

# Africa: A Progressive Force?

temporary steps to combat the recession.

While accepting foreign capital, the South Africans reject outright foreign suggestions of reform. "The fact that they (blacks) work for us," states Prime Minister Vorster, "can never...entitle them to claim political rights. Not now, not in the future." And Minister of Information Connie Mulder, rumored to be Vorster's successor, asserts, "The Nationalist government of South Africa is prepared to do everything — even to use military forces if necessary — to maintain the right of the whites to control South Africa."

Simply, White South Africans know that they need imports, foreign technology, and capital from foreign investors to maintain their position. (See article, "Accomplices in Apartheid.")

## CORPORATE REFORM

Under public pressure, some corporations have begun to make limited reforms in employment practices and wage rates. The "Six Principles" listed earlier sound admirable. However, General Motors director Rev. Leon Sullivan, who organized corporate acceptance of the principles, spent 18 months in the effort, and only persuaded twelve out of more than 350 US corporations to accept even these modest reforms.

That some corporations will no longer segregate work facilities of dining halls is to be commended, as are commitments to increased training for blacks. However, it must be remembered that the entire body of South African law and custom limits the changes corporations can make. The Industrial Conciliation Act doesn't even classify blacks as employees. It reserves certain higher level jobs for whites. Since hiring blacks for these positions is illegal without government permission, reformist corporations can only introduce selective changes.

More important, the "Six Principles" do not address changing the fundamental structure of apartheid. There is no demand for black political rights, no endorsement of black trade unions. Without political power and union recognition, blacks are forced to accept token reforms in a system which continually reinforces their inferior status and deprives them of basic human rights. Indeed, the corporate reform program can be described, as one exiled South African put it, as "too little, too late."

South Africa is not the only country where people are poor, where there is discrimination, or where fundamental freedoms are denied. However, the systematic oppression of black South Africans is so blatant that the global community has come to an agreement on the need for change. To focus on the fight against apartheid does not mean that we approve of conditions in Black Africa. Nor does it mean that we believe that the US has solved its own racial problems. Rather, it means that the people of South Africa deserve a say in the disposition of the wealth that they create.

Even if apartheid is soon defeated in South Africa, political conflict there will continue. In fact, arguments over the morality of foreign investment there will continue. The removal of the apartheid system is necessary, but not sufficient, to allow South Africans — of all races — to determine their own destiny.

## SOURCES

Investment Responsibility Research Center, Analysis E, *Corporate Activity in South Africa*, 1977.

Jennifer Davis, *Too Little, Too Late: The U.S. Corporation Employment Manifesto for South Africa*. American Committee on Africa, 1977.

SCRIP Position Paper, *Playing a Progressive Role in South Africa: Apartheid, Proxy Issues and Corporate Withdrawal*, 1977.



## South African Blacks Demand Withdrawal

Black South African leaders and organizations reject the argument that the economic boycott of South Africa can only hurt its blacks. Though they know that the white leaders of South Africa will shift as much of the burden onto the blacks as they can, they believe that blacks will benefit in the long run. Here are a few of the many statements asking for foreign economic withdrawal from South Africa:

### NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER CHIEF ALBERT J. LUTHULI

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.

### FATIMA MEER, OF THE INDIAN CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA

The South African 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...

### THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA

It is our firmly considered view that liberal opinion—however well intentioned it may appear—that opposes our campaign for this withdrawal is, in the long run, only delaying the change that is essential if South Africa is to be rid of apartheid and slave labor. It is not enough to grant higher wages here, better conditions there, for this leaves the apartheid system intact, in fact it props it up longer—the very source of our misery and degradation.

### SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT ORGANIZATION

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.

[Adapted from a position paper, "Playing a Progressive Role in South Africa: Apartheid, Proxy Issues, and Corporate Withdrawal," Stanford Committee for a Responsible Investment Policy].