



Gazette, David Bidaway

Head of group that encourages investment in South Africa spoke to some empty tables at Canadian Club.

Speech backing South Africa draws boycott

By CRAIG TOOMEY
of The Gazette

At least two corporate members of the Canadian Club of Montreal boycotted a club luncheon meeting yesterday to protest against a speech by the head of a Canadian group that encourages investment in white-ruled South Africa.

Leopold-Property-Consultants Inc. and Alexis Nihon Corp., both real-estate firms, purchased tables at the luncheon and then left them vacant.

Executives of the two companies said they took the unusual step to express their disapproval of the speech by Walter Lawson, executive director of the Canadian South African Society, a South African-funded group based in Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

Several other regular corporate participants simply stayed away from the meeting, which drew fewer than half the normal 200 guests but included Walter Baker, South Africa's consul in Montreal.

"I did not feel it was appropriate for anyone from my company to attend," said Stephen Leopold, president of Leopold Property.

Leopold said he would prefer to receive information on South Africa from "credible and objective" sources such as journalists and news agencies. But South African censorship laws that are "greater than those of Russia" are preventing him from doing so.

Claude Amann, vice-president of marketing and public relations for Alexis Nihon, said his company was disappointed with the club's choice of speaker and disagreed

strongly with the Canadian South African Society's publicly stated positions.

Funded largely by the South Africa Foundation, an independent South African business group, the society aims to keep Canadian investment flowing into the white-ruled country.

"We support our government with regards to the South African situation," Amann said, without elaborating.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said during the weekend that Canada will ultimately cut all political and economic ties with South Africa because of its racist apartheid policies.

André Bleson, the Canadian Club's vice-president and chairman of the luncheon, said that to his knowledge none of the group's

members had lodged a formal protest over Lawson's appearance.

He said the role of the club's luncheons was to provide a forum for public opinion and Lawson's views were in no way shared by the organization.

In his speech, Lawson described economic sanctions against South Africa as "ham-handed and inhuman" measures that hurt the country's black population without promoting social change.

The retired executive of Montreal-based Domtar Inc. maintained that there is widespread resentment among all races in the country over the imposition of sanctions. "They feel they are getting very little encouragement for the very extensive reforms which have taken place in recent years."

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