

# Brave Ottawa, where tough talk is cheap

**T**oronto is just now recovering from the elation of Bishop Desmond Tutu's visit. Aftershocks of moral indignation still reverberate across our body politic.

This week Canada's sword of vengeance, in the form of Joe Clark, smote evil South Africa yet another body blow: \$2 million more of our tax dollars would go to "victims of apartheid" for something called "black education."

Bully for Joe and Brian. The world must be told that Canada will not put up with injustice or oppression. But before their chests swell too much with pride, let me recall a visit by another foreigner last year, one that somehow failed to produce the same orgasms of adulation that greeted Desmond Tutu.

In July, 1985, Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani and a group of Afghan resistance leaders came on a secret visit to Toronto. Rabbani is head of the Jamiat-Islami, the largest of the nationalist guerrilla forces fighting Afghanistan's Soviet invaders. They had come to meet Canada's Islamic community and to beg aid for Afghan soldiers and wounded civilians.

Incredibly, shamefully, Rabbani and his colleagues had to sneak into Toronto, hide here and leave like thieves in the night. There was no media gush, no frenzy of supporters, no United Church tambourine services, no \$100-a-plate dinners. No money, only silence.

Why was Rabbani, who was warmly greeted at the White House this past week by President Ronald Reagan, treated by Canada like a leper?



I was the only journalist to meet with Rabbani and what he told was shocking. External affairs, that great, clarion-voiced defender of human rights, had at first refused Rabbani entry into Canada. Only after pressure from the U.S. did Ottawa most grudgingly allow Rabbani and his allies into the country — provided that they remained silent, invisible and left quickly.

So I found myself with the most important leader of free Afghanistan in a setting that could only be described as halucinatory — a small apartment in a university dormitory in Etobicoke, filled with turbaned, robed Afghan warriors. Two men were cooking food — a precaution, they explained, because of Soviet KGB attempts to poison Rabbani. Other Afghan warriors guarded the doors and windows.

Rabbani quietly itemized the mounting horrors being inflicted on his shattered nation by Soviet occupation forces. Three million suffering refugees in Pakistan and four million more starving, disease-ridden victims inside Afghanistan. Tens of thousands of Afghan children being kidnapped from their families and sent to the USSR

for communist indoctrination. Countless wounded, maimed, ill. The growing number of insane.

We spoke, amid the gentle greenery of suburban Toronto, of the fire bombs that do not go out, of murder and mass executions, of the poisoned wells, the mines, and the air strikes. Rabbani told me of the thousands of Afghan children without feet and hands, victims of exploding toys scattered by the Russians. Of Afghan men and women burned alive by the secret police, frozen in refrigerators, electrocuted. Of fathers forced to watch their wives and children raped before their eyes.

All horrors confirmed by the United Nations, all part of the relentless genocide of the Afghan people by the Soviet invaders. And all things that our government did not want said aloud in Canada.

Brave Ottawa has millions for "black education" but not a penny for maimed Afghan children.

Rabbani went away as he came, in silence. External affairs no doubt breathed a sigh of relief. As one official told me, "we just couldn't run the risk of damaging relations with the Russians, now could we?" Of course not. You see, we sell wheat and construction equipment to the Soviet Union. An angry Kremlin could cost Ottawa a lot of votes if it cut off Canadian imports.

Canada does not export much of anything to South Africa — moral platitudes excepted. Urging sanctions against Pretoria is painless, a cheap shot that earns left-wing votes without getting customers mad at you. Scourge South Africa for denying blacks the vote. But don't even dare whisper about Afghanistan where an entire nation is being slaughtered by those nice people who buy our wheat.