

## **Where America Went Right - South Africa**

By Kysa Nygreen

The U.S. actions pertaining to South Africa consisted of passing sanction laws restricting business with South Africa as well as negotiating with both white and black leaders in order to dismantle the South African policy of apartheid. These actions have proved to be a sensible and effective way of starting to abolish apartheid in South Africa.

The U.S. should have a foreign policy that provides us with allies and security. The goal of U.S. actions should be to get aid when needed, to negotiate before any military action, and work with other countries toward peace and peaceful solutions to conflicts. We should never initiate military action and we should use our military only as defense in rare and very extreme cases. The U.S. should be able to get both military and financial aid, agreements and treaties, as well as protection of U.S. citizens from our foreign relations. Our allies should get equal service from us in return.

In the situation with South Africa, the U.S. has a dilemma to consider. We want a strong ally in Africa and South Africa is the strongest nation on the continent. They provide us with valuable trade and resources such as diamonds, precious metals, and vital raw materials used in our factories including iron ore, steel, coal, and uranium, as well as a market for American products. We don't want to break our economic ties with this country, however, we have many moral values preventing us from being allied with South Africa. Americans believe in democracy and have a one man-one vote based constitution. We are constantly striving toward creating an unbiased society in which all citizens, regardless of race, are given equal opportunity. South Africa's system of apartheid contradicts all of the values written in our constitution by giving the white minority complete power over the black majority. Therefore, the U.S. will not support South Africa unless apartheid is abolished.

The U.S. joined with some European allies have placed restrictions on South Africa in order to encourage them to move away from apartheid. South Africa was prohibited from participating in the Olympics because of apartheid. The U.S. has placed sanctions on companies that do business with South Africa hoping to bring the South African government to its knees. The law passed in 1986 banned new U.S. investments and bank loans in South Africa, prohibited imports of iron ore, steel, coal, uranium, and farm products, outlawed the sale of

computers to South Africa, and took away landing privileges of South Africa Airways in the U.S. Under this law, the sanctions must remain in effect until South Africa releases all political prisoners, repeals the state of emergency (a 1986 policy allowing South African police to detain suspects for up to six months without charging them or bringing them to trial. It also allows the government to restrict protests and bar the press from areas of unrest) in all provinces, legalizes all democratic political parties, repeals the Group Areas Act (law dictating where blacks may live and work), begins negotiations with black leaders, and takes specific steps to dismantle apartheid. This law was passed by congress over president Reagan's veto.

Today, over 150 colleges, 80 cities, 26 states, and 17 countries have divested their stock in companies that do business in South Africa. South Africa is losing billions of dollars. Already, the airline sanction has cost them nearly \$10 billion. There are supporters and critics, both black and white, of these divestments and sanctions. Neither side admits to opposing the end of apartheid, but some don't see divesting as the way to end it. Some people see divesting as contributing to apartheid by further impoverishing and weakening the black population of workers. Although most blacks tend to support divestment, this is not always the case. The common argument opposing them is that the South African government will be the last to feel the effects of sanctions. The most directly effected people will be the blacks themselves who lose their jobs as a result of closing companies, and new employment is scarce. A quote taken from an editorial opposing sanctions is from a black worker who lost his job during General Motor's South African sellout and reads, "The politicians and churchmen told us that sanctions would bring down the Pretoria government. But the government is still there, and now we are starving." This is a common view often (but not always) taken by conservative whites. Another argument presented for the lifting of sanctions is that it is necessary to lift sanctions in order to create the stable economy that would be needed to support the emergence of a secure democratic South Africa.

Those who favor sanctions as a way of bringing down apartheid agree that the black workers will be effected in the short run, but are willing to sacrifice that if the government will be effected in the long run. They believe that stricter sanctions will speed the process of bringing down the government. Most blacks support this argument and this can be demonstrated by the fact that the African National Congress as well as many black Americans have been pushing president Bush to maintain sanctions and even tighten them.

Since Frederick W. de Klerk has been president, South Africa has seen many significant changes that appear to foreshadow the end of apartheid. Under de Klerk, South Africa has released Nelson Mandela, legalized the A.N.C. and all anti-apartheid groups, and begun a negotiating process. De Klerk was invited to the White House to negotiate with president Bush, the first South African president to visit the U.S. since 1945. De Klerk has also begun negotiating with black leaders like Nelson Mandela and the A.N.C. for a new constitution. In the past few years, there have been other changes in South Africa too. Blacks are now allowed in hotels, bars, theaters, and schools previously denied to them. The beaches, toilets, parks, and benches are no longer segregated. It appears that South Africa is moving in the right direction and the end of apartheid may be just around the corner.

The question facing the U.S. now is whether to acknowledge South Africa's progress and begin loosening sanctions, or to take this opportunity to buckle down even more and make certain that the end of apartheid really comes. President Bush has been hinting that he is interested in lifting sanctions. "When people move in the right direction, it's time to start reviewing our policy," he said. The truth of the matter is that nearly all of the conditions set in 1986 for lifting sanctions have been met. However, the state of emergency has not been lifted in the province of Natal, and all political prisoners have not yet been released. Moreover, there is no concrete evidence that South Africa has taken specific steps to dismantle apartheid. Assistant secretary of state for African Affairs Herman Cohen told Nelson Mandela in a meeting that the U.S. had no intentions of lifting sanctions. Although Bush is opposed to sanctions, it is thought that he will not take action on lifting them yet for two reasons. Due to his winning just 9% of the black vote in 1988, he is making every effort to gain more black voters and maintaining sanctions may be a way to ensure this. But more importantly, South Africa has not taken specific steps to dismantle apartheid, the state of emergency still exists in one province, and not all political prisoners have been released. Thus, based on the 1986 sanctions law, we are still prohibited from lifting bans on trade .

The U.S. should not lift sanctions yet. We should tighten them now more than ever. By placing sanctions on our businesses with South Africa we made it exactly clear where we stood. By maintaining them, we'll prove that we won't be misled by minor "cosmetic" changes in the system. We shouldn't budge until apartheid is completely discontinued. It is inevitable that the ones who will suffer first will be the blacks themselves, but that is a misfortune we will just have to bear with. It is likely that the American and European divestments have influenced South Africa to make progress toward dismantling apartheid,

but it's too soon to stop. If we keep strict sanctions and continue negotiating with de Klerk and Mandela, as well as other African leaders, we can speed this process and hopefully bring the white government to its knees.

The goal of U.S. foreign policy should be to get as many allies as we can. As South Africa is an economic tie, it would be beneficial for both nations if we allied. However, it is important to recognize that apartheid contradicts all the morals written in our constitution, and we, therefore, must do all we can to end the system if we plan to continue trade with South Africa. We have done this quite successfully by placing sanctions, encouraging divestment, and negotiating. We really only had three choices. We could have used military action to take over South Africa and reform it. However, one of the goals of U.S. foreign policy should be to negotiate for peaceful solutions. Driving an army into a country who never even threatened us is hardly a peaceful solution. On the other hand, we could have sit back and watched the oppression of an entire people by their government. Yet, as a superpower in the world, it should be our responsibility not to stand for such a bluntly racist and cruel policy, just as we would not stand for another Hitler today. Thus, I think we took the right step in passing the sanction law in 1986 over Reagan's veto.

If we are to depend on South Africa for precious metals and raw materials, it is important that there not be instability there. One of the goals of U.S. foreign policy should be to negotiate for peaceful solutions in a time of conflict. There is a definite conflict in South Africa between the whites and the blacks which is causing much instability. We have negotiated with both sides in an attempt to make compromises and reach agreements. Though everything is not resolved now, there is substantial progress being made and it is obvious we have made the correct decision in meeting with de Klerk and Mandela.

The U.S. should get protection of our citizens from relations with other countries. Likewise, other countries should expect protection of their citizens from us. When an entire nation of people is being literally oppressed as South African blacks were under apartheid, we have a duty to protect them. Though some anti-sanction people may disagree, divesting from South Africa is really, in the long run, protecting the citizens of South Africa from further mistreatment, as well as protecting the pride and heritage of many American black citizens. It's the same protection of citizens we would expect from our own allies.

So far, the U.S. has done everything right. We recognized the problem of apartheid in South Africa, and decided to take a stand. Though President Reagan was unwilling to cooperate, congress got around him and passed the

sanction law over his veto. We got South Africa's attention, we negotiated, and we did not take military action. The U.S. may have really made a significant difference in the government of South Africa. If we maintain sanctions and continue to negotiate, we may be well on our way to seeing a great change for the better in South Africa.

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