

# Big crowd turns up to hear former editor

By John Gibb

The Wanganui Moutoa Gardens dispute reflected "a failure of leadership", and should have been resolved much earlier, former South African editor Donald Woods said in Dunedin yesterday.

Mr Woods (61), who was in Dunedin as part of a national tour sponsored by the Newspaper Publishers Association in newspaper week, addressed more than 500 people at a packed public lecture, organised by the *Otago Daily Times*, at the Otago University Union hall.

He referred to the Wanganui dispute during a wide-ranging address, in which he advocated frank dialogue between individuals and nations as the key to resolving political, racial and cultural conflicts throughout the world.

Direct talks between ANC leader Nelson Mandela and former South African president F. W. de Klerk had signalled the end of entrenched hostilities in South Africa, and similar talks in Ireland and the Middle East also offered the promise of peace, he said.

By contrast with the oppression and massive



Former South African newspaper editor Donald Woods addresses a large crowd at a public lecture in Dunedin yesterday.

inequalities perpetuated under the former apartheid regime, New Zealand, appeared to be "a country without major problems, or should be".

"If you get major problems, your leaders are letting you down."

He queried how the Moutoa Gardens dispute could have been allowed to

reach its present level in a relatively peaceful country without earlier intervention to resolve the issues.

There was "something very peculiar going on over the dispute, including why it was cropping up at this time", and was apparently "coming out of nowhere".

"It seems to me to be a failure of leadership on all sides when these issues can suddenly flare up. It should never have got to this stage," he said.

He also queried aspects of the Manri protest leadership, saying that some protest figures had "proclaimed themselves

leader" but there had evidently been "no selection process".

Reflecting on South African life under apartheid, he said it was vital to grasp that the system had been "mad as well as ... bad", that its architect, Hendrik Verwoerd, had been "nutty as a fruit cake", and that so-called

inter-tribal tensions had been exaggerated by racist propaganda.

Although press freedom was not under any obvious political threat in New Zealand, the press needed to probe beneath the surface more actively and do more to foster greater understanding of other cultures and languages.

He noted that the English-language *Daily Dispatch* newspaper, which he had edited in East London from 1966 until his arrest and banning in 1977, had included a page in Afrikaans to celebrate cultural diversity.

Introducing the lecture, the *Otago Daily Times* editor, Geoff Adams, said Mr Woods had played a significant role in the break down of apartheid and the "installation of democratic government in South Africa".

After his 10am address, Mr Woods spent about half an hour fielding lively questions from the audience, which responded with a standing ovation.

The crowd overflowed the more than 400 seats provided, with many people standing in the aisles and at the rear of the hall, and others turned away because of the crowding.