southern africa
PERSPECTIVES

VOICES FOR DISENGAGEMENT

We don't discriminate - we do business wherever it's found.

The Africa Fund (associated with ACOA) - 164 Madison Ave - NYC 10016
Recent years have seen growing pressure on U.S. Corporations involved in Southern Africa, generated by public exposure of their complicity with the white minority, apartheid and colonial systems of South Africa, Rhodesia, and Portuguese-ruled Africa. Many companies have responded by developing a rationale which seeks to justify their initial investment, continued presence and ongoing expansion in these racially oppressive countries.

The most universal corporate defense raised is the argument that U.S. companies act as catalysts for peaceful and constructive change of the racist systems by investing inside Southern Africa.

There is nothing in the history of South Africa’s economic development to bear out these arguments that increasing industrialization must inevitably lead to improvement in the quality of life for everyone. For the black people of South Africa the last 20 years of intensive economic development have also been years of intensifying oppression and exploitation. White-black wage-gaps widened, pass laws were tightened and extended to cover African women as well as the men and the Bantustan design was used to transform the whole African population into a rightless “temporary work force” in the “white” areas. The 10 years between 1961 and 1971 set a record for the number of new discriminatory laws passed—98 of them—all based on the intention to perpetuate racial differences.

South Africa now has all the apparatus of a police state... and that framework was being built at the same time as were the great new factories and roads and bridges that heralded economic prosperity.

Despite well-financed attempts by the South African Government and many major corporations to sell the image of the U.S. Corporation as a force for good in Southern Africa the chorus of African and other voices raised to contradict this argument continues to grow. The statements we have quoted below come from people representing a great diversity of background and experience. They have one important common theme—the rejection of the delusion that corporate expansion will lead to significant change in the oppression of the peoples of Southern Africa, and the conviction that the logical response in support of the struggle for self-determination should be immediate disengagement by U.S. business from South Africa.

**RESOLUTION:**

1) To reject the involvement of foreign investors in this exploitative economic system...

Black People’s Convention Statement, South Africa. December, 1972

“...there has been great publicity given recently to moves by South African business circles and foreign investors in South Africa, ostensibly designed to bring about changes within the existing order. It must be pointed out from the outset that these changes which would consist in the improvement of the social policies of the firms, increment in Black wages and vocational training, in no way affect the basic tenets of apartheid. They are but a devious attempt at perpetuating white domination and maintaining one of the highest rates of exploitation in the world under the guise of welfare policies...[the] dubious premise that economic progress and accrued investment will gradually transform and corrode the apartheid system from within...is upheld neither by history nor statistics. Recent statistics show a widening gap between white and black wages. The earning gap between white and black mine-workers rose from 15.2 to 1 in May 1966 to 17.9 to 1 in 1970. Black wages in the mines did not go up once in real terms between 1911 and 1970.

Ambassador E. O. Ogwu, Chairman, U.N. Special Committee on Apartheid 1973

“...Our call for disengagement of foreign investment is supported by a large number of organizations and movements who are against those who advocate violence as the only solution to gain political and social freedom for the millions of oppressed and underprivileged people in South Africa.”

Sonny Leon, Leader of the Coloured Labor Party, 1972

The ANC has long called for the ending of all foreign capital investment in South Africa. We see the economy as essentially structured by a colonial-type relationship between the white minority and foreign capital interests on the one hand, and the African people on the other.

South Africa is an attractive center for profitable foreign investment, precisely because migrant labor in abundance is organized and made easily available to business by the regime as a conscious act of policy...companies are not motivated by the desire to bring employment to the African people or to improve the economic condition of African workers [but]....largely by considerations of profit, their share of the market and the sources of the raw material supplies they require.

Oliver Tambo, Acting President-General of the African National Congress, South Africa

“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 blood, 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.”

The late Chief Albert J. Luthuli, Nobel Prize winner and President of the African National Congress

“All investments are a direct contribution to the colonial war. I understand how Gulf can say that investment brings progress. Some even say that after independence Africans will have the fruits of this investment. But this progress is not real for the African population. The increased economic interests of Western countries will bring about a need to defend these interests.

To invest in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau is
to delay our independence. We are against it.

At the United Nations we stated that we will consider any agreement between Portugal and these companies invalid. These investments are immoral acts against our people.

Marcelino Dos Santos, Vice President of FRELIMO, New York, October, 1972

"The apartheid government grows stronger by the day because of its solvency, which it gets from foreign investors. If the government had an economic shock, things might begin to change.

Mrs. Fatima Meer, Indian Congress of South Africa, January, 1973

"SASO sees foreign investments as giving stability to South Africa's exploitative regime and committing South Africa's trading partners to supporting this regime. For this reason SASO rejects foreign investments.

Further SASO sees the ameliorative experiments like those of Polaroid as at worst, conscience salving and at best, resulting in the creation of a change-resistant middle class amongst the few blacks employed by foreign firms."

Statement of Policy of the South African Student Organization (the national Black student organization) 1972

"The Africans accept sanctions as a price for their freedom and declare as our enemy any person who claims on our behalf that sanctions should be withdrawn to alleviate African suffering through lack of employment. The African National Council calls upon the Security Council and all States which support the cause of human freedom to intensify sanctions."

Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa, President, the African National Council of Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) before the UN Security Council, January, 1972

"Disengagement from these territories (Angola and Mozambique) will no doubt mean financial loss to Gulf, but it will at least provide it with moral leadership and set a valuable precedent for social responsibility among other corporations. This leadership will put Gulf in a position of strength especially at this time when African States are beginning to pose incompatible alternatives: either investment in Southern Africa or in independent Africa or in other progressive States, NOT IN BOTH."

Executive Secretariat of the Organization of African Unity at the United Nations, 1970

"The basic fallacy in the argument of those who hold out any hope of political change through economic expansionism is that they fail to understand a single fact of history: in authoritarian societies economic forces are controlled by political forces, not the other way about.

It is naive to suppose that South Africa's white society would give up its power, its privileges and its present system of more rapid economic expansion. The change-through-expansion argument should be seen for what it is—a rationalization to justify what is in the best
economic interests of those who employ it. Hard-headed political analysis shows that it is almost certain to be a dangerous delusion.”

Colin Legum, born and raised in South Africa and respected author and journalist on African affairs.

“... Reaffirming the inalienable right of the people of South Africa to self-determination and freedom, ... Condemns the continued and increasing cooperation of certain States and foreign economic interests with South Africa in the military, economic, political and other fields, as such cooperation encourages the South African regime in the pursuit of apartheid in the defiance of the United Nations; ... Requests States members of international agencies and organizations, particularly the members of the European Economic Community, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the International Monetary Fund, to take the necessary steps to deny all assistance and commercial or other facilities to the Government of South Africa so long as it pursues its policies of apartheid and racial discrimination and continues to defy the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council; ... Invites all organizations, institutions and information media to organize ... intensified and coordinated campaigns in 1973 with the following goals:

(a) Discontinuation of all military, economic and political collaboration with South Africa;
(b) Cessation of all activities by foreign economic interests which encourage the South African regime in its imposition of apartheid;”

Extracts: United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2925 E (XXVII) 1972

“I believe that apartheid has to come to an end. I believe that America itself, with its industries and business can no longer underwrite apartheid, whether it be General Motors, Chrysler, Ford, or 300 other companies that are there. The tide is moving in the direction of freedom and opportunity in the world, not in the direction of apartheid, and I am saying that the United States government ought to declare an economic embargo against the Union of South Africa....”

Rev. Dr. Leon Sullivan, Director of General Motors Corporation “Meet the Press”, March 7, 1971

“To the extent that U.S. corporations are agents which support and strengthen the South African economy they are also responsible for the strength of apartheid. A healthy economy strengthens white control, white imperviousness to economic sanctions, white ability to keep blacks oppressed.... If indeed U.S. investment in South Africa assists in maintaining the overall system of white control then the only legitimate demand possible by those wishing to challenge that control is that U.S. companies must withdraw from South Africa.”

Timothy H. Smith, Executive Secretary, the Interfaith Committee on Social Responsibility in Investments

“American business as it increases its economic involvement in South Africa becomes a partner of the South African state as it maintains its control over the great mass of non-white people living within its boundaries. This economic aid has helped South Africa on its way to a self-sufficient economy, has and continues to provide important political and psychological support to the racist system, and now helps the South African economy in its process of economic, military and political expansion into the rest of Africa. ... To think that a few remedial changes made by U.S. corporations allowing a few more Africans to get skilled positions and to allow some increase in wages (even as the cost of living goes up) will challenge the pattern of apartheid and minority control is naivete of the worst order. ... Some of us oppose this. ... Thus we take the view that all sorts of pressure must be brought to bear on U.S. companies to get out of South Africa, and urge truly concerned people to look toward the struggle of the liberation movements and the mass of oppressed peoples for fundamental change in South Africa.”

George M. Houser, Executive Director of the American Committee on Africa, “An Open Letter to Ulric Haynes, Jr.,” April 18, 1971

“... I must report that the idea of doing business in South Africa is totally unacceptable; we could not be true to the basic principles on which we run our business and we should lose our integrity in the process. We should have to operate within a social climate where the colour of a man’s skin is his most important attribute and where there is virtually no communication between the races; we should be locked into this system. We should have to operate within an economic climate which is deliberately designed to demoralize and to maintain an industrial helotry; we should in turn profit from such exploitation and ultimately end up with a vested interest in its maintenance.”

Mr. Neil Wates, Managing Director of Wates, Ltd. after visiting South Africa in 1970 and rejecting an invitation to invest in that country.

“Most of us believe that American corporations should totally disengage from southern Africa; that the presence of American corporations in which we are shareholders undergirds the system of racism, colonialism and apartheid which prevails in southern Africa ... even progressive employment on the part of American companies will not bring the basic changes in society that we support because of our Christian commitment to freedom, justice and self-determination.”

from the report by an ecumenical church team of 14 persons who visited South Africa in October-November

“The basic change sought is majority rule. Accordingly, the Chairman [of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Congressman Charles Diggs] supports the principle that U.S. business should disengage from South Africa. ... External pressure reinforced by the tinderbox nature of South African society may ultimately force withdrawal.”