

1997

In Good Faith

Erika Simpson

Political Science, simpson@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Simpson, Erika, "In Good Faith" (1997). *Political Science Publications*. 99.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/99>

Reviews

IN GOOD FAITH

Canadian churches against apartheid

Renate Pratt

Waterloo ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997, xii, 366pp, \$29.95

Renate Pratt provides a compelling account of how Canadian churches struggled for nearly two decades to pressure businesses and governments to take a stand against apartheid. Their sustained effort altered the political climate in which companies, bureaucrats, and politicians considered whether or not to support the racist South African government. As the moving preface by the Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu attests, Pratt has written a fascinating account 'of what it cost the anti-apartheid stalwarts whose names must be written in letters of gold in any authentic history of the struggle for justice, peace, democracy and reconciliation in South Africa.'

This book will appeal to those with a general interest in the Canadian government's foreign policy making record, the overseas activities of Canadian corporations, the investment strategies of Canada's domestic banks, and the role of Canadian churches in affecting change. It will interest scholars who study the effectiveness of economic sanctions and the ability of non-governmental organizations to bring about societal transformation. Moreover, it will educate all activists interested in bringing about change that is in keeping with solid moral and ethical principles.

To facilitate co-operation among the Canadian churches and religious orders, and between them and the South African Council of Churches and related anti-apartheid organizations, a 'taskforce' was established in 1975. For nearly twenty years, its members endeavoured to discourage the corporate sector from profiting from the system of apartheid and to encourage the Canadian government to act forthrightly, rather than timidly, to oppose apartheid. Pratt was the first coordinator of the taskforce. She excels at analysing the Canadian government's contradictory two-track policy: critical diplomatic rhetoric on the one hand and uncritical support for Canadian trade on the other. She clearly sets out the approach of the taskforce and the breadth of its activities, the policies and practices of the Canadian banks and corporations involved in South Africa, and the policies of various Canadian governments between 1975-90. The abhorrent conditions in South Africa under the apartheid regime, and international political developments such as the response to sanctions, are also overviewed.

As Pratt points out, many taskforce members engaged in a wide range of sustained actions to draw public attention to the hypocrisy and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring of Canadian corporations and governments. They learned valuable lessons from creative initiatives such as attending shareholder meetings as dissident shareholders, soliciting proxies for taskforce use, organizing services of witness close to the South African trade mission, publishing details of Canadian loans to the South African government, meeting with high-level bank investors, federal bureaucrats, and ministers - even securing information from South African managers about wages and employment conditions in Canadian firms in South Africa. The lessons the taskforce learned from its many successes - and failures - will assist others interested in stimulating governments and corporations to re-evaluate the purpose and structure of their ties to other types of repressive regimes. Pratt's long-term involvement with the taskforce, her access to a wealth of archival material, and her careful research and writing style have together resulted in a gem of a book that should be on every idealist's bookshelf.

Erika Simpson/University of Western Ontario

LOOSING THE BONDS

The United States and South Africa in the apartheid years

Robert Kinloch Massie

New York: Doubleday, 1997, 832pp, \$48.95

It is no surprise that this year's Gelber Prize for the best book in the field of international relations should have gone to a work about the United States and South Africa. The end of apartheid and the return of South Africa to a full place in the international community under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, one of the most admired figures on the planet, are rare and hopeful events. People want to know more about how they came about. In this major work, Robert K. Massie, a young American historian, gives us an important part of the explanation.

To do so, Massie ran a serious risk of being overwhelmed by his material and his dedication to his subject. His book links three stories, the stories of the civil rights and divestment movements in the United States and the story of the decline and fall of apartheid in South Africa. Any one of these could have made a book in itself. In *Loosing the Bonds*, Massie has managed to provide a history of each without losing a sense