

TALK BY HELEN SUZMAN, OPPOSITION MP SOUTH AFRICAN
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Prime Minister
Some cogent points
against
sanctions.

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What can be done by the West to speed up the dismantling of apartheid? Many options are presently under consideration, with disinvestment and sanctions much to the fore: campaigns for such actions have indeed reached tidal wave proportions in the U.S.A. Let me say at once that if I thought these would work, they would have my unconditional support.

Not only do I not believe these campaigns would be effective - I believe they would be counter-productive.

I understand, respect and do not argue against the moral motivation for disinvestment and sanctions. But, once gone from the South African scene, any influence that may have been exercised has gone too: any good that may have resulted from quiet diplomacy, or Codes of Employment Conduct for Companies with Interests in South Africa (as adopted by the European Community) will go by the board.

The Sullivan and European Community Codes have certainly made businessmen more conscious of their social responsibilities, and have led not only to improvements in employment practices, but also to assistance in education and housing for employees and their families.

And more recently, perhaps because of the threat of disinvestment, organised business - Chambers of Commerce and Industry - have expressed their objections to the detention of trade unionists and are pressing for the repeal of influx control.

The vacuum left by the withdrawal of U.S. and European firms will be filled - if it is filled at all - by companies with less interest in the welfare of their black employees. Moreover, if it is fondly imagined that the South African Government will buckle under such pressures and abandon apartheid faster than it intends to do, this illusion should be immediately dispelled. Far more likely, far more in keeping with the temperament of the Government and of the majority of the white inhabitants, would be the development of a siege mentality.

Nor should the idea that economic hardship would lead to a successful Black revolution, followed by a Black majority socialist government to replace the white capitalist regime, be seriously entertained - it just is not on, as anyone acquainted with the ferocity and determination of the South African army and police will agree. Nor incidentally, is there any guarantee that the replacement would be any better or more democratic than the present regime, should a revolution succeed.

That disinvestment, lack of foreign capital and imposition of sanctions would be effective as a punitive measure is, of course, undeniable. But it would not be selective of its victims.

Indeed, although white South Africans would be affected, the major sufferers would be black - South African Blacks and also Blacks from neighbouring states in Southern Africa which are heavily dependent on South Africa for financial aid, grants, markets and jobs, some of which countries, like the B.S.L. countries, are also part of a customs union with South Africa, and are linked to the Rand monetary system. "Blacks don't care if there is mass unemployment" people say. And I say (who am on the receiving end of many requests from recent job losers for assistance in obtaining jobs) that Blacks who don't care are those whose jobs are not endangered or who have never had a job to lose.

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The South African Government is more sensitive than you think. It does not enjoy being a pariah. It would like to be welcomed back into the Western community of nations.

But not at any cost.

Rather should you aim at attainable objectives than adopt measures that could reduce the country to economic chaos, with totally unpredictable consequences.