REPORT OF N.G.O. ACTIONS IN THE U.S. FOR THE
CULTURAL BOYCOTT OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE INTER-
ATIONAL NGO ACTION CONFERENCE HELD IN GENEVA
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I. INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, at the urging of the African Liberation Movements, the Organization of African Unity, and the United Nations, a cultural boycott has been organized against South Africa.

In 1965, South Africa changed the conditions under which cultural events could be performed. Prior to this date, there were loopholes in the laws enforcing the segregation of casts or audiences. Segregation tended to exist anyway, because many theater owners refused to serve multiracial audiences, most blacks could not afford to attend cultural events, and the extreme segregation of the society made the gathering of mixed audiences very difficult. Still, artists could, if they wished, insist on performing before mixed groups because it was not illegal to do so.

Also in 1965, South Africa changed its copyright law to permit the staging and publication of works by foreign authors over the objection of the authors themselves, legalizing the piracy of works of art. This action was taken because a cultural boycott had been launched following the Proclamation prohibiting mixed audiences. Thus, it was acts of the South African Government, the Proclamation itself, and then the change in the copyright law, that gave impetus to the cultural boycott movement.

II. WHY A CULTURAL BOYCOTT?

To some people, a cultural boycott is a kind of censorship, and censorship is one of the vices of the South African Government. Many opponents of the South African Government, including some artists and actors in South Africa, argue against the boycott. They insist that the boycott will not affect the Government one iota, and will hurt most those the boycott organizers presumably want to help; i.e., opponents of the Government.

But the apartheid regime has used the staging of cultural events and the importing of foreign talent in its propaganda efforts to win acceptability for apartheid internationally. When groups such as the "Supremes" perform in South Africa--having accepted their status as "honorary whites"--and before segregated audiences, apartheid is reinforced and whites feel more secure that their position of domination is internationally accepted.
South African promoters are willing to go to great lengths and spend millions of dollars to win this kind of acceptability. The South African papers, and government publications such as the South African Digest, are constantly filled with suggestions that various cultural personalities will be coming to South Africa, bestowing respectability on the system.

The laws of apartheid have created an abnormal situation, and, as in the case of sports, there can be no "normal" exchange of culture with an abnormal country. Through the cultural boycott, performers, writers and artists unequivocally express their solidarity with their black counterparts in South Africa who are not free to express themselves artistically.

The South African Government has gone to great expense to defeat boycotts of any kind. Millions of dollars have been spent to improve South Africa's image abroad. A cultural boycott tarnishes that image. South African efforts to defeat the boycott testify to its importance.

III. BOYCOTT SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Entertainers who go to South Africa on a purely commercial basis, do little more than make money for themselves and perpetuate the idea that all is well in sunny South Africa. A notorious example of this failure of the cultural boycott movement to persuade artists not to perform was the 1970 visit to South Africa of soul singer Percy Sledge. Sledge sang before both black and white audiences. A black man, he was put up in a hotel for whites only, and at his own admission, met few black South Africans. His remark, "No politics, just good times," could have been made in any period of history by anyone who cooperates with tyranny to divert the oppressed from their oppression.

Sledge, of course, is not alone. Other Americans who have entertained in South Africa include jazz musician Stan Getz, poet Rod McKuen, and singers Eartha Kitt and Johnny Mathis.

In 1965, the American Committee on Africa circulated a declaration by American artists called "We Say No to Apartheid." Outlining the facts of life for South Africa's majority--racism, political repression, poverty, malnutrition, and inferior education--the artists pointed out the cultural deprivations suffered by blacks, and pledged themselves not to display, publish, conduct, perform, or produce their works in South Africa until the day when black and white equally enjoy the educational and cultural advantages of that rich land. More than 60 artists signed the initial declaration, and more signed another release ten years later. (see attachment)

The Patrice Lumumba Coalition and others were very active in
shutting down the play, "IPI-TOMBI" when it came to New York, calling it a "sad and dangerous burlesque of the very real day-to-day victimization of our Brothers and Sisters in Azania (South Africa)." Both Mohammed Ali and Aretha Franklin cancelled plans to perform in South Africa. Both received urgent requests from the American Committee on Africa, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Black Concern, and others not to go. The black American press including the Amsterdam News, Jet Magazine, Encore and the Washington Afro-American have helped to spread the news of the boycott.

Stating the position held by many American playwrights, Stephen Schwartz refused to allow his play "Godspell" to be staged in South Africa. He wrote the South African agent who wanted the play, "There are always cogent arguments to be found for compromising principles. But I continue to feel that if the "purity of the Gospel message" has failed to reach white South Africa by this time, one American musical comedy is not going to make much of a dent in anyone's thinking. I still believe that preventing a South African production carries more weight because it denies people business opportunities in entertainment, which historically has been more influential than moral guidance." (New York Times, April 23, 1972)

The African National Congress office in New York was instrumental in opposing the performance of "Umbatha" by a South African group, but when the play closed was also helpful in seeing that the black cast was assisted, particularly those who did not wish to return to South Africa.

IV. CONCLUSION

Individuals have supported the cultural boycott for many different reasons. Its success can be measured, in part, by the reaction to it of the South African government. Ever preoccupied by public image, the South African Government is again changing the rules, integrating facilities that were once segregated, abolishing certain aspects of what has been called "petty" apartheid. And even these actions are causing a furor within the Nationalist Party. The right-wing is convinced they will lead to the downfall of white domination.

The importance of the cultural boycott is historical. It is one of many political tactics used by opponents of apartheid. These opponents stress the necessity of viewing the boycott not as a moral principle, but as a strategy to achieve specific ends.

However, the cultural boycott as South Africa reminds everyone that change will not come by appeasement, that the daily suffering of the majority cannot be entertained away, and that all support for the ruling Nationalist Party and its economic and political allies must be removed.
V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning the cultural boycott of South Africa, I make the following recommendations:

1) greater coordination must be made with the liberation movements of South Africa and among NGO's concerned with opposing performances which aid apartheid. We must have more advance knowledge of who is coming out of South Africa, who is performing in Europe and planning to come to North America, etc. We need the kind of working relationship for exchange of information as exists between anti-apartheid sports groups and the South African Council on Sport.

2) We should renew efforts to engage prominent writers, playwrights, performers, etc. to pledge to boycott their works from South Africa, seeking to place new ads in the newspapers.

3) Advertisements for academic and other positions in South Africa which appear in European and North American publications are discriminatory. The ACOA initiated a case in 1972 in which the City of New York Human Rights Commission banned such advertisements. Such tactics should be tried in other areas.

4) We should encourage the Centre Against Apartheid to commission a new review of South African legislation actions in this area which would provide immeasurable assistance in convincing artists and other cultural performers from going to South Africa.
we say no
to apartheid

We take this pledge: in solemn resolve to refuse any encouragement of, or indeed, any professional association with the present Republic of South Africa, this until the day when all its people shall equally enjoy the educational and cultural advantages of that rich and beautiful land.

SAMMY DAVIS, JR.
DICK GREGORY
JOANNE WOODWARD
FREDERICK O'NEAL
PETE SEEGER
ROBERT DAVIS
BROCK PETERS
KARL MENNINGER
KURT VONNEGUT, JR.
ARTHUR MILLER
RICHARD ROUNDTREE
BILL COSBY
BARBARA WALTERS
EDWARD ALBEE
SIDNEY LUMET
JESSICA TANDY
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

DIAHANN CARROLL
PAUL NEWMAN
LEONARD BERNSTEIN
ASHLEY MONTAGU
JEROME ROBBINS
AL HIRSCHFELD
CLIVE BARNES
ELIA KAZAN
BETTY FRIEDAN
NORMAN CORWIN
HARRY GOLDEN
RICHARD KILEY
WOODY ALLEN
GALWAY KINNELL
DENISE LEVERTOV
VICTOR BORGE
E.R. BRAITHWAITE
DAVE BRUBECK

WILT CHAMBERLAIN
NORMAN ROCKWELL
RUBY DEE
OSCAR BRAND
ELI WALLACH
PETER BOGDANOVICH
STEPHEN SONDHEIM
TERRY SOUTHERN
HARRY GOLDEN
ZERO MOSTEL
KAY BOYLE
JOE MORTON
CAREY MCWILLIAMS
HUME CRONYN
ERSKINE CALDWELL
RAFER JOHNSON
(partial listing)

will you say no
to apartheid?

South Africa—where there is total denial of civil, political and human rights for the Black majority (80% of the population)—where there is racial discrimination, segregation and control of every movement from birth to death—that is the law of apartheid—that is the law of the land.

The American Committee on Africa, founded in 1953, is devoted to supporting African people in their just struggle for freedom and independence. ACOA informs Americans about significant African issues, mobilizes public support for African freedom, and works for policies which will strengthen this aim.

Say NO to Apartheid
American Committee on Africa.
305 East 46th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017

Add my name to "We say NO to apartheid", and keep me informed of further developments.

Name ________________________________
Address _______________________________________
City __________ State _______ Zip ______