

American Committee on Africa

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To: Dr. Edwin H. Land, President Polaroid Corporation
From: Charles Hightower, Washington Director
Date: November 30, 1970
Subject: A Proposal that Polaroid Disengage from South Africa

The American Committee On Africa has advised the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement of our complete support for their demands that the Polaroid Corporation effect a policy of complete disengagement from South Africa.

Our position in this matter, consistent with the work of this Committee for the past twenty years, views the presence of U. S. business in South Africa as reinforcement for the racist repression inherent in the apartheid system of that country.

It was from this concern that I wrote you a letter on November 18th to express our support for the demands made by the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement.

The reasons for recommending that the Polaroid Corporation disengage from South Africa are as follows:

1. A disengagement policy on the part of U. S. companies would reverse the trend of growing American economic involvement in South Africa.
2. Such disengagement can have an effect on economic circumstances within South Africa. Presently, the United States provides 19 per cent of South Africa's imports and receives 9 per cent of South Africa's exports. According to U.S. Commerce Department statistics, approximately 11 per cent of foreign investments are American.
3. Although the current trend in South Africa is towards economic self-sufficiency, this could not be realized apart from substantial assistance from other countries. The British, for example, are involved at a much higher level than the United States, but a U.S. policy cutting off trade and investment with South Africa would create substantial follow-through by British interests.
4. In the view of the American Committee On Africa, the engagement in racist South Africa by your corporation is inconsistent with Polaroid's

announced policy of equal opportunity employment. As the campaign accelerates against South Africa in this country, in Britain, throughout Africa and elsewhere, Polaroid's continued involvement in South Africa would threaten the integrity of your corporation.

5. The present trade and investment in South Africa involves operating in an economic climate which is anti-democratic, based on cheap African labor (Unskilled, African workers receive only 20 to 30 per cent of skilled pay rate as compared with 60 to 80 per cent in most of the industrialized countries of the world), and deliberately designed to demoralize the African majority of that country. In order to profit from such exploitation, the investor must develop a vested interest in the maintenance of the apartheid system. Again, we find this inconsistent with Polaroid's claim of equal employment opportunities.

6. Ending trade with South Africa would not hurt the Polaroid Corporation, nor would such disengagement threaten U.S. interests. U.S. investments in South Africa are only 1 per cent of the total foreign investments of this country. United States trade with South Africa amounts to only 2 per cent of the total foreign trade, reports the Commerce Department.

As policy alternatives to continued engagement in South Africa, it is recommended that the following measures be implemented:

1. That disengagement from South Africa by private American concerns be made with public statements expressing an abhorrence of the apartheid system.
2. That U.S. businesses locate in free African states like Zambia and Uganda in eastern Africa, and in Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa.
3. That economic aid and investment be channeled to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland in order to bolster these landlocked states who are economically dependent on South Africa.
4. Investigate the membership and financial assistance of individual businessmen or representatives of U.S. concerns in South Africa within the South Africa Foundation, the country's leading propaganda organization.

On August 27, 1970, the London Sunday Times reported that Wates Ltd., one of Britain's largest building and construction companies decided not to do business in South Africa.

Mr. Neil Wates, managing director of the firm, in an article in the business section (page 1) reported this decision. In January, this year, Mr. Wates said his firm had been invited to make "a substantial business investment in South Africa." Initially, Wates was inclined to refuse the

opportunity because of his abhorrence of apartheid. However, the South Africans replied that Wates, Ltd. had been misled by "hostile propaganda" and that such a decision could not be made from 7,000 miles away. Accordingly, the South Africans asked Mr. Wates to look at the situation from inside South Africa. In his report to the London Sunday Times, Neil Wates gave his impressions of South Africa and the reasons why his firm will not invest in that country. I am including excerpts from that article below:

"(The) idea of doing business in South Africa is totally unacceptable to me: 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."

In describing the demoralizing climate for the majority of the South Africans, Mr. Wates stated: "White industry needs African labour: but each African must have a permit to work, live, and move. It is true that he can establish certain residential qualifications to live in a township--if for example he has worked in the area for fifteen years, or ten years in the same job. But he may not necessarily be able to live with his wife.

"What he needs of course is a home. What he gets is life in a transit camp, without property, political--and precious few legal rights. So far from being a protector, the law is seen as a persecutor; incredibly 934,000 people were convicted of offences in 1968; 674,000 were admitted to prison during that year and the average daily prison population was 80,000..."

He concludes, in writing: "I travelled South Africa hoping that I would find good reasons for doing business there. But the parallel between Hitler's treatment of the Jews in the 1930's and South Africa's treatment of the blacks today became daily more obvious to me. Just as I think with hindsight it would have been totally wrong to do anything to connive to Nazism in those days so also do I think we should do nothing that would help to perpetuate apartheid today."

cc: Polaroid Revolutionary Workers' Movement
