is one of the few sports that does not suffer under sports isolation; in fact it has progressed remarkably in 1978.... The good order which reigns in professional boxing can be ascribed very largely to the outstanding guidance given by the South African National Boxing Control Board. The World Boxing Association has great respect for the services which the Board renders to professional boxing throughout the world. As proof of the respect which the Board enjoys abroad, I wish to mention that four of its members and its Secretary were appointed to important positions on committees of the WBA during 1978."

A spokesperson for the South African Council on Sport, an anti-apartheid organization, has called Robert Arum an "opportunist" for his pivotal role in making the fight arrangements. Black boxers, controlled by Arum, have been pressured into fighting South Africans. In promoting this fight, Arum argued that he has personally "licked apartheid" and secured a promise that this and every future sporting event in South Africa will be integrated. After using this argument to disarm criticism, Mr. Arum suddenly acknowledged that the South Africans were lying to him. To support Mr. Arum's position, the Public Relations head for Top Rank, Inc. stated during a telephone interview that Mr. Arum was not a racist (even though the question was never posed).

According to a report from ACCESS (The American Coordinating Committee for Equality in Sport and Society), the non-racial South African Council on Sport (SACCAS) has charged that the South African Southern Sun Hotels, co-promoters of the fight, have "laundered" Ministry of Information funds to promote South African boxing in the U.S. The Information Consul for the South African Consulate in New York denied these charges, presented to him by a representative of MACAA. The Information Consul said: "To the best of my knowledge, South African government funds are not involved in promoting the fight."

Representatives of STFC (Stop the Fight Campaign) met on August 14, 1979, with Art Watson, President of NBC Sports, and several of his colleagues. A representative of STFC stated that the fight was an affront to all Americans who oppose racial injustice and would be used by the South Africans as a propaganda showpiece, with a black fighting a white before a mixed audience. In addition, NBC was notified that the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa had just cabled NBC to stop the fight or face severe consequences on the African continent. The SCSA would instruct African athletes not to grant interviews to NBC at the Olympics; no sports events in Africa could be televised by NBC; and the SCSA would raise the whole issue of NBC's Moscow coverage with the Soviet Olympic officials unless NBC cancelled the telecast.

UPDATE

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Mr. Dennis Brutus, the distinguished exiled South African humanist and foe of apartheid, and President of the South African Non-Racial Committee, conferred in Boston with representatives of Massachusetts Citizens Against Apartheid and the South African Solidarity Committee, a Harvard-based group. He had just arrived from New York, where he and a delegation of human rights leaders and Africanists had met with Robert Arum of Top Rank, Inc.

Mr. Brutus stated "I wish to express my appreciation and that of all South Africans opposed to Apartheid and racism for the actions being taken by your groups. I would also urge groups across the country to approach their local NBC affiliates." Mr. Brutus is trying to arrange his schedule in order to participate in the meeting with Mr. Sy Yanoff. During his visit he will be conferring with representatives of news organs as well as meeting with community leaders.

For further information, contact Peter McFarren of MACAA, 864-5496.