

## SPERRFRIST MONTAG, 8. JUNI, 17.00 Uhr

Address Pronounced on the Occasion of Renaming Krugerstrasse in the City of St.Gallen

Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2009

By Hans Fässler, historian and former member of the Anti-Apartheid Movement

Comrades of the anti-apartheid struggle, including Councillor Solomon Tshivhula as representative of the Embassy of the Republic of South Africa

Elected officials

Members of the city government of St.Gallen

Ladies and gentlemen of the press

Distinguished guests

We are gathered here to celebrate and to reflect. To celebrate the fact that in the suburb of Lachen-Vonwil in the west of St.Gallen (where incidentally I spent the first 25 years of my life), a street named after Paul Kruger has been renamed. To put the history of southern Africa in a nutshell: Kruger was a forerunner of apartheid, a champion of white supremacy, one who talked of the natives of that region as "kaffirs", "savages", "rustlers" and "thieves". Kruger strongly believed that Blacks and Whites were not part of one and the same human race, that the Boers were God's chosen people destined to wrest the land away from the "devious native chiefs", that the Whites were born to rule and the Blacks to serve, and that there could only be one civilization on African soil, that of the "White Man". So it is altogether fitting and proper to un-honour such a man by taking his street away from him, and I should like to thank the city authorities for having consented after 23 years to a demand voiced for the first time by the local chapter of the Swiss anti-apartheid movement.

This is where the celebration ends and the reflection begins. Because renaming Krugerstrasse may be a giant leap for St.Gallen's city government, for the anti-apartheid movement, however, and for its legitimate heir, the Apartheid Debt and Reparations Campaign, it is only one small step. Because millions of the victims of that crime against humanity, as apartheid was branded by the UN General Assembly in 1973, are still alive today and continue to be victims. And the profiteers of Apartheid are still alive today, too, and some of them are just around the corner.

It has been established beyond doubt by the so-called *Kreis Report* of 2005 and other studies that the South African Apartheid regime had good and reliable friends in Switzerland, particularly throughout the 1980s, when, in a context of increased militarization and repression in South Africa, Swiss relations with Pretoria intensified. Military co-operation, weapons manufacturing, arms dealing, nuclear co-operation, intelligence co-operation, bank loans and other financial exports, gold and diamond dealing and sanctions busting provided much-needed relief at a time when the white masters at the Cape of No Hope were increasingly isolated by the international community.

It is for that reason that in 2002 the so-called Khulumani complaint was filed in New York in the name of victims of Apartheid: to hold a number of businesses responsible for aiding and abetting that murderous regime. Among those companies were Holcim, EMS-Chemie, Nestlé, Sulzer, Schindler, Novartis and Oehrlikon Contraves. And, needless to say, there were the very same banks that have been instrumental in bringing about the deepest economic and social crises in our generation: Crédit Suisse and UBS. It was no other than Friedrich Dürrenmatt, who, in his little-known short story *The viral epidemic in South Africa* (1986) wrote: "The Swiss bankers believe that the more they participated in the South African economy and the more they busted the sanctions against that country, the more they were respecting the true interests of the black population."

Apartheid, let it be said clearly and without any false regards, is an unfinished business, in the double sense of the word.

It is unfinished, firstly, because we still do not know the whole truth about the "Swiss Apartheid Connection". The decision taken in 2003 by the Swiss federal government to close down access for the research teams to the Federal Archives must be revoked. Because with the Swiss banks probably dropped out of the Apartheid Reparations litigation in New York's District Court, the claim to protect Swiss companies facing civil claims for reparations in US courts can no longer be upheld.

It is unfinished, secondly, because the campaign for Apartheid reparations will continue, both inside and outside the courts, hopefully ending with a conviction of a number of multinational companies for aiding and abetting a crime against humanity, a decision which will make history like the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal.

It is unfinished, thirdly, because the Swiss federal government has refused so far to discuss or comment on the findings of the *Kreis Report* of 2005. It has done so stubbornly vis-à-vis the Swiss political public, and it has done so indecently when Swiss ambassador Rudolph Baerfuss, apparently on orders from the Swiss Foreign Ministry, refused to respond to a memorandum presented by prominent representatives of South African civil society groups, i.e. the representatives of Apartheid victims.

It is unfinished, fourthly, because the city government of St.Gallen, in their answer to *Private Members Question No. 183* as to whether they would confirm the fact that, as late as the 1980s, the centre and right of centre parties represented in the city council had supported Apartheid, simply answered: No.

Let me conclude my address on a sombre note. In 1986 our press-conference to have Krügerstrasse renamed was underpinned by the participation of the then mayor of St.Gallen, Heinz Christen, and the minister of Justice of the Canton of St.Gallen, Hans Rohrer. It was honoured by the presence of Dulcie September. To introduce her to those unfamiliar with the painful history of the anti-apartheid struggle and in order to link that struggle to those against slavery and racism, I quote what Shoayb Casoo of the South African Embassy in Paris said in 2008 on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage to the death cell of Toussaint Louverture in Fort de Joux: "In South Africa, with the support of our friends throughout the world, freedom came only fourteen years ago. It was a long struggle to achieve the ideals that Toussaint Louverture, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King and others have advocated. It was a struggle that witnessed many sacrifices. I want to mention one very significant event that has many parallels with our commemoration here today. I am referring to a great South African and freedom fighter, Dulcie September, Chief Representative of the African National Congress (ANC) in France, Switzerland and Luxembourg. She was the victim of an act of cowardice and of vile – she was assassinated on 29 March 1988, in the town of Arcueil, just outside Paris. She too shared the values and spirit of Toussaint Louverture, and she too suffered an untimely death – and she too left the same legacy of hope and inspiration that continues today."

I therefore ask you for a moment of silence in memory of that brave woman, who, incidentally, has had a square named after her in the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement.

Ladies and gentlemen, naming a soccer stadium (Grünigerstadion), naming a school (Ecole Primaire Dulcie September), renaming a city (Stalingrad, Pretoria) or a street (Krügerstrasse) or renaming a mountain (Agassizhorn) can and must never be an end in itself. It is and will always be part of the politics of memory, i.e. of the struggle over the interpretations of history and part of the ongoing struggle for justice, equality and a life in dignity for all.