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Dear Eartha Kitt

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AN OPEN LETTER TO JEREMY THORPE AND EARTHA KITT WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE, WHO NEEDS ENEMIES?

There are a lot of people in the world these days wanting to reform South Africa. We are grateful for that, for South Africa can certainly do with reform, not to mention revolution. And the knowledge that their struggle enjoys the whole-hearted support of millions of freedom-loving people throughout the world has been a tremendous help and encouragement to the liberation movement.

But there are some people offering "solutions" to the South African problem which they have thought up on their own, not so much to assist our movement as to sidetrack it. Since they have been getting a lot of publicity in both the South African and overseas press lately, we think it is about time to tell them where they get off.

Let us take as an example Mr Jeremy Thorpe, Liberal Party leader, who returned from a short lecture tour of South Africa last June with his own plan for dealing with the problem of British investment in South Africa.

Having visited Soweto, Mr Thorpe said he was appalled by the "slave conditions" of the African workers, whose living conditions he found "as bad as anywhere in the world".

"No British firm", he opined, "should tolerate a situation in which employees are paid wages barely of subsistence level, where trade unions are not recognised and where people are allowed to live in hovels".

His plan is for MPs to buy one or two shares in the companies with subsidiaries in South Africa, and to press for reform from the inside, either by direct approaches to the directors or by raising the issue at general meetings.

"Those who call for the withdrawal of British investment in South Africa will achieve nothing", he said. Why? Mr Thorpe supplies the answer: Britain holds 60 per cent of the foreign investment in South Africa. "Many of the British firms accept the situation there and are prepared to pay the low wages offered by the South African firms".

But, says Mr Thorpe, "I am sure the British directors and shareholders are not aware of the treatment the African workers are receiving. If the facts are brought to their attention I feel certain improvements can be made".

Bigger Profit Than Anywhere

Mr Thorpe perhaps does not realise what a condemnation his words are of all capitalist investment, not only in South Africa, but everywhere in the world. Are any investors aware of the treatment received by the workers whose labours create the

profits for them? Those men who frantically buy and sell shares on the floors of the workers' conditions? Do they even know what products are made by the companies whose shares they buy and sell?

No, Mr Thorpe, the British investor puts his money into South Africa because he gets a bigger profit there than he can get anywhere else in the world. It is cheap black labour that makes his profit so big. If you take away his cheap labour and his huge profit, why, he will simply transfer his investment elsewhere, and the devil take the South African workers, black or white, who will lose their jobs.

Anti-apartheid demonstrators have been putting the facts before meetings of shareholders in the biggest British companies with investments in South Africa. They have found on the whole that the British shareholders not only know what is happening in South Africa, but condone it. Oh yes, your company chairman will say of course he disapproves of apartheid, but he will go on making use of apartheid cheap labour because, he claims, he is doing good by providing work. He even boasts he is paying as good wages as the next man. He will argue that you can't expect him to make radical reforms on his own because he would price himself out of business. He will then order his company thugs to eject the demonstrators.

British "Liberalism"

The *Guardian*, in an editorial on June 5, 1972, came down four-square on Mr Thorpe's side. "Mr Thorpe's approach is the right one", it opined. "It will be much easier to persuade conservative directors of the validity of progressive policies if they have been put forward by a committee of reasonable MPs, rather than by disruptive demonstrators".

Well, well, this is what British liberalism has sunk to! The *Guardian* does not, apparently, question the policy put forward by the demonstrators, but merely their social standing. Well, if reasonable MPs are more effective than disruptive demonstrators, perhaps the MPs could use their persuasive powers to get the British business world to implement the decisions of the United Nations General Assembly, the Organisation of African Unity and the African National Congress, all of which have called for the severing of all relations with South Africa as the best means of rendering support to the liberation movement. We would remind Mr Thorpe that it was the late Chief Lutuli, President-General of the African National Congress and a Nobel Peace Prizewinner, who issued the call for a total boycott of South Africa in every sphere. Would Mr Thorpe include him -

and the many other men and women of great stature who head the liberation movement in South Africa — in the ranks of disruptive demonstrators who can be ignored?

What A Cheek

What right has Mr Thorpe to advance his own private solutions to South Africa's problems? We would not presume to tell the British people what to do about Ulster, or inflation or unemployment, or containers or the Common Market. We leave it to the good sense of the British people to solve their problems. We might even come to the conclusion that the policies of Mr Thorpe's Liberal Party were the correct ones, and if the situation was one of sufficient gravity to warrant our intervention, or that of the United Nations, we might feel justified in declaring our support for Mr Thorpe's cause.

But we would not, under any circumstances, launch our own campaign for the reform of Britain, as Mr Thorpe proposes to do for South Africa. What a cheek! Imagine the African National Congress telling the British people where they get off in their own domestic politics!

For that is precisely what Mr Thorpe and those who think like him are doing to South Africa. Mr Thorpe may say he is only telling British investors what they should do. But he is doing more than that. He is saying the ANC policy is wrong, the OAU and the UN are wrong, the freedom fighters are wrong in calling for the withdrawal of investment from South Africa. He is saying the way we have chosen is the wrong way; only his way is the right way.

And please, Mr Thorpe, don't quote to us the examples of the U.S. firms Polaroid, Pepsi Cola and the rest which are claiming to have increased African wages in their South African subsidiaries, and to have given so many thousands of pounds to some or other educational or charitable cause in South Africa. This is merely testimony of the enormous profits these firms are able still to extract from cheap labour in South Africa, otherwise they would not remain there. Despite their propaganda, Polaroid, Pepsi Cola, General Motors and the rest are not in South Africa for the sunshine, nor out of concern for the condition of the South African workers. They are out for profit, and they are getting it. Announcing its decision to stay in South Africa last December, the Polaroid Corporation went out of its way to stress that "the South African Government allowed the experiment to proceed without interference or opposition of any kind". Precisely. Nothing Polaroid, Pepsi Cola or Mr Thorpe can do in terms of their present policies is of much concern to the South African Government because it does nothing to alter the basis of apartheid. If it did it would not be permitted by Vorster or anyone who might take his place.

Is this merely the voice of the disruptive demonstrators again? Let us then quote for the benefit of Mr Thorpe, Pepsi Cola, General Motors and all others who are trying to excuse their blatant collabora-

tion with apartheid the words of an American church team which spent three weeks in South Africa last October and November investigating precisely this issue.

"Most of us believe that American corporations should totally disengage from Southern Africa", said their report. "The presence of American corporations in which we are shareholders undergirds the system of racialism, colonialism and apartheid which prevails in Southern Africa". Discussing the argument (listen to this Mr Thorpe) that US firms would do more good for Blacks in South Africa by staying than quitting, the report said: "Even progressive employment policies on the part of the American companies will not bring the basic changes in society that we support".

And in case Mr Thorpe would like to check the credentials of the commission, the statement was read by the Right Rev. John E. Hines, presiding bishop of the Episcopal (Anglican) Church on behalf of the other churches involved in the Church Project on US Investments in Southern Africa at a press conference held in New York last February and reported in the Johannesburg "Star" on February 16, 1972.

Kitt, Goolagong et al

What we have said about Mr Thorpe, Polaroid and Pepsi Cola goes as well for people like Eartha Kitt, Margot Fonteyn, Evonne Goolagong and all the others who have chosen off their own bat to break the boycott of South Africa. They all go for the profits they make in South Africa, and they all find reasons to justify their betrayal of our freedom fight. A reporter of the Johannesburg "Star" reported on May 27: "Singing sex-kitten Eartha Kitt told me before flying to Rhodesia at the end of her South African tour this week that she believed her visit had 'knocked a significant dent in apartheid'". She hopes to come again, and to pave the way has also worked out a plan to save the consciences of artists who want the pickings they can get in South Africa so badly they are even prepared to perform before segregated audiences.

In conjunction with OK Bazaars, Eartha has started an organisation called SPEED (Stage Performers' Endowment for Educational Development) to raise money for African education. SPEED will ask every entertainer who comes to South Africa to give 2 per cent of his or her earnings towards African education. (Only 2 per cent, Eartha? Do you think you can buy us with 2 per cent?)

She said her visit had pricked White consciences, and claimed to have done more for the benefit of the Coloured people than the Coloured Labour Party which criticised her for coming.

Well, Miss Kitt, all we can say is Mr Vorster doesn't think so. He bans leaders of the Coloured Labour Party, but he hasn't done a thing to stop you, because he welcomes your help in breaking the international boycott of South Africa. He is prepared to dine with Dr Banda, to allow you to sing to segregated audiences, and to let in any other person who is



Jeremy Thorpe

willing to perform on his conditions, because he knows what you do hurts us.

Yes, Miss Kitt, hurts us, both physically and morally. You not only break the boycott we want imposed, but you hurt us, as a Black woman who has suffered the indignities of apartheid, by taking the side of our enemies in this struggle. You do what Vorster wants you to do; you don't do what we, the oppressed, want you to do. Whose side are you on? Are you just a good girl?

Moreover, Eartha, you encourage other people to overcome their doubts and follow in your footsteps. Two days after you spoke, Margot Fonteyn said in the New York Times: "What pleased me most, and made me feel justified in going was that Eartha Kitt was in Cape Town at the time I was there, and she was totally sympathetic and understanding and thought I had done the right thing. That made me very happy".

Margot Fonteyn is a principled person. She even told Coloured demonstrators in Cape Town who objected to her performing before segregated audiences, that she was glad they had come. "I understand why you're here. I am happy to see you here with your posters. For 15 years I have refused many invitations to perform here, and nobody knew about that. At least my coming here has given you this opportunity to demonstrate".

Please Dame Margot. We've got Vorster and his gang here already to demonstrate against. We have no lack of opportunities to get hit over the head with police batons. We don't need this sort of assistance from you or anybody else.

The time has come to say firmly to those who claim to be our friends that they must make their choice. South Africa is our country. We have chosen to fight and suffer to free it. If you are not in our camp you are in the camp of the enemy. There is no room in between. Please don't try to take the weapons out of our hands. If you can't join us, then at least leave us alone. We don't tell you how to dance or sing. What makes you think you know better than we do what must be done to "dent" or smash apartheid?

Above all, please don't sell us out for 40 pieces of silver and then pretend it is all for our own good.