

LEARNING COMMUNITY

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

TASK FORCE REPORTS

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TASK FORCE ON SOUTH AFRICA - FALL REPORT 1971

To educate ourselves concerning the conditions in South Africa has been our prime goal this fall. In summary, we will limit our report mainly to conditions in the Republic of South Africa, even though problems are great and conditions are difficult in the whole of Southern Africa.

To aid us in our study we have used a packet of papers and booklets prepared by the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ; this has been our basic research tool. We also were fortunate to have as a speaker a citizen of South Africa who is now a candidate for his PhD at the University of Wisconsin. Another resource was a documentary movie produced by CBS with Walter Cronkite as narrator. Besides these, we have had five persons on our committee who have first hand knowledge of Southern Africa based on having lived there for an extended period of time.

I. CONDITIONS

The nightmare of living conditions that exist in South Africa today are so terrible and evil that a big stretch of the mind is needed to begin to comprehend what exists there. To we who are secure and comfortable in our dwellings, our jobs and our families, the only descriptive analogy appropriate is to say that the Regime in South Africa now is similar to that of Nazi Germany in the 30's and 40's.

The government policy in South Africa is based upon their ideology of "apartheid", which according to its leaders means "separate development" of the races. That is, that each racial group will be developed separately and independently of each other's race. In reality, the policy of apartheid is based on white supremacy over every other race. The government has divided its peoples into four races--blacks (or Africans or Bantus), white, colored (mixtures) and Asian (mostly Indian). Whenever there is a conflict between separate development and white supremacy, a decision is always made on the side of maintaining and preserving white supremacy. For no matter how educated, skilled, or gifted an African may be, he is always, according to the ruling minority, inferior to the white man. In the words of the late prime minister, Verwoerd, "My aim is to keep South Africa white. Keeping it white can mean only one thing: namely, white domination; not leadership, not guidance but control, supremacy."

This tyrannical regime is manifest in all phases of life--religious, political, economic, social and educational.

In order to carry out such a policy, the government has a vastly complex and detailed number of repressive and oppressive laws. Each one of these laws is in direct contradiction to basic human rights which Americans tend to take for granted and which are laid down in the United Nations' declaration of Human Rights. The following are examples of some of these violations:

1. Complete segregation of and in all public amenities. This means separate movies, separate busses, entrances, exits, separate benches for blacks and whites, separate elevators, phone booths, etc. To oppose this segregation is a criminal offence punishable by a fine of \$840 or no more than 3 years imprisonment or whipping.

2. It is unlawful for a white person and a non-white person to drink a cup of tea together in a cafe anywhere in South Africa unless they have obtained a special permit to do so.

3. A white man who spends a few hours each week in his own home teaching his African servants to read is guilty of a criminal offense.

4. An African religious minister who conducts regular classes for his congregation teaching the reading of the Bible is guilty of a criminal offence.

5. May not of right attend a multi-racial church service in a white area.

6. Any policeman may, in performing his function of preserving the internal security of South Africa may, without warrant and at any time, search any person or premise anywhere and seize anything found on that person or premise.

7. It is unlawful for an African worker to take part in a strike for any reason whatsoever.

8. An African factory worker who is absent from work 24 hours without permission, in addition to being dismissed, is guilty of a criminal offence.

9. A white man who tells a group of Africans that the apartheid laws are unjust and should be disobeyed is guilty of an offence punishable by a fine not exceeding \$280 or imprisonment for not longer than one year, or both.

These are just a few of the hundreds of laws passed to regulate, control and dehumanize. An African may not vote. Africans have been forced off their land in rural areas and pushed to the city to man the labor force in factories and mines. And then, the workers have been forced away from the cities to where they work and live in compounds or reserves outside the urban area, thus keeping the urban areas white.

Nor may an African come and go and travel where he pleases. According to the Pass Laws of 1952, every African must carry a reference book containing his photograph, racial identity card, registration number, particulars of his tribal connection, ethnic class, official authorization of urban area, labor bureau permit to be employed or to seek work, the name, address and monthly signature of his employer and other particulars. This pass book volume must always be carried with each person; failure to produce the book results in immediate arrest. There were an average of 1,313 arrests every day in 1966. There are some 300,000 persons in jail each year. These passbooks serve to regulate and control the employment of the blacks.

Such rule, inequalities and unjust laws and conditions are carried out by the white minority; there are 3.6 million whites and 12.7 million blacks in South Africa. Further inequities can be seen in comparing the per capita income which is \$116 for Blacks and \$1,800 for whites. In Education, an average of \$19 dollars is spent on each black person whereas \$300 dollars is the average spent on educating a white child. It is illegal for any black man to occupy a position senior to any white man in the community. Again in the words of the late prime minister Dr. Verwoerd: "When I have control of Native education I will reform it so that Natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them...people who believe in it are not desirable teachers for Natives." Education is designed not for the Black man's advancement or progress, but for his enslavement and suppression.

Whites own 87% of the land and blacks are prohibited from owning property in white areas. The remaining 13% of black owned rural land is very poor land. The health standards are also terrible: 50% of black babies die before the age of 5; there are epidemics of TB. For hazardous mining jobs spending all day underground, the black laborer receives 45¢ a day...This, then, is a thumbnail sketch of present living conditions in South Africa.

II. AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Within the United Nations, the United States verbally condemns the policy of apartheid. Yet our government grants to South Africa a certain amount of guaranteed percentage of the sugar in the U.S. market. The sugar industry in South Africa is worked by Chinese and Indian laborers--about 125,000 of them whose average wage, including food rations and housing, equals 86¢ per day. These sugar subsidies could be used to send surplus food to famine stricken Africans and to help thousands of refugees who flee from South Africa apartheid. Also, the American embassy in South Africa could be integrated, but it is not. Presently, according to the South African regime, an American Negro diplomat would not be 'persona grata'. In actions, we are indirectly supporting racist policies.

There are many, many private businesses who continue to do business there. Some of these companies are Gulf Oil, IBM, Polaroid, Kimberly Clark, Chrysler, to mention only a few. These private enterprises are a significant factor in the stability of the South African economy and therefore in support of the present apartheid regime. Our companies claim that theirs is an apolitical influence, merely following the laws and customs of the country. Yet the American corporation in South Africa is generally indistinguishable in its business practices from its South African counterpart. In fact, South Africa resigned from the UN's International Labor Organization in 1966 because South Africa failed to remedy the situation of harsh and ruthless discriminatory labor laws. In 1961, the Christian Nationalists, the ruling party of South Africa, declared South Africa a Republic and withdrew from the British Commonwealth, mainly due to pressure from the British against the policy of apartheid. Some of the business practices which are so ruthless include the fact that costs are held down by a low wage structure based on African labor force plus the establishment of white owned and controlled industries on the borders of African reserves; workers work in a white area, but live in a black area. The old, the ill and the cripples are being forced to leave their families and friends in the urban area and go to a designed resettlement area, far from family and friends. Profits are being made, by American corporations at the expense and exploitation of non-white labor. Involvement is growing and it is important in helping to maintain gross white supremacy rule. One of the managers of one of the largest British building companies in the United Kingdom, Mr. Neil Wates, after visiting South Africa made the following statement: "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 color of a man's skin is his most important attribute and where there is virtually no communication between the races. We should have to operate within an economic system which is designed deliberately to demoralize and maintain an industrial helotry. We should in turn profit from such exploitation and ultimately end up with a vested interest in its maintenance."

When blacks or whites in South Africa are questioned about the influence of American business firms, they cannot answer honestly because support for economic sanction is illegal and carries possible death sentence. It is treasonable for any South African inside or outside the Republic to advocate a policy of economic withdrawal. In fact, the South African PhD candidate who spoke to this committee recently requests that his name be withheld precisely for this reason, because he does advocate a policy of U.S. economic withdrawal, and being a South African he is not permitted to say so.

Another important American involvement is the floating of a 40 million dollar bank loan revolving credit arrangement to the South African government. The loan represents 10 U.S. banks, two of which are First National City and Chase Manhattan Banks. This 40 million dollar loan of course aides the stability and flexibility of the minority government in South Africa. Numerous individuals, organizations and churches have appealed to the banks to stop renewal of the loan. However the banks have proceeded to renew loans.

One vital Question:

In the face of constant reminders by the United Nations of the grave present problem and the possibility of future racial war, WHY does the American government allow a "business as usual" policy when the high rate of American trade and investments only supports the apartheid status quo, insures that a final war will be all that much more bloody and Anti-American, and perhaps might force the U.S.A. to intervene on the side of the South African government in order to protect American investments.

III. BLACK RESPONSE

In all of Southern Africa as well as even in South Africa itself, the black peoples have followed a course of non-violent opposition along with a willingness to discuss differences. The nonviolent opposition began with Gandhi in the 20's on the sugar plantations; and even before that there was a history of the blacks attempting to solve grievances by talk over the conference table. However, especially in the last decade, these means have been suppressed so thoroughly and exhaustively by the white minority government, that violence seems to be the only recourse today. On March 21, 1960, 20,000 unarmed men, women and children marched to the police station at Sharpeville before a national strike was called. The police and army shot through the crowd and killed 69 persons. This clearly showed that non-violence had failed in South Africa; like Nazi Germany, South Africa had no conscience. Now even expressed opposition and organized protest is not only illegal, but it is met with blood and iron. Hope is all but gone.

The cause of the non-whites in South Africa has been recognized in the honor that was accorded the late President of the African National Congress, Chief Albert Luthuli who won the Nobel Peace prize. Yet even in his own land, he was deprived from the Gospels and democratic principles.

The few white radicals and liberals in South Africa who demonstrate or voice their opposition to the white minority rule, are put down by imprisonment in their own homes where no one is allowed to visit, nor can they go out.

In Mozambique, the liberation front is now fighting a virtual war with Portugal, which the United States (partially through Gulf Oil) is supporting in dollars and arms.

IV. CHURCH RESPONSE

It was the Christian Nationalist movement which started the apartheid policy in South Africa long ago, with the Dutch reformed church being influential and active in this party. In 1941 the Christian Nationalist party said, "We stand for Christian Nationals, which is an ally of National Socialism. You can call the anti-democratic principle dictatorship if you wish. In Italy, it is called Fascism in Germany, National Socialism and in South Africa, Christian Nationalism." Unfortunately, in the name of Jesus Christ, the South African Government has justified white supremacy. Yet in spite of this there are more black Christians in South Africa than there are white Christians. People still do believe in justice, liberty, dignity of man and mercy. There are today over 2,000 independent or separatist sects; a marked increase in membership of the African independent churches. Most of the 94% of the whites who profess Christianity continue to accept their racially divided churches more readily than they do their racially divided society.

Recently, the churches have spoken out and begun to action their moral convictions. In 1963, the United Church of Christ warned that "tragic internal conflict threatened South Africa; that it was "virtually a police state" and that all who trade with and invest in South Africa "contribute indirectly to the continuance of a system that has made a mockery of human rights."

In 1964, the Methodists urged all nations in the name of elemental justice to take action by means of boycott and withdrawal of investments by both churches and individuals.

In 1965, the United Presbyterian Church in USA states "Apartheid is maintained by a totalitarian force reminiscent of Nazi Germany." "American economic involvement, both governmental and private, has been a significant factor in the stability of the South African economy and therefore of the present apartheid regime."

In 1964, the National Council of Churches asked the government "to explore and exercise such political and economic pressures as may lead to the effective disassociation of the United States and its citizens from implicit support of South Africa's denial of rights to non-whites."

In 1966, several Methodist churches asked their banks to discontinue the revolving credit because of the material and symbolic support it gave to apartheid. The banks did not heed and loans were renewed. The Methodist board is transferring their investment portfolio to a bank that is not providing direct support to South Africa. If churches cannot make sacrifices for moral integrity, they can hardly expect government and business to do so.

IV. WHAT CAN WE DO? WHAT WILL WE DO?

- 1) Sell our IBM stock and make a declaration of why we are doing so in a symbolic gesture of protest. This is being considered by our church.
- 2) Write to IBM. This is already being done; letters of protest and inquiry into policy have gone to the National level. A letter is also being prepared for the local division of IBM to strongly state our concern as a church body.

- 3) Alert our legislatures and explore what kind of pressures or economic boycotts could be implemented.
- 4) Sell our individual stocks in companies doing business in South Africa and making huge profits at the expense and exploitation of non-whites.
- 5) Write our congressmen. Write the President.
- 6) Further education and publicity, i.e., have Bill Winecke write some articles on the real horrors of the situation in Southern Africa. Inform the public what companies are doing.
- 7) Demand that the United States curb American investment in South Africa and stop all military aid to Portugal and South Africa.
- 8) Support the African liberation movements with money and material aid. Let people know what the movements are fighting for. This is being done. One member of the committee is going to the church's mission committee for a collection on Easter to go to a specific relief fund in Africa. Some members walked in the Walk for Development, 42% of whose money goes for medical and educational projects in the Mozambique Institute.

These are only a few of some of the channels open to us. We ask for your ideas, opinions, knowledge, experience and wisdom to help us find more avenues for constructive social action--before it is too late.