

Statement by Kwame Kwasi Afah (Edell Lydia, Jr.)  
Hearing on The Anti-Apartheid Selective Purchasing Resolution  
Before The Council of the District of Columbia  
January 20, 1976

My statement will encompass essentially two main themes:

1. IBM is not an equal opportunity employer/either here in the U.S. nor in South Africa
2. A brief examination of the role played by IBM in South Africa

IBM is not an equal opportunity employer. And as a result, I was fired from IBM on March 9, 1972 after having worked there for three years and four months (actual starting date November 1, 1968). Let me provide some background information. In August of 1970 the IBM Black Workers Alliance (BWA) was formed in the Washington, D.C. area and all Blacks working for IBM in the area were welcomed to join. The principal reasons for the existence of the BWA were as follows:

- a. to see that Black IBM employees got better promotional and career development opportunities within the corporation;
- b. to help Blacks receive equitable compensation for the job they did;
- c. to assist newly hired Blacks to adjust and "learn the ropes" within the company;
- d. to serve as a "watchdog" over the Equal Opportunities Program Office which almost had excercised no real clout or any authority to change anything; and
- e. to improve upon IBM's service to the Black inner city communities from which many of us came. (During the late 60's and early 70's there was a conscious decision made by top level officials to move nearly all the branch sales offices to the Maryland and Virginia suburbs.) We found a disastrous credibility gap between what IBM described as its "social responsibility" as a "corporate/citizen".

From its inception some of the BWA members were harrassed and many subtle threats were made against many of us. On numerous occasions I was threatened with being fired due to my participation

in BWA activities such as trying to provide assistance to other Blacks who were literally catching hell. Also during this period, I was becoming quite active in D.C. in a number of issues such as the transportation and freeway battles, the Angela Davis case and many others. My work with IBM was always appraised satisfactory or better but not at one of the top ratings. After going two years without an increase in salary from March, 1970 until March, 1972 I was offered only a 6.9% raise. I indicated that this amount was not commensurate with either my expectations or my performance level on the job and that I would no longer work for such slave wages. After a few days of talking with upper management in the D.C. area, I was fired for insubordination as they called it. I felt as did a number of my co-workers that IBM had used its infamous "Appraisal and Pay for Performance Plan" to weed out one more Black worker who did not fit into their scheme of things. Subsequent to this a complaint was filed with the United States Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) charging racial discrimination. This was on March 9, 1972 and three years later the EEOC not only ruled in my favor but uncovered what appeared to be a pattern of racial discrimination employed within the IBM appraisal system favoring whites over Blacks. Though IBM denied that charges and EEOC findings, a financial settlement was reached between IBM and myself on a five digit figure.

I certainly don't wish to give the impression that I'm here to merely air my personal case before you. If I could call names I'd mention a certain secretary who had numerous years of outstanding performance with IBM only to find herself being kicked around by IBM management because she dared to speak out; or I would mention the two Sisters who were transferred to my branch office whom had always

been appraised at one of the best ratings prior to coming to this office. But shortly thereafter, they became active with the BWA. They found their ratings all of a sudden near the lowest possible and eventually were fired for "incompetence" and "tardiness".

You see, what happens is IBM constantly uses this very subjective rating/appraisal system to control and weed out dissidents and especially Blacks. The case of Jerry Vallery, one of the founders of BWA who became Chairman of the South Africa Committee of the BWA is worth noting here. I'd like to point out that when the BWA was conceived no one ever considered a South Africa committee because hardly any of us knew of IBM's involvement there. You might say that it was a tightly kept "secret". In any event that committee's work received attention in the national and international media. On numerous occasions, in sessions with corporate executives they were either very short with words or refused to say anything about involvement in South Africa. On one occasion at a meeting with Buck Rogers, then IBM vice president, Rogers refused to answer Vallery's questions about IBM in South Africa. Vallery was subsequently harrassed out of the company. There was also the case of a white manager at IBM in Gaithersburg, Md. who refused to accept a young Black's excuse for not coming to work after a doctor's appointment, and who told him to get to work the best way he could even "if he had to ride a broom." The young Brother was often warned that this was his last chance, and though I tried to provide him some assistance he was fired after nearly having a mental breakdown from all of the harrassment he received.

IBM once ballyhooed its participation with the National Alliance of Businessmen (NAB) project to hire Black "hard-core un-

employables". After about two years into the program about 1/4 of the original number of participants remained here again due to the insensitivity to Black inner-city "misfits". These cases are documented and they go on and on and on!!!

A favorite IBM tactic is co-optation. Like the McKinley High School Project so brilliantly conceived and directed by a Black customer engineer (hardware and software repairman) which was to acquaint McKinley students with data processing equipment. The project outgrew the company's expectations and ability to control both it and its director and he too was harassed out of the company. IBM boasts of being one of the largest corporate contributors to the United Black Fund but it was BWA members that literally forced IBM to allow payroll deductions to UBF at a time when people like Councilman Doug Moore was struggling to make UBF work and gain respectability. Project Turkey, initiated by BWA members and now financed and claimed by IBM as its own gives hundreds of baskets of food to families each Thanksgiving.

No where is cover-up demonstrated better than with IBM South Africa, Ltd. One of the pat answers to "why is IBM in South Africa?" is that we don't set foreign policy but rather we follow the lead of the U.S. government in foreign business dealings. That logic is perhaps what lead IBM computers to "smell out" North Vietnamese soldiers with electronic sensors that help to better target U.S. "anti-personnel" weapons; also to computerize the total passbook system in South Africa, you know the passbook with the picture taken by the Polaroid ID-2 camera and without which the South African fascist police will arrest one on the spot. Need we be reminded of the horrible Sharpeville massacre of 1960 when nearly 100 Africans

were slaughtered on the spot for protesting the wearing of the passbook. These are examples of what we mean by "IBM COMPUTES APARTHEID". Why is IBM in South Africa? By its own admission revenues from the S.A. operation is only a tiny fraction of IBM's total revenue. Obviously then it is not the money alone. My theory is that IBM has much to gain by the apartheid system remaining intact so that the gold, diamonds and other wealth in South Africa will remain in the hands of a few world-wide vultures who seek to continue exploiting the rest of us. Not to mention S.A.'s military role in Africa such as it is now playing in Angola along side of the United States I might add!!!

And when the bluster of IBM attempts to portray to us a corporation which is socially responsible are we to be taken in by it? And where will IBM be next - Angola? - or is it already there? IBM's computers also help to make the S.A. military much more efficient - the same military that is bracing itself for the inevitable all-out attack upon it by Black Africa. District of Columbia City Council Members will you continue to be a partner in these crimes against humanity? I HOPE NOT!! How many more local examples occurring right here under our noses do we need before we realize that all four of these corporations and especially IBM which controls over 75% - yes over 3/4 of the computer industry in the world have nothing on their minds but exploitation and P-R-O-F-I-T!!! If they discriminate against Blacks in this country as EEOC clearly pointed out, what would you guess they would be doing in the most brutally racist of all countries in the world - perhaps that the world has ever known, where it is against the law to pay or treat Blacks equal to whites? Ask yourself.

But just as they did in my case, they are probably trying to get rid of some tax-write-off money to shut you up - mere chump change to a corporation that nets, not grosses, over a billion dollars a year. A few years ago, in fact, they were the only corporation in Fortune magazine's top 100 to do so. Don't let their big bucks, big legal department or big publicity campaigns scare us. Let's stand strong together!!! Vote yes for the resolution that Brothers Coates, Doug Moore, Marion Barry and Jerry Moore so courageously are co-sponsoring to stop doing business with those who commit crimes against humanity - IBM, CDC, ITT and Motorola.

Thank You Very Much!