

Segregation and racism . . . doing well in S. Africa

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First of a series.
In March and April, five Wisconsin legislators went on a trade mission to South Africa. Their blatant racism and naivete was given wide coverage in the press, yet the media neatly skipped over more specific purposes of the trip. It is clear that the legislators did not go simply out of ignorance—it seems they are merely role-players in a much larger scenario and the trip is only one more episode



Wisconsin-based industry's cooperation with the government of South Africa has been invaluable in the white domination of that country's majority black population. This seven-part series examines Wisconsin's role in supplying and building high-technology equipment for the South African energy program and its contribution toward the apartheid state's quest for a nuclear bomb.

in a long history of Wisconsin industry aid to South Africa.

Some Wisconsin companies directly participate in the subjugation of South African blacks by using them as cheap labor in their South African plants. Clearly, simple racism is not the prime motivation reason for trade with South Africa—there is a profit to be made.

SOUTH AFRICA IS actually two nations in one—an African, Third-World nation and a western industrialized state. It is a state that has proletarianized what were once independent tribes, that forces the majority to labor in factories and mines owned by South African and overseas corporations. The companies steal black labor, as well as natural resources from black lands.

Apartheid is the system of racial segregation in South Africa, which deprives the black majority of basic human and economic

rights. South Africa, unlike most other oppressive nations in the world, is based upon legislated and institutionalized racism—much like Germany in the 1930s. The society is totally divided according to race—black, East Indian, white and "coloured" (mixed race).

Although whites comprise only 18 percent of the population in South Africa, they own 87 percent of the land and make ten times the per-capita income of blacks. A series of laws enforces this structure, and controls the movement, family life and work practices of all black citizens.

All blacks are forced to become citizens of tribal homelands, which lie in the poorest and most infertile areas of the country. These "Bantustans," somewhat similar to Native American reservations, are being given a bogus "independence" by the white government. This is in an effort by the state to make all blacks foreigners in their own country, in order to subject black workers to more stringent controls in white areas.

DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S claim to be reforming the apartheid system, all blacks must carry identification passbooks and male workers must live separate from their families in urban areas.

Any criticism of the apartheid system is severely punished. In June, 1976, more than 600 black schoolchildren protesting in the township of Soweto were shot to death by government troops. In 1977, Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko was killed while under police custody. In 1980, coloured riots in the Cape Town area were fueled by rising unemployment. In Africa, South Africa has become more and more isolated since the independence of the Portuguese colonies in 1975 and of Zimbabwe in 1980. South African troops and jets repeatedly intervene in Angola and Mozambique, and still occupy the resource-rich colony of Namibia.

Most indications point toward



The South African Defense Force (above), the military arm of a racist government that is bolstered by U.S. industrial aid.

an impending civil war in South Africa. The white minority government is preparing for a confrontation by strengthening itself economically and militarily—by seeking aid from Western countries. Westerners can seriously weaken the Apartheid State by denying it access to that aid.

Yet Western multinationals are making an unprecedented effort to justify their involvement in South Africa. By slightly "improving" the conditions facing their black workforce and by barely lessening the racism in their mines and factories, the companies hope to sway public opinion toward favoring trade with South Africa. But like all the heralded "reforms" in South Africa, corporate reforms are only cosmetic, changing nothing of the essence of oppression. Black workers still have no right to vote, to move freely or to live with their own families. At the same time, their labor in the factories is strengthening the economy of the state that denies them these rights.

BIKO EMPHASIZED THIS many times before he was murdered: "Heavy investments in the South African economy, bilateral trade with South Africa...are amongst the sins of which America is accused. All these activities relate to whites and their interests and serve to entrench the position of the minority regime." His position was clear—a corporate withdrawal from South Africa would not "hurt the blacks," simply because the blacks have nothing to lose.

American multinationals persist in portraying themselves as a "progressive force" in South African "race relations." American black businessperson Leon Sullivan once drew up a list of reform guidelines for U.S. companies to abide by.

He was director of General Motors, and his proposals came to be known as the "Sullivan Principles." The guidelines called for companies to stop segregation

and to give equal pay, management and training benefits to blacks.

From the beginning, the principles were both cosmetic and limited. True racial equality in the workplace would be illegal under South African laws, and corporations are not known to break the law for the sake of their workers. Companies have found it easy to circumvent the principles, including Sullivan's own GM.

IN KEEPING WITH its obligation to desegregate restrooms, General Motors S.A. replaced the "Blacks Only" and "Whites Only" signs with color-coded doors so the move would have no real effect. In this way, the Sullivan Principles have been discredited by the companies that signed them, as is well documented in the book, *Decoding Corporate Camouflage*, by Elizabeth Schmidt, who is now studying on the Madison campus.

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Wisconsin firms keep morals and profits separate

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Even Sullivan is now having second thoughts. In April, 1981, he said he was not at all sure that investment in South Africa is a good idea in any form. It is significant that many companies, including most of the Wisconsin manufacturers with subsidiaries in South Africa, have not even tak-

en the minimal step of signing the mild Sullivan Principles.

The movement against U.S. corporate involvement has been largely limited to university campuses, with students calling for schools to divest themselves of stocks in companies that do business in South Africa. In 1978, the UW System Board of Re-

gents sold its South African-linked investments, after State Attorney General Bronson La Follette advised them to obey a state law against investment by firms that condone discrimination.

Though important, university divestiture is more a symbolic act than one that directly threatens South Africa. Approximately 100 companies operating in Wisconsin do business in South Africa, including such giants as Time magazine, U.S. Steel, Century Insurance and Dow Chemical. In-state manufacturers ship tons of heavy equipment to South Africa, much of it possible through European affiliate companies.

African industry, or is converted into strategic oil. Milwaukee manufacturer Allis-Chalmers may become involved in this second stage of energy development. African uranium that is dug by Milwaukee machines is exported to Western countries, or is put into the South African nuclear industry. Allis-Chalmers built South Africa's first—and, as of now, its only—nuclear reactor, called SAFARI I.

Allis-Chalmers also may have cooperated with companies from the Federal Re-

Wisconsin companies in S. Africa:

ALLIS-CHALMERS CORPORATION

A highly diversified manufacturer, constructing, mining, farming, synthetic fuel, nuclear and water desalination equipment. In the mid-1960s, A.C. built South

Milwaukee dock records show that P&H shipped 50 hydraulic cranes to the South African port of Durban last year.

REXNORD — A mining and ore processing equipment manufacturer.