

ARTICLE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

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Beyond all possible divisions of Black opinion in South Africa, there is the rejection of apartheid, the rejection of the country's new constitution which went into operation this year, and the demand that real progress now be made towards power-sharing.

Statements about what is termed reform made by Mr. P.W. Botha in his opening address to the 1985 session of the South African Parliament have received wide coverage. Americans should be made aware of Black South Africa's attitude to them because reform after all is reform about their interests. They should be accepted as the final arbiters of what constitutes reform and what constitutes mere political tokenism in the face of growing international pressures on the South African Government to abandon apartheid. Stripped of all its political camouflage the State President has said that Blacks in large numbers must be accepted as permanent residents in those parts of the country of their birth in which they had been previously regarded as temporary sojourners. He said that they would have the right to own property there in freehold title, but that this would not be in any way related to the extension of political rights. He talked of South Africa having to evolve consultative and liaison machinery to enable Black South Africans to discuss matters of common interest with Whites.

Perhaps the statement in the State President's speech which has drawn the widest interest is the following:

"In my capacity as the person with the final responsibility for matters affecting the Black communities I have therefore, after consultation with those concerned, decided to supplement the activities of the Special Cabinet Committee by establishing an informal, non-statutory forum in which interest groups and representatives of the government bodies concerned will participate on an ad hoc basis and by invitation."

We must see this statement in the context of his speech as a whole, which reaffirms his commitment to political apartheid and the continued White claim to have a monopoly of power in 87 per cent of South Africa and over all its wealth. This he stated clearly when he said:

We are committed to co-operative co-existence, and we believe that this ideal can be achieved only if the diversity of our

society is recognised and it is accepted that the composition of our country's population need not be an obstacle in our way. But this is possible only within a system in which there is no domination of one population group over another, which in turn requires self-determination for each group over its own affairs and joint responsibility for and co-operation on common interests. Any further constitutional development will take place in accordance with this guideline.

I ask Americans to consider what criteria they will employ in judging the South African State President's statements. I ask them to remember that valid moral judgments can only be made against principles and Black South Africa is not asking Americans to judge the steps which the South African Government is marketing as reform on criteria provided by the poverty of apartheid.

After all the so-called reforms have been read together, Black South Africans still find themselves in the following position. They are denied a vote in the land of their birth despite the fact that they constitute 72 per cent of the total population. They are told that if they are thinking or aspiring to the politics of a sovereign state, then they should do so in one of the ten so-called homelands which together constitute something like 13 per cent of the country. They are asked to accept that Whites have a monopoly of power in 87 per cent of the country and over all its wealth, and they are asked to accept that the majority of people living in this White controlled bulk of South Africa, who in fact outnumber Whites there, should not seek to share power with Whites but should be satisfied with involvement in local government and with liaison with the State about matters which are local government matters and matters to do with culture, education, health and welfare. They are expected to continue accepting harsh apartheid laws in so-called White South Africa which determine where Blacks shall live, what schools their children can go to, where they should have business rights, and which dictate that they cannot marry whom they will, or build churches where they want to build churches. This is the reformed South Africa of today which Mr. P.W. Botha is asking the world to judge as better than the South Africa of yesterday. Black South Africans regard these so-called reforms as minor shifts in emphasis of apartheid which remains a scourge on the face of the earth and an affront to all mankind.

For us, reform must begin with a statement of intent on the part of the State President that he is prepared to talk about power-sharing.

Black South Africa is facing an intransigent White minority. This present apartheid government has survived for 37 years despite the world's indignation and even abhorrence. The South African Government is campaigning for international support for what it is attempting to do, and we ask the international community to reject the so-called reform which is being offered as spurious and to

rededicate itself to increased pressures on Pretoria to start thinking about real reform. And in particular, I urge Western nations to be coherent and purposeful in what they are doing to bring White South Africa to its senses. In the past all too frequently, pressures against Pretoria have been sporadic, indiscriminate and often contradictory.

We who suffer under the yoke of oppression urge the world to accept that not just any gesture is good, whether or not it contributes towards the toppling of the regime in South Africa. We ask the world not to make moral statements to satisfy Western indignation, but to mount real pressures which Pretoria actually experiences as pressures, and which do not at the same time involve Black South Africans paying additional prices as the oppressed people of South Africa.

The current debate in America is, amongst other things, about the merits of disinvestment. A mass of literature has built up around the debate and it is pursued in almost every quarter in the world, and there is a veritable library of books, articles, speeches and statements made on the subject. Americans, however, should not get lost in this labyrinth of point and counter-point but accept that disinvestment is not a stick which can be used to rap Pretoria's knuckles. Disinvestment is a strategy which will hurt South Africa as South Africa and particularly a strategy which will hurt Blacks far more than it will hurt the Government.

We have had the example of sanctions against Zimbabwe during Ian Smith's regime, and Americans should understand that the South African economy is vibrant and resilient in comparison. If the world failed to avoid a bloody warfare by getting the Smith regime to make meaningful reforms, it most certainly will fail more dismally in the case of South Africa if it pursues the same strategies.

Black South Africans have been witness to token action from the West for generations, and for the West once more to make token gestures of calling for the withdrawal of investments which would not move the South African Government to act because the level of disinvestment which would be hoped for would not damage the economy will deeply dismay us.

If economic sanctions were mounted against South Africa which had the effect of damaging the economy, Black South Africans would suffer truly grievous losses. More than 50 per cent of all Black South Africans are 15 years and younger. That means a population bulge of over 11 million young people are moving towards the market place where they will be seeking jobs, where they will require housing, health, education and welfare, and where essential services will have to be supplied. They will hit the market place which is already characterised by vast backlogs in the provision of

these things, and in which there is an already existing unemployment problem. Millions of Black South Africans already live in slum conditions and there is an urgent need for industrialists throughout the world to shoulder an international responsibility to invest in South Africa for the sake of humanity.

If disinvestment was successful irreparable damage would be done to the growth base of the South African economy and the huge population bulge moving towards the market place would find themselves in poverty more abject than anything that their older had experienced.

Those pleading for disinvestment should also pause to consider the implications which this would have for neighbouring states if the South African economic growth base was damaged. States in Southern Africa and Central Africa and along the south-eastern seaboard have struggled for their political liberation only to grapple with desperate poverty. The economic salvation of this whole sub-continent depends almost entirely on Black South Africans achieving their liberation without themselves and their neighbours having to pay terrible prices in economic terms.

Beyond these humanitarian and economic concerns, there are political reasons why disinvestment should not be encouraged. If we are to avoid a blood-bath in South Africa, Blacks will have to bring Whites to the negotiating table. For this they need to develop power advantages, and Blacks can hardly be expected to develop power advantages in an economy which is degenerate, and a country in which Whites are forced into a laager. There is in South Africa now a total dependence of Whites on Blacks for the running of their mines, their industries and their houses of commerce. There is also a reciprocal dependence of Blacks on Whites. This situation of interdependencies contributes towards a climate in which the politics of negotiation can begin achieving things. To damage the South African economy will retard the internal political process of democratic opposition terribly.

I am more indignant about apartheid than any American could possibly be. I suffer under the yoke of oppression. I see my people around me suffering with crippling effects of terrible deprivation, and I live in an environment the harshness of which cannot be described, but can only be known through experience. I reject the Government's concept of reform, and I demand the movement towards power-sharing but for all this, it will be morally wrong of me and politically inept of me to encourage the West to bring pressure on South Africa by damaging the South African economy. Economies are not things which can be picked up and dropped. Economic development follows only sustained effort and the continuous building of gain upon gain. The destruction of the South African economy, even if it led to the toppling of Pretoria, would not give South Africans a clean slate upon which to write a beautiful future. Social reconstruction would have to begin under

terrible disadvantages, and generations would pass before there was any real recovery.

The West is indignant about apartheid and if the West is to respond to Black pleas, then the West must find other ways of beating the South African Government.

We as Black South Africans do not yet know what President Reagan's policy of constructive engagement spells out for us. At this point in time I would be surprised if he himself knew. If America can be constructively engaged in helping to bring about reform, then for God's sake let her do so. And until such time as we are proved wrong in action we will encourage President Reagan and Dr. Chester Crocker to pursue their policy and to find ways and means of making that policy benefit Blacks in the struggle for liberation.

It is our plea that America takes the apartheid issue out of the party political arena to develop an all-America response to apartheid. We plead with Americans not to reject the first Administration in American history which has enunciated a South African policy. Americans could make that policy meaningful and we ask them to do so.
