Fiddling while Soweto BURNS

Here are some suggestions for how to refute arguments being put forward by South Africa’s lobbyists and Congressional opponents of ending Export-Import Bank financing to South Africa. While the best defense is a strong offense, it also helps if you can dispel fears based on lack of information.

1. THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK ISN’T GIVING DIRECT SUPPORT TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS APARTHEID SYSTEM. The Eximbank is one of the most direct ways the US government supports South Africa. Eximbank credits strengthen the apartheid regime in areas which are critical to its survival. Many of the exports financed by Eximbank go directly to the government. More than one-quarter of the financing from 1971-76 went to develop key industries such as iron and steel, energy and mining. As Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko said in 1977: “Heavy investment in the South African economy, bilateral trade, ... all these activities relate to whites and their interests and serve to entrench the position of the minority regime.”

2. WON’T BLACKS BE THE ONES TO SUFFER MOST IF EXIMBANK FINANCING IS CUT OFF? The African majority is already forced to endure tremendous inequalities. For example, average black per capita income is 15 times less than that of whites. More and more blacks are advocating that American companies pull out. As Lutheran Bishop Manas Ruthela said: “We know that there will be suffering, but we realize that it is by suffering that something better may happen. We don’t mind taking the consequences.”

3. ENDING EXIMBANK FACILITIES FOR SOUTH AFRICA WILL DECREASE US EXPORTS AND INCREASE AMERICAN UNEMPLOYMENT. The Eximbank receives four times more requests for financing than it can approve; if South African transactions end, the Bank’s export-promoting facilities will be used elsewhere. The American labor union movement, including the AFL-CIO, United Auto Workers and Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, supports ending Eximbank financing for South Africa, and is not concerned that American workers will suffer.

4. CONGRESS SHOULDN’T SINGLE OUT SOUTH AFRICA FOR RESTRICTIONS ON EXIMBANK FINANCING. Repression in South Africa based on legalized racism sanctioned in the constitution is unique. Under that system, blacks have no political rights, and their only economic “right” is to be a source of cheap labor for the white-controlled economy. There are in fact other countries which are already excluded from receiving Eximbank financing; the Soviet Union, China and most of Eastern Europe. The Bank has actually refused to grant direct loans to South Africa since 1964 because of apartheid; ending all Eximbank financing is overdue.

5. NO ONE SUPPORTS APARTHEID, BUT ENDING EXIMBANK FINANCING ISN’T THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR BRINGING PROGRESSIVE CHANGE. The international campaign to stop commercial bank loans to South Africa has already made it hard for South Africa to find willing lenders. Ending US government trade credits now could make it even harder. According to the South African Financial Mail: “If these government guarantees were withdrawn, foreign banks would themselves have to bear the risk. In that event they might choose not to grant the credits at all. The consequences could be ... severe enough to raise question marks over South Africa’s ability to service its huge foreign debt obligations.”

Many people who object to ending Eximbank financing argue that it is better to promote American economic involvement to increase US leverage. This argument has been made for decades, but all the evidence goes against it. A January, 1978 report by Senator Dick Clark concluded: “Collectively, US corporations operating in South Africa have made no significant impact on either relaxing apartheid or in establishing company policies which would offer a limited but nevertheless important model of multinational responsibility.”

6. SOUTH AFRICA IS ASSISTING US NEGOTIATIONS IN ZIMBABWE AND NAMIBIA, SO WE SHOULDN’T PUNISH THEM NOW. South Africa is not co-operating on Zimbabwe. It still openly violates U.N. sanctions against Rhodesia and sells Rhodesian weapons and oil. South Africa says it will go along with western proposals to give up control over Namibia, which it has administered illegally since 1966. If this is the case, it is precisely because of continuous international pressure to give up its occupation.

7. BUT THINGS ARE IMPROVING IN SOUTH AFRICA. South African propaganda makes much of insubstantial changes. Changing “pass books” to “passports” and upping black wages slightly while the black/white wage gap increases is not impressive. These cosmetic changes will not give blacks the vote, get rid of the bantustans, or stop detentions without trial and police killings in jail.
Don't let your Representative vote $ for Apartheid!

"No longer is opposition to apartheid merely a minority cause or a campus issue... On the contrary, it is coming to represent a genuine popular movement commanding its own congressional base."

-- Washington Post editorial, May 4, 1978

Even the Washington Post has gotten the word! For the first time ever, a Congressional Committee has voted for economic disengagement from South Africa. On April 26th and May 1st the House Banking Committee voted to end all Export-Import Bank financing of trade with South Africa until there is "significant progress toward the elimination of apartheid." The margin of victory on the measure, introduced by Rep. Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.), was substantial: 28 - 16.

Popular pressure made this vote an exciting victory. Washington delegations from civil rights and religious groups succeeded in convincing several Committee members that South Africa's unique system of legalized racism should not be condoned by financing from the Eximbank. At least one other member switched his vote because of a meeting with a strong and diverse delegation from his district.

The South African lobbyists were at first caught completely off guard, but their last-minute lobbying did split the liberal Democrats. Some Representatives from heavily industrialized areas, even some who had never voted wrong on a southern African issue before, came out siding with South Africa: Hannaford and Patterson of California, Moohead of Pittsburgh, and Ashley of Ohio. Economic interests didn't always win out, though. Vento of St. Paul and Blanchard of Michigan, who had spoken against the Tsongas amendment, were convinced to support it in the end.

In the Senate, Riegel of Michigan offered the South Africa amendment in the Banking Committee on May 3rd, but an amendment by Stevenson of Illinois requiring the President to make a general list of all countries eligible for Eximbank financing was adopted instead. Riegel will probably offer the South Africa cut-off when the bill reaches the full Senate, in June or July probably.

WHAT LIES AHEAD AND WHAT YOU CAN DO

We have a big job ahead and very little time to do it in. Our latest information is that the bill will come before the full House on THURSDAY, MAY 11TH!! The conservatives will surely try to strike out the South Africa prohibition, so we need to work to defend it. The momentum is definitely going our way. NOW WE'VE GOT TO FULL OUT ALL THE STOPS.

Here are the "vital statistics": The South Africa prohibition is part of the Export-Import Bank authorization bill, H.R. 12157 in the House and S.2520 in the Senate. Ask your representatives to vote for ending Export-Import Bank financing to South Africa.

Immediately try to get mailgrams and phone calls into your Representative's office. If possible, try to arrange a personal meeting for a delegation of people from different groups that support ending US links with apartheid, to meet with your Representative or his or her staff.

We need letters from national organizations to House members immediately.

Addresses are: Rep. , House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator , Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

We know it's hard to plan strategy on this short notice, and without knowing for sure when the vote will come up. We ask you to keep working until you hear from us again with results from the House vote and more information on the Senate. RIGHT NOW IS THE CRITICAL MOMENT. Please free to call us at (202) 546-7961 for an update, collect if need be. And please call us if you learn how your Representative will vote.

Your support on the campaign to end Eximbank financing for South Africa is vital. If we lose, the Vorster government will gloat over it, saying the American people don't back even Carter's rhetorical support for majority rule. If we win, it will be the first economic sanction taken by the United States against South Africa, and it will be due in large part to popular pressure.

THE WASHINGTON OFFICE ON AFRICA
110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002
(202) 546-7961