

# **SOUTH AFRIKAN SHOWDOWN**



**DIVESTMENT  
NOW!**

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Cover Photo:

**A general view of the Security Council as it voted unanimously to impose a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa.**

Photo credit: UNITED NATIONS

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# **SOUTH AFRICAN SHOWDOWN**

# **DIVESTMENT NOW**

**By Kalamu ya Salaam**

A tough nut is about to be cracked. As the shell of South African separatism, known as apartheid, is smashed into smithereens, American corporations who have previously invested in the South African economy are now faced with the difficult dilemma: to divest or not to divest.

Relatively few people, outside of the South African government, will

argue that apartheid is a moral or just social system. In fact, world opinion is just the opposite. The people of the world, notably using the United Nations as a vehicle to express their sentiments, are resolute in their support of the struggle to smash apartheid. This mass opposition to apartheid poses a serious problem for companies who have made considerable capital investments in South Africa.



This Namibian woman understands that the "business" interests who are after Namibia's uranium resources are aiding South Afrika in its exploitation of her homeland.

The recent wave of campus protests against college and university investments in companies who do business with South Afrika has caused corporate boardrooms to hum with conversations pro and con about sticking with South Afrika. Joel Lefkowitz, an editor of *Politics and Education* magazine, writing in the June 2, 1978 edition of *Seven Days* magazine points out that the investments are considerable.

Harvard University, for example, holds over \$360 million worth of stock in IBM, Standard Oil of California, General Electric, I.T.T. and other major firms investing in South Afrika. Columbia has about \$80 million in investments in many of the same corporations as well as Texaco, on whose board of directors Columbia President William McGill sits.

Princeton's share is \$195 million and one of its trustees, R. Manning Brown, is a director of Morgan Guaranty and Union Carbide (which deal with South Afrika and Rhodesia respectively).

The dollars are less but the percentages are significant in the case of smaller institutions like Williams College and Dartmouth. 30 percent of whose investments are linked to South Afrika.

The pressure is on to cut all ties to South Afrika. Responding to undeniable evidence that Polaroid's

business in South Afrika was directly supporting the racist regime, Polaroid corporation did a dramatic divestment in November of 1977. Other companies have been more reluctant to pull out.

The cover story of the June 19, 1978 issue of *Fortune* magazine, a leading journal of big business, is "Why U.S. Companies Should Stay In South Afrika". The story offers the current rationale for why companies should continue their capital investments in South Afrika. The purpose of this article is to advocate divestment. This advocacy will be explained by countering the main arguments of the Herman Nickel article in *Fortune*.

### Stability, Change and The Status Quo

The basic rationale for continued business presence in South Afrika is two-fold. First, it is argued that U.S. companies act as an effective force to bring about "peaceful" and "productive" change in South Afrika. Second, it is argued that South Afrikan Blacks benefit from and want companies to continue doing business in South Afrika.

Nickel sums up the pro-investment argument succinctly. "By their

continued presence, the (U.S. companies) argue, they not only provide jobs for their 90,000 employees, including some 60,000 Blacks; they also can serve as catalysts of peaceful social change."

The facts show just the opposite. While some changes are brought about within a particular plant itself — such as integrated eating and toileting facilities, equal pay for equal work, training programs for Blacks — this does not have any "catalytic" effect on the society at large. South Afrika grows more and more repressive daily, in defiance of both the legitimate aspirations of the people of South Afrika for freedom and self-determination, and in defiance of world opinion against apartheid as demonstrated by recent UN sanctions.

Not only is the presence of U.S. companies a lightweight, almost negligible, counterweight to the "legalized" racist violence of apartheid, but indeed, the laws of South Afrika require that in times of national emergency such companies must cooperate with the government. George M. Houser, writing about "Polaroid's Dramatic Withdrawal from South Afrika", points out that "the white regime has signaled very clearly that it will brook no genuine interference from foreign firms. In November (1977) it announced that any corporation, domestic or foreign, could be ordered to tailor its production to government demands in the interests of national security." In the final analysis corporate investment in South Afrika rather than actively promoting progressive change actually objectively supports the status quo.

Donald Woods, a white former resident and citizen of South Afrika, escaped in late December 1977. A friend of Steve Biko, the Black leader of South Afrika's Black consciousness movement, Donald Woods was a "liberal" newspaper editor and critic of apartheid until he was banned. Writing in his book *Biko* he explains what banning means:

On that day, October 19, Percy (Qoboza, a Black editor of a Black newspaper in South Afrika) and I had been due to fly to America for a conference at Williamsburg, Virginia, of the African-American Institute. The Security Police took Percy earlier that day, and came for me at the airport. I had been on the point of passing through passport control at the airport when three men approached me.

"Mr. Woods?" said one in English. "We are from Security Police headquarters in Pretoria. You won't be leaving on that plane — please come with us."

In a small office near passport control they handed me three batches of documents signed by the Minister of Police, J. T. Kruger, banning me under terms of the Internal Security Act. The banning orders confined me to the magisterial district of East London, prohibited me from writing or publishing anything and from entering any newspaper or publishing house or school or other educational premises, forbade me to be with more than one person at a time other than my wife and children, and ordered me to report to the local police station in East London once a week. The ban was for five years.

Donald Woods was banned specifically for calling for justice for Steve Biko, and investigation into the cause of his death, and justice for Black people in South Afrika.

Woods' book explains in great detail, including supporting documentation, specifically how the

racist regime is entrenching itself into a block of intransigence which the presence of U.S. companies can not possibly hope to move or crack. Mr. Woods' informed and firsthand view directly contradicts those in America who think that business investments are or will have a positive effect on the present regime.

. . . The only peaceful yet effective means of compelling the Pretoria regime to see reason and to meet in honest negotiation with the chosen leaders of the majority of their citizens is the employment of all the strongest pressures that can be brought to bear short of war.

There are many pressure points that can be applied in many fields, economic, diplomatic, strategic, financial and social. And they all add up to one word — ostracism. There has been a belief for many years that ostracism is a negative and destructive process, and this may well be so in certain contexts, but not where the Nationalist government is concerned.

Opponents of international pressure often argue that such pressure will have adverse effects in South Africa; that it will drive the whites into the laager and make them more intransigent.

Not so. They are already in the laager. Mr. Vorster's recent election campaign was geared almost exclusively toward giving the world the message from white South Africa: "Do your worst!" There is really no alternative that the Vorster government has left the anti-apartheid world. He and his predecessors have proved that they regard "friendly advice" from abroad, unbacked by strong action, as weakness and condonation of their policies.

Pro-investment proponents fail to recognize that they are dealing with a determined and despicable government that has already firmly decided which way South Afrika

should go. Apartheid is not the creation of a "tyrant" or a futile dream of a small cabal of white racists. Apartheid is the official government policy, built on laws passed in parliament, and supported by the majority of white citizens and an army, police force and militia. Apartheid is no accident or aberration, but is instead a deliberate policy whose stated goal is to enforce and extend the domination and exploitation of eighty-three percent (Black) of the total population by thirteen percent (white). Elementary arithmetic demonstrates that the only way thirteen percent can continue to dominate eighty-three percent against the will of those eighty-three percent is through systematic violence and repression. The addition of U.S. investment does nothing to change this basic equation of white racism and repression in South Afrika.

If, as men daily demonstrate, the apartheid government will not listen to "friendly advice", how then do U.S. companies think that they can be a "catalyst" for change? If U.S. companies were critical to South Afrika's survival, then the companies could argue with Vorster that we will stay but you must change. But, unfortunately, they are not critical.

Herman Nickel admits this, even as he argues for U.S. companies to stay.

To begin with, one has to confront a truth that Americans often prefer to ignore in foreign relations: there is a clear limit to American power and leverage. While continued U.S. investment, credit, and trade are important to South Afrika, they are not a matter of survival. At least on this

point, South Africa's Finance Minister Owen Horwood and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young are in perfect agreement. "South Africa will certainly not be forced to its knees by disinvestment of American capital, whatever that vague notion may mean and however it is supposed to be brought about," Horwood told me when I questioned him in his spacious Cape Town office. "South Africa, is one of the most self-sufficient nations in the world," said Young in a recent interview. Even the staff report of Senator Clark's subcommittee on Africa, with its strong disengagement bias, concedes that U.S. economic interests in South Africa "may not be decisive" after all.

If the U.S. economic interests are not decisive then how can they bring about significant change? They can not. Proponents of continued investments in South Afrika can not have it both ways. A non-decisive force for critical change is a contradiction in essence. This is what the outcome of business interests in South Afrika turn out to be: a contradiction in essence.

### **No More Superprofits**

Before addressing Nickel's second argument about benefits to Blacks, let us look closer at why U.S. companies went into South Afrika in the first place and what keeps them there now.

One of the main reasons that U.S. companies had for investing in South Afrika was that they got a good return on their investment. Today that reason no longer stands. Nickel acknowledges this much, "After all, business in South Africa is not nearly as profitable today as it used to be, with the once-fabulous returns (a record 29.9 percent in 1973) sharply down to 8.5

percent in 1975". The prospects for the future of the South Afrikan economy is not bright.

The South Afrikan economy is shrinking rather than growing. There is rising unemployment, a staggering loss in productive output, and massive dissipation of the budget as apartheid forces spend over twenty percent of their available capital gearing up for the violent "apartheid armageddon".

According to Nickel, "Largely as the result of the mid-1970's recession, which hit South Africa about eighteen months late, the economy's real growth rate has nose-dived from 7 percent in 1974 to 0.5 percent in 1977". South Africa is no longer the investor's dream that it once was.

Back in the fifties and sixties South Afrika seemed to be a stable investment with promises of limitless longevity. However, the architects of apartheid had more foresight than many foreign investors, they built an economic turnstile which turns one way on South Afrika's monetary borders; it's easy to go in and very difficult to leave, or, as the old Afrikan-American saying goes, "if you grin, you're in, but you got to shout to get out!"

Nickel notes the economic corral which surrounds U.S. companies who invest:

... The fact is that any "heading for the exit" is not nearly as simple an exercise as some of its proponents seem to assume. For while South African foreign-exchange regulations allow the free repatriation of profits, this does not apply to capital. There is thus no way of packing up the plant and shipping it home. If an American corporation found a South African buyer, the

proceeds would first have to be invested for at least seven years in low-yield South African government securities — a solution as unattractive politically as it is financially. The alternative of selling out to another foreign enterprise would merely give the buyer the competitive break of being able to pick up a plant at a knockdown price — and without any obvious gain for South Africa's blacks.

Profiting off the misery and exploitation of other people has never been an effective course of business because, not only is it morally wrong, but in the long run it balances out in the red. South African apartheid has always been based on exploiting the Black masses of South Afrika and any company doing business in South Afrika knew this. It is difficult to sympathize with the dilemma of companies caught up in the complexity of apartheid investment laws when the same companies opted to overlook the blatant exploitation of Blacks and go after superprofits.

### The "Chicken Run"

However, the reluctance of U.S. companies to leave South Afrika is not shared by many white South African citizens who see no future in South Afrika's policy of apartheid. According to a copyrighted *Washington Post* article that was reprinted in the June 25, 1978 *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, "1977 statistics showed that for the first time in 18 years, more whites (26,000) left than entered (24,882) South Africa. It was the country's largest exodus ever and more than twice the figure two years ago. The 1977 trend represents a drastic change from the 1950's and 1960's, when South Africa attrac-

ted an average of 40,000 immigrants annually."

Emigration from South Afrika is commonly referred to as the "chicken run". The article, provocatively entitled, "Signs of White Exodus Emerge in South Africa" goes on to describe the emigrants:

The typical emigrant from South Africa last year was a young professional with small children who was descended from British settlers or who came from the country's 118,000 member Jewish population. Last year emigrants to Isreal increased sevenfold from 1975, according to government figures. The United States accepted five times as many South Africans in 1977 as it had in 1975, the same figures show.

These teachers, computer programmers, engineers, architects, nurses and — particularly worrying to the authorities — doctors, are taking the option that their saleable skills and sufficient funds give them.

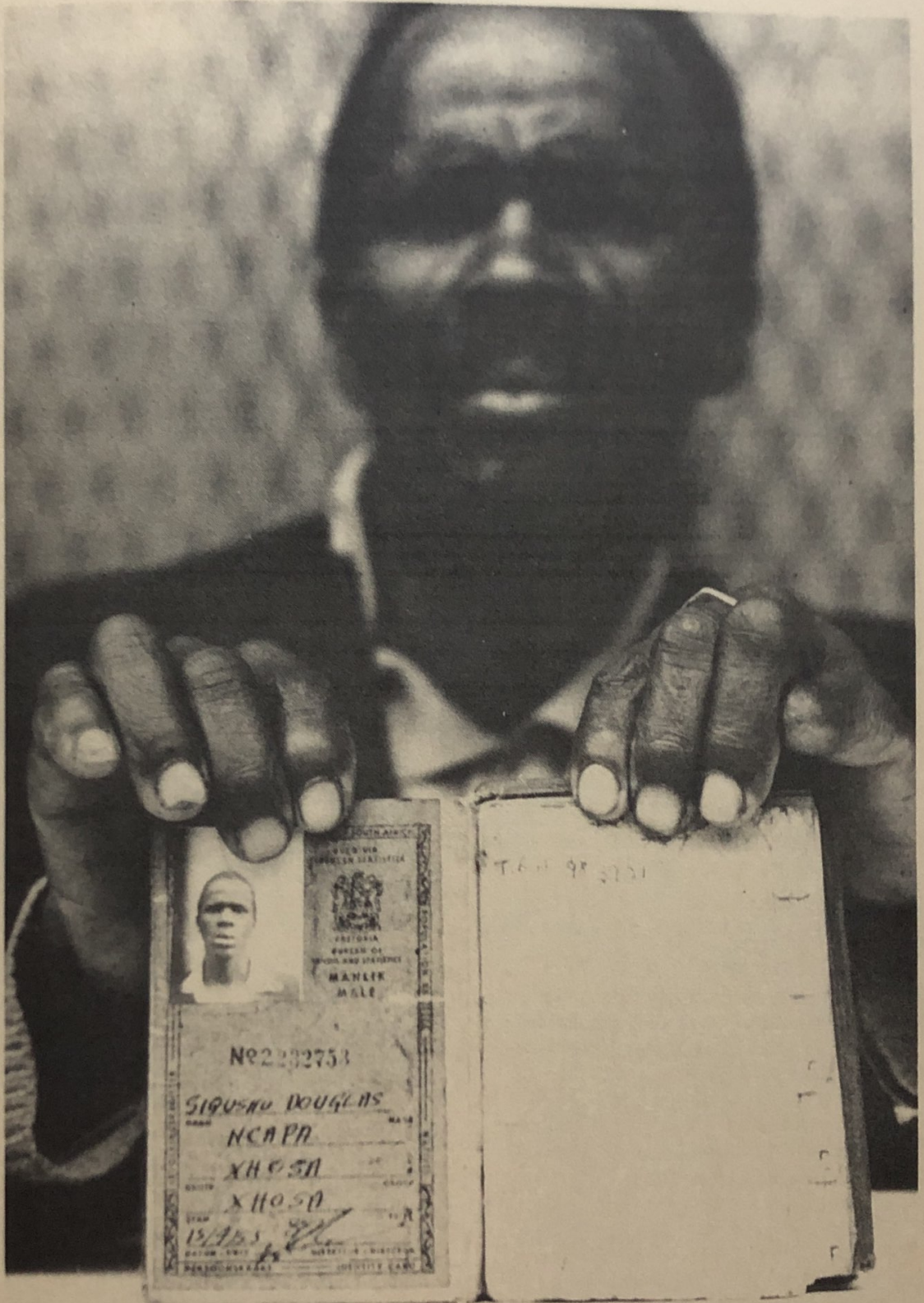
Although the flight of professionals is not yet acute, it bodes ill for an economy already short of skilled personnel.

The Ministry of Health said 213 doctors left South Africa last year. For the first time, incoming medical students at the University of Witwatersrand here received a letter advising them that the school was intended to prepare doctors for South Africa and that if they did not intend to practice here after graduation, they should not accept a place.

While it is possible for skilled whites to emigrate, politically repressed Blacks and their white allies are forced to exercise the less attractive option of exile.

While it is true that there are not yet many major business people emigrating from South Afrika, a few are deciding to leave. They are





A Black man holds his "identity card" which is used to facilitate the exploitation of Black labor.

"South African apartheid has always been based on exploiting the Black masses of South Africa and any company doing business in South Africa knew this."



### ACTIVE BLACK RESISTANCE TO APARTHEID

the "Polaroids" of the South Afrikan business world. However, many of the South Afrikan business people who do choose to stay, while staying, they also choose to illegally export their capital. As the "Exodus" article notes;

Another indication of diminishing confidence in South Africa's future disturbs the government perhaps more than the loss of people – the illegal outflow of money. People who are perhaps not ready to leave would still like their money in more secure climes. Realizing this, the government initiated a crackdown on currency violations last year and judges have been handing down heavy penalties as deterrents. A Johannesburg magistrate recently gave a high-level white executive a six-month jail term for sending money without authorization to his sick son in Switzerland.

One newspaper reported that last year alone 60 prominent businessmen were involved in 700 currency

violations totaling almost \$14 million. The South African Reserve Bank could not confirm this figure, but it said that in the year ending March, 1978, 361 persons were charged with violations adding up to \$9.2 million. Married emigrants are allowed to take just under \$35,000 with them. If they have more, it must be left behind.

Any economic and political situation that motivates skilled white citizens to emigrate and motivates successful business people to illegally export capital surely should be sufficient to justify U.S. companies divesting their interests in the racist state of South Afrika.

### Benefits to Blacks

The "benefits to Blacks" theme holds even less water than "the force for change" theme. If "force for change" is compared to throwing a small bucket of water on a raging house fire, then "benefits to



### GROWING WHITE RESISTANCE TO APARTHEID

Blacks" is like spitting on that same fire and proclaiming that you are helping to put it out. Neither of these two methods will work. They both would be ludicrous were it not for the dehumanizing plight of Blacks in South Afrika. But some businesses continue to peddle the old quack tonic "benefits to Blacks".

These businesses argue that, not only are they providing employment, they are also providing other educational and social benefits to Blacks in South Afrika, benefits which, according to the current business wisdom, Blacks have no other way of obtaining. The new bottles for this old elixir is a set of six principles created by Reverend Dr. Leon Sullivan, a Black civil rights leader from Philadelphia

who is also a member of the board of GM.

In Dr. Sullivan's view, if companies continue to do business in South Afrika, then they should at minimum conform to these basic guidelines:

1. Nonsegregation of races in all eating, comfort, and work facilities
2. Equal and fair employment practices
3. Equal pay for comparable work
4. Training programs to prepare Blacks and other non-whites for supervisory, administrative, clerical, and technical jobs in substantial numbers.
5. More Blacks and other non-whites in management and supervisory positions.
6. Improving employees' lives

outside the work environment in such areas as housing, transportation, schooling, recreation, and health.

To these six, in this author's opinion, a seventh should be added.

7. Ignoring and nonadmission of the plight of the millions of Blacks who do not work in our company!

Can limited benefits for less than one half percent (0.5%) of the Black population be used as a rationale to continue doing business in South Afrika?

The disenfranchised, politically repressed, economically exploited, and physically impoverished masses of Black people in South Afrika do not benefit from the presence of U.S. corporations. The meaningful measures of progress such as improved health, social stability in family life, adequate employment and political enfranchisement which means that people determine how they are to be ruled, these are precisely the issues that are left untouched by investments in South Afrika.

Writing in the essay "Prosperity 'For Whites Only': The Paradox of Economic Growth in South Africa", Jennifer Davis spells out how the central issues are left untouched.

... Even if United States corporations, responding to the pressures being exerted on them by concerned Americans, were to take the unlikely step of ending all internal discriminatory practices, the whole external structure of apartheid would remain. If General Motors or Mobil embarked on a two-year crash program designed to produce real, equal job opportunity in practice, so that the number of skilled, managerial, and scientific jobs mir-

rored the population ratios — 80 percent being held by blacks, with a black majority on the local executive board — even were this wild dream to become a reality, an African managing director in Johannesburg or Windhoek would still have to carry a pass, live in a ghetto, apply for permission to bring his wife to town, and be prevented from voting for or becoming a member of Parliament or even a city official.

In fact, far from exerting leverage for such radical changes in policy, foreign investment is building South Afrika's economy, making it better able to withstand future challenges from the international community or its own population.

Apartheid is a killer. Let no one be fooled. While Nickel waxes eloquently about the good being done for a labor force of 60,000 Blacks over sixteen million Black people suffer under the social system of apartheid which has but two goals: exploit the Black and Enthrone the white. Nickel asks us to consider better conditions within a few plants adequate compensation for the squalid living conditions that a majority of Black children, women and men suffer on the South Afrikan reservations called Bantustans or Homelands. Perhaps Nickel is not aware that statistics show that approximately one half of the children born in these areas die before reaching the age of five, a death rate which is twenty-five times greater than that of white children in South Afrika. To argue for the preservation of 60,000 jobs in the face of blatant and inhuman exploitation requires either total ignorance of the real ramifications of apartheid or else a callous indifference to the plight of over sixteen million Blacks in South Afrika.

## Does the World Need A South Africa?

Certainly the United States does not need South Afrika although there are those who would argue otherwise. But again the facts are that within the context of trade and vital raw resources, U.S. trade with several other Afrikan countries is of critical importance, while trade with South Afrika is only a source of marginal profits. For example, in an article titled "South Africa in Our Future" published in *National Review Magazine*, October 15, 1976, Laurence Salomon disputes the theory of South Afrika being critical to the U. S. economy: "... The fossil fuel energy now sold by Nigeria to the United States, for example, exceeds in value everything that South Africa sells to and buys from the United States, Algeria sells more to the United States and to France than does South Africa." With the "possible" exception of platinum, used for catalytic converters on automobiles, there is not one resource in South Afrika that is so critical that the United States would be literally lost without that resource.

In addition, the resource that South Afrika is best known for, Gold is a resource that not only is no longer necessary to the U.S. economy but, indeed, is increasingly becoming a resource that is harder and harder for South Afrika to produce. Besides, industrial societies need oil and not gold. While no machine runs on gold, no machine can run without oil or a petroleum based product.

At this stage in history, companies who have invested in South Afrika must face the fact that they

are there because they want to be there. No one forced them to invest in South Afrika and no one is forcing them to remain if they should choose to leave. Certainly, some companies will suffer capital losses if they divest, but those losses could easily be subtracted from past profits and/or written off in future taxes; companies who leave South Afrika will not really lose. No company can argue, based on a solid assessment of the facts, that their presence in South Afrika is helping to end apartheid, or that they are benefitting more than a minute percentage of an oppressed and exploited Black population. No company has any reason to be in South Afrika that will stand the test of applying the measuring rod of the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. No company can any longer argue, in the face of the faltering of the South Afrikan economy, that there are superprofits to be made from South Afrikan investments.

In the final analysis there is no significant reason to do business in South Afrika. Investment in South Afrika, like apartheid, like segregation, like colonialism makes no sense at all and faces the anger and opposition of the majority of the peoples of the world. Companies who insist on doing business in South Afrika can not avoid the central question: Will you stand with the right or go down with the wrong? History and contemporary conditions suggest that South Afrika is an idea and reality whose time is up. In the face of this reality, divestment is the rational choice for U.S. companies.

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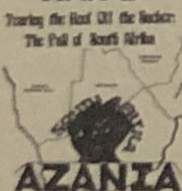
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