July 10, 1991

Op-Ed Editor
Seattle Times
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Dear Editor:

At a time when President Bush is urging Congress to abandon the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act, we urge the United States Congress to resist such pressure and keep sanctions until the purpose of the 1986 Act has been achieved. Sanctions remain the one form of real pressure the United States can exert on apartheid South Africa short of declaring war on the Republic of South Africa and sending troops to liberate the majority of oppressed South Africans. The American Committee on Africa, which continues to analyze the effects of sanctions and divestment, concludes that sanctions have cost the apartheid economy more than $30 billion. We need to keep the pressure on apartheid, not take it off at this critical moment in the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa.

Nelson Mandela and 30 million other black South Africans still cannot vote. The promises of reform made by President F.W. de Klerk do not provide sufficient grounds for the United States to lift sanctions yet. As Representative Ronald V. Dellums, author of the 1986 Act, recently stated in a letter to President Bush: "Our premature lifting of sanctions could ease the pressure and stall the process. The resulting dash of expectations could lead to a level of popular unrest that would make the previous violence that has occurred pale by comparison."

While the de Klerk regime has received favorable media attention both here and abroad for moving towards a democratic South Africa, the actual progress that has been made in that direction is minimal. Congressman Dellums also pointed out in his June 26, 1991 letter to President Bush that while the South African government has made assurances that it will eventually begin the negotiation process with the black majority, actual negotiations have not yet begun. Both the African National Congress and the government agree that the current dialogue constitutes only "talks about talks." Whether or not the de Klerk regime will actually enter into negotiations in good faith remains to be seen. Taking the pressure off de Klerk is clearly a wrong move.

In looking at whether "good faith" will be the cornerstone of any negotiations with apartheid officials, one must also look at the role South African authorities are playing in the current
violence. Although it has largely been unreported in the United States press, newspapers in South Africa and Namibia have reported on an emerging alliance of anti-democratic forces in South Africa. The purpose of this strategy is to instigate township violence that will not only result in the needless deaths of black South Africans and their allies but will suit the propaganda needs of the ruling National Party, the same party that initiated the whole structure of apartheid in 1948. Through forming a "centrist" alliance, to be known as the Christian Democratic Alliance, the National Party can retain political control of any new government that emerges.

Nico Basson, a former communications expert with the South African Defense Force, has recently revealed that in February, 1990, the very time the de Klerk government released Nelson Mandela from 27 years of unjust imprisonment, the South African Defense Force began training mercenaries in remote locations to provoke ethnic conflict between township residents and those of men's-only hostels. The hostels themselves are creations of the inhumane system of apartheid, with its policy of forced removals of people from their homes and families and establishment of barren "homelands," which force the separation of families and ensure the loss of South African citizenship for those designated to live in the "homelands." In an interview with the Christian Science Monitor, Mr. Basson commented that "the strategy is to break the ANC's [African National Congress] hold on the black community by creating an ethnic split between Zulu and Xhosa." Buthelezi's "Inkatha Freedom Party," the recipient of arms and training from Pretoria, has been bolstered as a result. While denying Basson's claims, the South African Defense Force (SADF) has not denied his further charges that Namibia was a testing ground for the program now being pursued in South Africa.

Basson in fact worked on the SADF's covert campaign in Namibia, "Operation Agree," which sought to prevent the major liberation organization in that country, SWAPO (South West Africa Peoples' Organization), from winning the 1989 independence elections. In that campaign Pretoria provided financial support to a rival group, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, and ordered SADF special military units to intimidate the political opposition. Basson's disclosures about this campaign have not been denied, but have been characterized as "top secret," and been referred to the attorney general for prosecution.

Pretoria's "dirty tricks" in the Namibian elections paid off when SWAPO won the election but failed to get the two-thirds majority it needed to determine the country's first constitution. Basson's allegations appear to be supported by recent talks between the National Party and Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party. Not coincidentally Buthelezi has also recently visited President Bush in the White House and urged lifting of the 1986 sanctions against Pretoria.
Meanwhile, evidence of Inkatha participation in the killing of black South Africans continues while the African National Congress gets blamed for it in the American press. De Klerk's government has also been cultivating other potential partners in its move to weaken the African National Congress. Seeking allies within the South African Democratic Party, for example, the new and congenial South African Ambassador to the United States is a member of that party. Not surprisingly, perhaps, while Ambassador Harry Schwarz professes to want an end to apartheid, he also opposes sanctions, the one tool that the international community so far has found effective against apartheid.

We urge our Washington State Congressional delegation headed by Speaker of the House Tom Foley to heed the voices of those living under apartheid and keep sanctions.

Sincerely,

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