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COAL PETITION

WHY BOYCOTT SOUTH AFRICAN COAL

South Africa is today one of the biggest coal producers in the world. 56% of the EEC's coal comes from South Africa, and coal is one of apartheid's biggest export earners. Yet black miners are appallingly treated, often forced to live in prison-like mine compounds, paid poor wages, and working in dangerous conditions.

The EEC last year failed to impose a ban on the import of South African coal, due to the intransigence of Portugal and West Germany. The IAAM hopes that this petition will persuade our Government not to wait for an EEC ban but to impose its own restrictions.

COAL — A VITAL APARTHEID EXPORT

Over the past few years the production of coal has assumed increasing importance to South Africa. As demand went up, due to the rise in price of oil, so South Africa increased production. At present the volume of exports is about 35 million tons and it will probably increase to about 45 million tons at the end of the decade.

This is a substantial slice of the apartheid regime's income. To cut it off would deal a severe blow to the white minority rulers.

AN EXPLOITED WORKFORCE

Blacks constitute about 90% of the workers in the mining industry in South Africa and their working conditions are a direct parallel to their position in South African society.

The majority of workers are migrant workers, recruited either from the rural areas of South Africa or from the neighbouring independent states. They are not allowed to bring their families with them but are accommodated in overcrowded dormitories in single-sex hostels. Visitors are not allowed into the mine compounds, and recreation facilities are extremely limited.

Accommodation is usually arranged on a "tribal" or "ethnic" basis, to use apartheid terminology, so that the mine owners can operate the old divide and rule techniques of control.

Job reservation remains in force in certain areas, in spite of pressure from the National Union of Mineworkers to abolish it. Certain positions such as mine manager, mine overseer, shift boss, mechanical and electrical engineers, are open only to whites. In some cases black miners actually do the work of the

overseer but are not paid the rate for the job.

There is still a huge gap between wages for black and white miners. In 1983 the average wage for a white coal miner was 1,608 Rand per month, while for Africans it was 317 Rand per month. (R1 = approx. 33p.)

HUGE FATALITY RATE

The fatality rate for miners sharply reflects apartheid working conditions. Since the turn of the century it is officially estimated that 48,000 people have died in South Africa's mines. An average of 600 miners die every year in mining accidents. (These figures relate to all mines, not just coal mines.)

A serious mine accident occurred in September 1983 at the Hlobane Coal mine when 68 miners died in a methane gas explosion at the mine. The NUM charged that safety measures had been lacking at the mine, and claimed that the Chamber of Mines did not consider safety a priority. It called for an enquiry into the cause of the explosion.

The inquiry found that the owners of the mine were criminally responsible for the death of the 68 miners. While the mine owners pleaded guilty to the charges, they got away with a ludicrously small fine of only R400.

182 miners died in another accident in 1986, this time in a gold mine. This accident was due to the presence of highly inflammable toxic material — a type of polyurethane foam — used in some of the underground equipment.

A THOUSAND WAYS TO DIE

This appalling accident came just when the NUM was due to launch a new booklet *A Thousand Ways to Die*, which was savagely critical of mine safety standards. Mines are basically not safe, and black team leaders who are in charge on the spot do not receive the same training as white miners, even though they are expected to carry out the same safety procedures.

Allowing for the greater numbers of black miners, the fatality rate for them is still more than twice as high as it is for whites.

THE NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkers

The poor working conditions of black miners have resulted in increasing militancy among black miners.

The National Union of Mineworkers was founded in 1982 and rapidly became

one of the strongest and most militant trade unions.

It has constantly campaigned for fairer wages and for the abolition of discrimination. Even injured workers are discriminated against on the grounds of their colour, with medical attention slower in coming for blacks than for whites. White miners enter the mines last and leave first; they are entitled to take any cage to the surface, but black workers are restricted and may suffer the annoyance and humiliation of seeing a partially empty cage proceed upwards without them.

THE CALL FOR A BOYCOTT

The oppressed majority in South Africa have consistently called for sanctions against their apartheid rulers, and for a boycott of South African products. Coal is included in this call.

The call was further endorsed in November 1986, when the International Mine-workers Organisation called on trade unionists to refuse to handle all South African coal. Miners representatives from 35 countries, including Mr James Motlatsi, President of the SA NUM, called for the coal ban as part of a package of international sanctions against South Africa.

SUPPORT THE CALL!

The Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement appeals to organisations of all kinds, trade union, church, women's, and youth bodies, to support the boycott. Get your institution, workplace, local council, etc. to pledge not to buy South African coal.

Please get your organisation to sign the petition overleaf.

It will be submitted to the Irish Government in the hope that Ireland will impose a ban on the import of South African coal, as it has done on fruit and vegetables, and that it will press urgently for the imposition of such a ban at the next meeting of EEC Foreign Ministers.

