Protestors demand removal of Namibian sardines from grocery store shelves

PHILADELPHIA — Shoppers at West Philadelphia supermarkets can expect to find cans of Del Monte sardines and Purina Cat Food No. 8 clearly labelled STOLEN From Namibia — Product of Apartheid if the Philadelphia Namibia Action Group has its way.

As of last week this group, made up of people living in the West Philadelphia area and their supporters had held demonstrations and leafleted in front of three local supermarkets: one Acme, one Thriftway, and a Pantry Pride — Penn Fruit.

Before each demonstration, members of the group entered the stores and pasted the large labels over the canned fish which is imported to this country through contracts with the South African government.

At each store the group met with different reactions from store officials. At Thriftway, the owner first promised that he would remove the cans. Then, when found that the labels had been added, he demanded to be paid because he said he couldn't sell the cans. Reminded that he had promised, the demonstrators not to sell them anyway, he finally turned over 39 cans of Del Monte and Spruce sardines to the demonstrators.

At Pantry Pride — Penn Fruit, where the group demonstrated last weekend, the manager expressed sympathy for the group's objectives and promised to return the cans to his supplier along with copies of petitions signed by over 100 customers asking the store not to carry products supplied by South Africa from Namibia.

At the Acme store, the manager had promised last spring not to stock the products. When they appeared on the shelves and the demonstrators protested, he refused to talk with them, although he did remove the cans which they had relabelled. When the store put out new cans, the group returned, walking down the aisles of the store and relabelling about 30 cans of sardines.

A spokesperson for the group told the AFRO that one purpose of the actions is "to make the public aware of the ways in which our money is going into the hands of racists in South Africa through the dealings of multinational corporations like Del Monte."

Although we are against all companies doing business with South Africa, we have focused on Del Monte because it is one of the biggest.

"Furthermore, because the fish are caught in Namibian waters and packed near Walvis Bay in Namibia, they are being imported in violation of international law, since South Africa illegally occupies and administers Namibia," the spokesperson said.

Del Monte used to label its cans "Packed in South Africa (Namibia)," but changed the label two years ago when the U.S. government announced its opposition to American firms doing business in Namibia with the South African government.

"The most important—point we want people to see is that Americans are buying protein-rich fish and even feeding it to their cats, while one out of every two Namibian children dies before the age of five, largely due to protein malnutrition and inadequate medical care. And the workers who canned those sardines earned about $30 a month in working conditions of near slavery," the spokesperson said.

The group promises to continue the campaign so long as the products appear on supermarket shelves.