Apartheid supported by U.S.-sanctioned PR visits

By The Southern Africa Liberation Committee

With its African policy vis-a-vis Angola lying in shambles, the U.S. State Dept. has been recently very loudly disclaiming its support for white minority rule in southern Africa. No longer willing to be caught tangoing with racist South Africa, Henry Kissinger has been stating over and over in the media that the days of white minority rule are numbered. In other words, he seems to be recanting Memorandum 39 and perhaps even wondering where he ever got the gall to write it in the first place.

Yet the U.S. State Dept. and various U.S. institutions (particularly universities) are now furiously arranging educational and political exchange trips to the United States with South African individuals who are apparently acceptable to the apartheid regime.

MSU will host two such visitors during the first week of May. And these are by no means isolated cases. Other U.S. universities such as Old Miss and Grand Valley State Colleges have been participating in these exchanges. Students at Grand Valley, however, staged a protest rally over the visits.

The point is not that these individuals do not have the right to visit with and speak to Americans. For truly, even by mistake, a progressive individual may sneak his name on the travel list and later embarrass both regimes.

No, the central issue is the quiet development of "detente" with apartheid, thereby bolstering its image at home and abroad must not be supported by the U.S. government or MSU. Such visitors must not be invited precisely because it lends support to apartheid.

Some may argue that the South African individual, not the government, is hurt by such a boycott — that they are denied the opportunity to travel and broaden themselves. Yet if such visits were not important to apartheid's image at home and abroad they wouldn't bother to send people out to places where they know rallies may be organized against them. And it creates internal difficulties for a government that is so hated that its citizens cannot even travel abroad. Even the true believers will now begin to doubt the validity of the system. And those who benefit disproportionately from apartheid will be restricted even.

For the tiny few "non-whites" who are allowed to leave South Africa, it is unfortunately true they will suffer and miss some opportunities. But for the vast majority of black South Africans life is confined to a barren bantustan anyway, or to a "black spot" 10 to 15 miles outside the "white" cities, or to an all-male labor barracks camp 11 months out of every year. So now must the liberation of the masses be sacrificed just to broaden the experiences of a tiny few? And wouldn't life be richer for them all with true political independence in an undivided South Africa?

The absurdity of apartheid reveals itself by sending one visitor to MSU who is the manager of a jim crow hotel, or "non-white" as they dub it. This is a pure insult to the black people of this country who suffered...
and died fighting against such degrading social practices. And what’s more disgusting is that the State Dept. goes along with this and the South Africans seem proud to announce to us the hotel is segregated, as if they think we’ll accept it as a step forward by “non-whites.”

Euna Kulp, a “coloured woman” from South Africa, is the manager of a “non-white” hotel in South Africa. And while certainly it must be noted as an achievement for any woman to become a hotel manager, is it progress to be forced by law to run a segregated business? The hotel is owned by the Coloured Development Corp., a politically bankrupt creation of apartheid to aid in the economic development of coloreds. But imagine, if you will, the federal government sponsoring jim crow businesses and calling that economic development. Black-owned business, yes!!! But segregated black-owned business??

And furthermore, one wonders just how much economic development can the coloreds actually achieve without any real democratic political rights? At present, coloreds are “allowed” to vote for two-thirds of the colored advisory council (the rest are appointed by the regime) which “advises” the big white parliament on issues concerning the colored community. Can you imagine the white business world will give up significant concessions and business to the coloreds? The colored people themselves have rejected this political farce with ever increasingly low voter turnouts anyway.

The other South African visitor to MSU is a “white Afrikaan” professor of industrial psychology, at the University of Port Elizabeth. Roux vander Merwe is scheduled to give a lecture on labor and its mental problems — absenteeism and turnovers. His approach to the topic should be interesting since Port Elizabeth is a big auto center in South Africa (Ford, GM, etc.).

A few questions preceding Dr. vander Merwe’s lecture may be in order. For example, will he discuss the fact that black workers are barred from the all-white Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) and that TUCSA wins high wage concessions and other benefits from employers at the direct expense of black workers? Will he mention how blacks are being forced to become a migratory labor force and thus how this encourages absenteeism and turnover?

One need not continue to raise the question of the guaranteed right to strike for black workers and the right to have their trade unions recognized under law. But we will say, unless Dr. vander Merwe is going to raise these issues, then most likely he does not need to be here in the first place. What will he be saying to students of American labor and industrial relations?

Will his message be that the rule of “divide and conquer” is universal? That racial divisions among workers facilitates exploitation? Will he be advising the UAW to kick all its black members out so white workers can have higher wages?

Again the question arises, why is the State Dept. supporting apartheid? Angola is free. Zimbabwe is on her way. Namibia is anxious and so surely South Africa will follow. So why are we cooing up with racists rather than freedom-fighters? Why not let the State Dept. sponsor a series of forums across this nation with the mothers of the SASO 9 and the Wilmington 10 in an exchange of views on how to combat political repression? Why do we need segregated hotel managers and reactionary professors from all-white universities in our midst? The time is now for the American people to stand up for freedom in South Africa and to force our government to stand up with us.

This viewpoint was submitted by Carol Thompson, Bud Day, Ione Marx, and Frank Steddeck of the Peace Education Center on behalf of the Southern Africa Liberation Committee, which is connected with the Peace Center.