SOUTH AFRICAN AIRWAYS!

They Can Fly But They Can’t Hide

- South African Airways is entirely owned by the South African apartheid regime;
- South African Airways has offices on the 9th floor at 900 Third Avenue (between 54th and 55th streets) in Manhattan. It flies between Johannesburg and New York City four days a week, using the British Airway terminal at JFK International Airport;
- These flights are usually filled with the ambassadors of apartheid, white South African businessmen, entertainers, tourists, and occasional politicians (along with their white American counterparts);
- South African Airways is the only direct commercial travel link between South Africa and the United States;
- South African Airways is the official diplomatic and envoy carrier between the white minority government in South Africa and the U.S. government; and
- Outside the U.S., SAA transports uranium from Namibian mines to England and Western Europe. SAA flies the South African Army (SADF) to invade Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, and to murder members of the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), which is fighting to free its country from South Africa’s deathgrip.
Why South African Airways?
Because South Africa Airways has to function publicly; it is susceptible to peoples’ outrage, and we can shut it down! It will be difficult and not without risk, but it's worth it:
- The apartheid regime will lose money—that means fewer guns for them;
- It would be a major blow to white supremacist morale in South Africa and would increase apartheid’s isolation; and,
- It would be a victory for the anti-apartheid movement here and strengthen our side. We need more victories.

Resistance to South African Airways
Things are not so rosy for South African Airways and this is largely due to the activities of Brooklynites Against Apartheid.

* On September 25, 1985 nine people calling themselves Free South Africa/Azania—Direct Action, occupied and blockaded South African Airways’ midtown office for three hours, seizing control of the phones and computers, and forcing it to shut down business. The nine activists were arrested by the F.B.I. and the Joint Anti-Terrorist Task Force. They were charged with “violating the property of a foreign government friendly with the U.S.” The federal misdemeanor charges were later dropped.
On February 1, 1986, approximately 30 people disrupted the evening departure of an SAA flight at JFK Airport. A gate was closed and locked across the departure ramp to the British Airways terminal blocking traffic. Passengers checking in on South African Airways were confronted with various guerilla theater skits, including the use of props such as fake coffins, dummies, and dozens of beach balls with “White South Africans will live in the sea” written on them. A large group roamed the terminal, challenging passengers at the gate and confounding SAA authorities. Official-looking leaflets (on SAA stationery) were distributed requesting that passengers move to another terminal, as well as “questionnaires” that passengers were to fill out and turn in to the Customs officials when they arrived in Johannesburg. No one was arrested. Brooklynites Against Apartheid took responsibility for this action.

On April 12, 1986, 35 people organized by Brooklynites Against Apartheid disrupted another South African Airways evening flight. Again the roadway gate was locked. A non-toxic substance was poured over the SAA scales and check-in counter making them inoperable. A shanty-town was erected blocking the international departure gate, and again passengers were prevented from boarding the plane. Port Authority police, some in riot gear, reacted violently against the anti-apartheid activists. SAA passengers had to slide
through a cordon of cops to get to the plane. Six people were arrested and charged with reckless endangerment, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, trespass and similar catch-all “crimes”. They are to go on trial at Queens Criminal Court (Queens Blvd. in Kew Gardens) on June 26th at 9 a.m.

These non-violent direct actions have effectively disrupted business as usual at SAA. South African Airways passengers now have to check-in through a special security shield. According to the New York Police Department, in a New York Post article, the South African Airways office in mid-town Manhattan is now among the top targets protected by anti-terrorist cops. SAA is running scared, and resistance to South African Airways is primarily responsible.

What to Do

Brooklynites Against Apartheid intends to keep up the pressure against South African Airways through direct action. You are welcome to check us out and join in the planning and execution of these actions. But you can also plan your own kind of activity against South African Airways. Here are some suggestions:

- Develop your own strategy and plans for how to disrupt and in other ways protest South African Airways’ operations, with your own group of friends or organization;
- Target other places that are supporting South African Airways, such as the Port Authority, and British Airways (which sponsors SAA by allowing it to use its facilities at JFK);
- Support the “SAA Six,” who are facing up to two years in jail on trummed up charges from the April 12th action at JFK. Come to Queens Criminal Court (Queens Boulevard) on June 26th. Publicize this situation. Deluge British Air with letters of protest as well as more active expressions of disapproval over its pressing of charges against the SAA Six, and its continued sponsorship of South African Air;
- Educate folks about South African Airways and its role here and in South Africa;
- Make South African Airways’ presence in New York an issue for the foes of apartheid here.

*The focus of our anti-apartheid work must materially support the liberation movements, harass the enemy and strengthen our movement at the same time. A concerted campaign against South African Airways can begin to fulfill all of these concerns.*

Clip the Wings of Apartheid!
Make Your Community an Apartheid-Free Zone!

Produced and distributed by Brooklynites Against Apartheid, PO Box 400790, Brooklyn NY 11240.

All photos from the anti-apartheid actions at Kennedy Airport.