

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE
ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON BANKS

SUBJECT: New York State economic links
with South Africa

For
Reading

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It is our pleasure to be here today to partake in these very important hearings. We will attempt to frame the question of divestment within the larger picture of the entire movement against apartheid in this country, stressing the grassroots involvement of people in this, the capital area of New York State. As you know, over ⁵⁰⁰~~four~~ hundred American corporations do business in South Africa, so the tremendous challenge which lies ahead of us is clear. It is up to ~~us~~ all of us, to take up that challenge.

I am speaking on behalf of the Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism, the organization which was formed over two years ago to organize a massive protest against the South African Springbok Rugby Tour. You may remember that the game which was played right here in Albany was met with spirited protest by thousands of Capital District residents and others from all over New York State. Remembering this history of Albany in the struggle against apartheid, it would be most appropriate if the location for one of the ^{largest}~~smallest~~ and most visible protests against apartheid in this country became the same location where the elected representatives of the people withdrew financial support for apartheid.

The Springbok protest expressed a clear message around the world...NO COLLABORATION WITH SOUTH AFRICA ON ANY LEVEL.

Since 1968, the United Nations has passed many resolutions condemning apartheid and calling for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa asking "all states and organizations to suspend cultural, educational, sporting and other exchanges with the racist regime ~~and other organizations or institutions in South Africa which practice apartheid.~~" In the Capital District

~~anti-apartheid movement~~
we have taken this call of the United Nations seriously.

The divestment campaign, which is the issue before this body, is the most crucial aspect of sanctions against South Africa since it is the corporations which do business with South Africa ^{that} ~~which~~ directly or indirectly support the apartheid system.

Let us not participate in meaningless dialogue about how foreign investments actually help the oppressed black victims of apartheid. A statement made by Mr. Salim Salim, President of the International Conference on Sanctions Against South Africa at a meeting in Paris in May of 1981 may help to underscore the ludicrousness of that argument. He said, "~~To those who have, in the past, used the arguments of the presumed plight of the black people in South Africa as well as the Southern African States, this Conference has given a clear and resounding response:~~ sanctions are important and vital in the struggle against apartheid; when applied effectively and decisively they will make a difference to the suffering people of South Africa in the sense that they will shorten the period of their humiliation and degradation."

And let us remember that those who are closest to the struggle for freedom, the Liberation movements themselves, have been the clearest on this issue. They encourage total sanctions because ~~the~~ isolation of South Africa in the world community and divestment of all foreign corporations is the most effective way to bring about the demise of apartheid.

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Let us ~~accurately represent~~ mass sentiment in this country as regards apartheid. Clearly, there is consensus against apartheid. *clearly* There is general agreement about the horrifying nature of the apartheid regime. If you were to take a random survey, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who would support apartheid.

Yet it is true that we support it everyday.

As long as New York State invests money in corporations which do business in South Africa, we support apartheid.

As long as New York State invests in banks which make loans to South Africa, we support apartheid.

And we find ourselves in the most contradictory of times. We are at a crossroads, if you will. At one side of the crossroads are the Reagan administration and hundreds of American corporations. The Reagan administration has called South Africa a friend, an ally. Restrictions against this illegitimate regime have loosened. In 1982, the State Department *in an almost unadvisable ~~bold~~ move* authorized the sale of 2,500 shock batons to South Africa to be used for torture during interrogation. The Administration's policy of "constructive engagement" is nothing but an excuse for United States multinational corporations to reap billions of dollars of profit by the exploitation of black labor. The Administration justifies the policy of "constructive engagement" by claiming that our continued contact with South Africa by the government and American corporations will make South Africa more receptive to suggestions for a more humane apartheid system. No apartheid system can ever be humane. We are not talking about reforming an inhumane system. We are talking about the elimination of the system. *We are TALKING ABOUT freedom.*

In his opening statement to the Conference on International Sanctions Against South Africa in 1981, Mr. Akporode Clark, Chairman of the U.N. Special Committee Against Apartheid phrased the obvious question. "How can foreign capital which went to South Africa in the first place because of the attraction of huge profit deriving from the apartheid system be the factor to cure apartheid?" Let us not pretend that huge conglomerates all of a sudden have altruistic purposes for existing. The Sullivan Principles, which are used by corporations as evidence of their positive influence in South Africa, have been described by the Motor Assembly and Component Workers Union of South Africa as "a toothless package and piece-meal reform that allows this cruel system of apartheid to survive." To allow American investments on the ground that American corporations may bring about reform is not only a ludicrous suggestion, but more dangerous is the justification it gives for the continued propping up of ~~an~~ ^{the} most undemocratic, cruel and ~~evil~~ ^{Racist} system ^{in the world}.

On the other side of the crossroads is the growing national consciousness about the immorality of the apartheid system and of the love affair between South Africa and the Reagan administration. With increasing world awareness about the nature of the racist Afrikaner regime, the South African government is engaging in an all out propaganda war to convince you and I that things are improving in South Africa. Slick, glossy fact sheets from the South African embassy contain lie upon lie in an attempt to lure big investors to South Africa. More and more South African products can be spotted in American stores. Public schools are receiving an onslaught of materials extolling the beauty of South Africa and creating a false picture of tranquility and progress.

But decent people in this country will not be hoodwinked. A national conscience about apartheid is growing. Anti-apartheid groups are springing up all over the country. Every year fewer and fewer entertainers are going to South Africa, (fifty in 1981, twenty two in 1982 and ten in 1983.) Divestment has occurred in neighboring states, cities and colleges across the nation.

We urge you, our representatives, to stand at the cross-roads with those who oppose the racist system of South Africa and exercise leadership that will make us proud. We urge that you not be taken in by bogus arguments which raise the question of whether a state legislative body should be dealing with foreign policy issues. By investing state monies in apartheid, as we are currently doing, we find ourselves already in the eye of a foreign policy issue.

Let us not put ourselves in a category of simply "abhorring apartheid." Let us put some clout behind our moral outrage against this ~~current~~ illegitimate government in South Africa. Let us be vigilant about our responsibility and let us pursue concretely the demise of apartheid and end our collaboration with it.

We urge you to follow the bold example of our neighboring states of Connecticut and Massachusetts who most recently divested.

We applaud your effort today to listen, evaluate and work with us to find a solution to this problem. We believe the

^{are} answer is clear and that there can be no equivocating from ~~us~~ ^{them}.

One answer in New York State lies in bills ^A 3380 and ^A 5034.

As citizens concerned about our involuntary support of the apartheid system because of our state's involvement in it, we are indebted to the sponsors of these bills. We beseech you to join with them in this move toward divestment, thereby providing leadership in New York State which is morally and politically correct.