



American Committee on Africa

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AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA CONDEMNS POLAROID

The American Committee on Africa today condemned the Polaroid Corporation for its decision to continue doing business in South Africa in a statement issued by George M. Houser, Executive Director, and supported the call for an international boycott of Polaroid made by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement.

"We reject the Polaroid position as contrary to its stated abhorance of apartheid," the statement said. "It supports the assumptions of white supremacy and minority control and is harmful to the real goal of African freedom and majority rule... Polaroid does not even admit, in its advertisement, the most important fact of all, that all programs proposed by the corporation as its rationale for staying to do business in South Africa must be carried out within South African racist laws... Blacks, who comprise two-thirds of the population, have no vote for the government (all white) which controls their lives; blacks do not have the right to strike; most skilled jobs are reserved for whites; whites are paid more than blacks who do the same job."

The text of the statement follows.

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STATEMENT ON POLAROID'S SOUTH AFRICAN "EXPERIMENT"

Polaroid Corporation has just spent about \$50,000 in newspaper advertisements in an attempt to answer the demands of its own workers that Polaroid stop all business with white minority-controlled South Africa. This huge sum is a comment on the reluctance of U.S. business to cut itself off from profits which average 15 to 20 per cent mainly because of cheap controlled black labor. The workers, the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, especially attacked the company's identification system which has been sold to the South African military and film/equipment used in making passbooks, the main tool in the system of legalized segregation, apartheid. Polaroid says it will stop the sale of the Polaroid products for passes but won't stop its other ties with South Africa. We reject the Polaroid position as contrary to its stated abhorrence of apartheid. In fact, it supports the assumptions of white supremacy and minority control and is harmful to the real goal of African freedom and majority rule.

Polaroid claims that although it will continue to do business in South Africa, it will start paying its Non-white (African, Asian and Coloured) workers higher wages, will train blacks for improved jobs and give money to improve education for the South African blacks. This is the new Polaroid "experiment" on black people, to be conducted under the laws of white South Africa, and is pure paternalism. If Polaroid was really interested in ending racism and minority rule in South Africa it would attack the source of the South African problem, the white minority government. If the company was really interested in African freedom, it could insist that the Non-white majority, 83 per cent of the population, have the vote; have the right to organize trade unions, political parties; have a right to travel and live freely. Instead, Polaroid offers charity to combat racism, giving money to a segregated school system and promising employees undefined benefits. Polaroid does not even mention freedom, but talks of an expanding economy which under the present white controlled system has not ameliorated the political status of the majority, but rather has grown increasingly repressive as the economy has boomed. What the South Africans lack cannot be made up in token gifts - control of their own lives, their homes, their work, government, country.

In its public relations effort Polaroid infers that South African blacks want the aid

Polaroid is offering and support this "experiment." In a country where the Terrorism Act makes advocating any economic dislocation an offense potentially punishable by death, it is naive of Polaroid to suggest that people would talk freely to the company's investigating team, complete strangers, about the apartheid system and U.S. options for action. All African political opposition has been driven underground, as thousands of people have been jailed, banned, banished or exiled for opposing the regime. The inference that Polaroid action represents African opinion is dishonest and is contradicted by the fact that the Organization of African Unity and two banned South African black parties have called for no more economic involvement or trade with South Africa.

Meanwhile, Polaroid does not even admit in its ad the most important fact of all - that all programs proposed by the corporation as its rationale for staying to do business in South Africa must be carried out within South African racist laws. The legal system under which Polaroid agrees to continue to do business and conduct its experiment in South Africa is one of racial segregation where by law:

--blacks who comprise two thirds ██████████ of the population have no vote for the government (all white) which controls their lives.

--blacks do not have the right to strike.

--most skilled jobs are reserved for whites.

--whites are paid more than blacks who do the same jobs.

Polaroid's claim of increased "benefits" for its workers must also be seen in the light of the circumstances in which they may occur, a sophisticated migratory labor system. For example, a black worker can never own a home in the white area where his job is; an African worker can be deported to the poor rural reserves and not allowed back to the city by government decree; a worker can be forcibly separated from his wife and children for a variety of causes; an African can be prohibited from working in certain areas and trades.

In a country where the average white income is more than ten times that of the African income, any wage increase for Africans is welcome. But it will be an increase determined by American whites (or their agents) with the approval of South African whites and without the participation of the recipients. Let Polaroid claim credit for white charity if it likes,

but not for black dignity, as it dares.

Polaroid believes education is the key to change in South Africa and will underwrite the expenses for 500 black students from elementary school through university. Polaroid thus plans to aid a segregated white-controlled educational system which aims at dividing the African population into false tribal groups and educating them for a place determined by white South Africa.

So much for what Polaroid is claiming to do to oppose the apartheid system. What is more crucial is what it is doing to enable apartheid to continue to function. White South Africa's power continues because the state receives essential political and economic aid from the western powers. Yet rising pressure against this support to the southern African regimes plus the growing militancy of the African opponents of the system organizing in exile, together with the mounting internal contradictions in the economic and political situation (i.e. a huge skilled labor shortage), has all meant that white South Africa and her allies must create new tactics to maintain ultimate control. Thus we see the South African regime reaching out for new "friends" in Africa and accelerating its public relations apparatus. Polaroid's activities must be viewed in this light as a maneuver to fulfill a liberal image through charitable acts while it maintains its business edge, a tactic which fits South Africa's ultimate goal. Polaroid's having its cake and eating it too solution will provide a model for other corporations (there are more than 300 American firms in South Africa) to ward off real pressures, or allow them to relax in a business as usual framework.

Polaroid generalizes about the campaign to stop outside support for South African apartheid on the basis of its own ignorance, citing the campaign as recent. Yet inside Polaroid itself the workers raised the issue six years ago, and the company's attack on the workers will not change the record that it was their offensive that finally changed the policy, though not enough--yet. The campaign against trade, investment, credit, and other ties to apartheid started some 15 years ago and accelerated with the support of both South African black opposition movements, the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress, after the Sharpeville Massacre and the banning of the parties in 1960. Thus Nobel prize winner, the late ANC leader, Chief Albert J. Lutuli said of this campaign:

"The economic boycott of South Africa will entail undoubted hardship for Africans. We do not doubt that. But if it is a method which shortens the day of bloodshed, the suffering to us will be a price we are willing to pay. In any case, we suffer already, our children are often undernourished, and on a small scale (so far) we die at the whim of a policeman."

And last November, John Cactsewe, London representative of the South African Congress of Trade Unions called on British trade unions not to deal with South Africa. He said, "They would not invest union funds in slave traffic or drug traffic. Investment in the semi-slave system of apartheid is no better." This is a worldwide movement, representing not only Africans, but also the United Nations, where numerous resolutions have called for similar actions.

Polaroid encourages American business to stay in South Africa. In the period 1950-1968, U.S. investment in South Africa increased from \$148 million to more than \$800 million. In the same period:

Tremendous gaps between white and black wages widened instead of narrowed.

Non-whites lost their last representation in the parliament.

Black opposition parties, press, and leadership were banned (or worse).

Multiracial parties were banned.

A host of repressive political laws including the Terrorism Act were introduced. This Act defines attempt to "endanger the maintenance of law and order", to embarrass the State, cause substantial financial loss, prejudice any industry, etc., etc. as terrorism, punishable by a minimum 5 years jail or maximum death sentence.

Arrest and indefinite detention without charges, trial, or appeal, were introduced - hundreds have spent months in detention in solitary confinement without access to the outside world at all.

The group areas act (13 per cent of the land for 80 per cent of the people) broke up families and forcibly removed thousands from white areas to tribal areas or desolate locations.

We believe that although U.S. business did not cause this police state with its human misery, it profited from it and is still profiting. The "expanding economy" cited by Polaroid has in fact proven to be the opposite of a "key to change in South Africa." U.S. participation in the economy increased as the horror increased. We call for people not to be fooled by Pola-

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roid's "experiment" with apartheid, but to support an international boycott of Polaroid, in line with the Revolutionary Workers program; and to give support to the real agents of change in South Africa, the liberation movements. We believe that Polaroid should offer no excuses for its presence in racist South Africa, rather that it should get out. No excuse is good enough for complying with the racist laws of a police state. Polaroid must get out or stand condemned of complicity in apartheid. And so must 300 other U.S. companies and the U.S. government. The line between facism and freedom has been drawn in blood by the liberation movement. All of us in the U.S. must answer the question: Which side are you on?

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