Throughout the last year, thousands upon thousands of Black South Africans have risked their lives in an almost daily challenge to the misery and suffering of apartheid. That challenge has been so widespread and so fundamental that the South African regime has had to resort to virtual martial law in many parts of the country.

At the same time, in this country, we have witnessed a resurgence of anti-apartheid activity. Arrests at South African consulates, occupations of buildings on college campuses and even the reluctant passage of legislation by the US Congress have all signalled a dramatic drop in open support for the white rulers of South Africa.

Nonetheless, there has been one quite startling exception to this pattern - the continued popularity of "The Gods Must Be Crazy," a South African film that is now being shown at the Brooklyn Heights Cinema. In spite of its undisguised support for the status quo in South Africa, the film has been drawing record crowds at the 68th Street Playhouse in Manhattan. The film's showings have not gone on without protest. Last summer, anti-apartheid activists tried to convince movie-goers to turn away and during May and June of this year, Brooklynites Against Apartheid disrupted two separate showings.

But now, in the wake of the state of emergency in South Africa, the film has come to Brooklyn. We are picketing here today to urge you to boycott the Brooklyn Heights Cinema until the management cancels the show. Brooklyn can be the place where we are finally able to halt the continued success of this clever piece of apartheid propaganda.

Brooklyn is home to probably the largest Black community in the United States and it will add insult to injury if we allow the uninterrupted showing of a racist film. In spite of its sophisticated humor, the movie reinforces all the standard justifications for colonialism while painting a pastoral, multi-racial picture of life in southern Africa, which is disturbed only by Blacks fighting other Blacks. That picture is one that the proponents of apartheid would very much like white people in this country to subscribe to. But that picture is a complete distortion of the reality of South Africa. There is no racial harmony there. It is a land of oppression and struggle - white people do the oppressing and Black people do the struggling.

It is up to us to decide which side we will be on - the side of the oppressors or the side of the freedom fighters.

THINK ABOUT ALL OF THIS. IF YOU AGREE, DON'T GO IN. CALL UP THE THEATER AND TELL THE MANAGER THAT YOU WON'T BE GOING TO THE BROOKLYN HEIGHTS CINEMA UNTIL THE FILM IS GONE.

DON'T SCAB ON THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE!

Issued by: Brooklynites Against Apartheid (718-638-0417)
This film, produced by white South African filmmaker Jamie Uys, is a smooth, sophisticated piece of pro-Apartheid propaganda. It reinforces all the standard justifications for colonialism while painting a pastoral, multi-racial picture of life in southern Africa, which is only disturbed by Blacks fighting other Blacks. Because the audience is asked to laugh at both white and Black people, the racism may not be apparent at first.

The country where the majority of the scenes were filmed is exquisitely beautiful - as, in fact, is much of South Africa. In that idyllic setting, San hunters and gatherers supposedly live in absolute harmony with their surroundings until, one day, a Coke bottle falls from an airplane and the possession of that object becomes the cause of dissension among the people. One of the young San men decides the object is evil because it is causing so much trouble and he decides to throw it off the edge of the earth. Thus he sets out on a journey which brings him in contact with the other characters in the film.

At the same time, a white woman newspaper reporter in a large South African city decides she's fed up with her life and she's going to become a teacher in the bush (or rural area) for a while. Then a group of Black guerrillas are seen shooting up the Black leaders of another southern African state. And, finally, a white microbiologist, who comes unglued at the sight of an attractive woman, is asked to pick up the reporter/school teacher when she arrives.

Add an eccentric "colored" mechanic, who is the microbiologist's sidekick, and a Landrover with various mechanical difficulties (the engine has to be left running at all times since it can't be started again; there are no brakes and the electric winch on the front bumper has a mind of its own).

Obviously, material for a kind of slapstick humor abounds. The problem is the way in which different people play their parts. The San are never allowed to speak for themselves. A narrator, who sounds white, 'interprets' for them and makes them sound like mindless, jabbering children. "Oh, well," you might be saying to yourself, "perhaps the South Africans (the white ones, that is, if you don't mind us including your semi-conscious thoughts) think kindly of the San and this is their way of showing it." I can only suggest that the San might think differently. For 400 years, they have been the targets of white oppression. In the early days, colonists used to hunt and kill San people for sport. Now, the whites are more 'civilized' - at one point in the film, a San hunter has a 'conversation' with a baboon in which the baboon is persuaded not to run away with the Coke bottle. Later, the hunter is put in jail for killing a goat. The biologist and the mechanic go to the rescue. The 'colored' man, who can speak a Khoisan language, communicates with the San man but there is no attempt at communication between the white man and the hunter. In other words, even at this late point, the San are too primitive to be able to communicate with white people. A recent announcement by the South African government underlines this view - it appears that the government plans to move the San to the game parks where they can be viewed in their natural habitat, the same as the other 'wild animals'.

While there are some genuinely funny scenes in this film, especially with the biologist and the Landrover, the problem is that the humor is used to reinforce all the myths about why the races should be separated, why white people are superior and why, therefore, the whites should be the rulers.

These ideas are cleverly camouflaged. By creating humor at the expense of the schoolteacher and the biologist, as well as the non-white folk, the filmmaker hopes to come off as treating everybody fairly. Uys makes fun of complex city life and seems to be saying that the uncomplicated life of the San is better. But then the San people are portrayed as helpless without the white man to protect them.

Part of the camouflage consists of a depiction of Blacks and whites working together as equals in the cities; another part consists of a depiction of Blacks in positions of political power as stupid at best and venal at worst. No matter how foolish or inept a white man is, he is infinitely superior to the San. And no matter how evil a white government is, it too is apparently superior. That is the final message of this film.