

Give chief Buthelezi a hearing

The leader of South Africa's parliamentary opposition, Colin Eglin, argues that power comes from a full pocketbook, not the barrel of a gun.

Widespread black home ownership and the abolition by Pretoria of the hated pass laws — which heavily restricted the freedom of movement of blacks — both came about as a result of their increased spending power, Eglin contends.

And the impetus of consumer economics, he believes, will continue to engineer major social change where sanctions fail.

It is a powerful argument. And Eglin brought it to New York this week, as he denounced economic sanctions against his country and lobbied Secretary of State George Shultz to substitute further American engagement in South Africa in place of disinvestment.

Eglin deserves a hearing. For one thing, he, and his better-known colleague Helen Suzman, have impeccable anti-apartheid credentials.

In 1959 they founded the Progressive

Federal Party to press for universal suffrage and the creation of a multiracial parliament. Today, that party controls 28 seats in the 166-member body.

When Eglin and Suzman were fighting their lonely battle against apartheid, the Marxist-dominated African National Congress (ANC) was broken and on the run.

Now the ANC is waging a bloody battle against those who oppose sanctions, black and white. Its leaders expect divestment to produce misery, economic chaos and, eventually, a Marxist revolution.

Foes of sanctions like Eglin and Suzman are committed to democratic values and peaceful change. So is an important black South African, far too little noted in the U.S. — Chief Mangosuthu Gatscha Buthelezi.

Chief Buthelezi is visiting the U.S. this week, as well. Let's hope administration officials and, particularly, members of Congress, listen carefully to what he has to say.

Surely the counsel of America's declared friends should carry some weight as against the demands of its avowed enemies.

The voice of the ANC

"The African National Congress supports all the peace initiatives of the Soviet Union."

— Alfred Nzo, general secretary of the African National Congress, speaking at the opening session of the World Peace Council international conference in Copenhagen, Denmark last month.

Elsewhere in his speech, Nzo remarked that "the Afghan people, with their allies in the Soviet Union, have worked desperately for peace."

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SOUTH AFRICA: BEYOND SANCTIONS

As soon as General Motors announced the sale of its South African subsidiaries to local interests, the employees went on strike to express their concern about treatment under the new ownership. General Motors had followed the highest standards of fair treatment and integration spelled out in the Sullivan Principles. Divestiture was forced as much by the "hassle factor" in the United States as by any idea that it would advance the destruction of apartheid. What is the result? The new ownership will be much less able to refuse government requests for the sale of trucks, much more prepared to reduce the wages of black employees in recession and less committed to the highest standards of business behavior—and the workers know it.

This illustrates the law of reverse effect that characterizes much of what happens in South Africa. White Afrikaners proclaimed a policy of apartheid—"separateness"—and ended up dependent on the blacks. Americans proclaimed sympathy for the blacks and did it in ways that may make their plight even worse.

For the blacks, the stuff of life in South Africa is made up of constant pain under such deplorable living conditions that life is death on the installment plan. For America, silence is not an option.

The sad fact is that the words of our President on this issue are not believed, because of a widespread perception that he does not really care—or only cares about South Africa as a geopolitical issue. By contrast, when he speaks of human-rights violations in the Soviet Union, the listener feels the throb of Reagan's commitment and outrage. Congress and the public have acted to fill this perceived moral vacuum with policies of divestiture, disinvestment and sanctions.

The same law of reverse effect comes into play in the American policy on sanctions. Economic sanctions will mostly affect the mining industry. The result? Unemployment among blacks who can least afford it and minimal impact on the whites. Politically, sanctions have driven the South African government into the laager, a metaphor for a white encampment of circled wagons.

Resisting all international pressure, Pretoria now resorts to harsher policies in everything affecting blacks. It has crippled black political development by imposing new limits on activities of the United Democratic Front, the domestic voice for the banned African National Congress. A previous trend to modest reform, including the suspension of the infamous pass laws, has been halted. The government can count on a solid political base in all of this because half the Afrikaner adult population works for the government.

That sanctions might have the reverse effect was predicted by many. Those who opposed sanctions included many white liberals such as Helen

Suzman—long the most articulate parliamentary voice against apartheid—and leaders of the Black Sash and the Institute of Race Relations, as well as many black moderates such as the editors of black newspapers in Soweto. Others, like Bishop Desmond Tutu, have supported sanctions, arguing that the symbolic value of punitive measures outweighs any short-term costs.

Many moderate black leaders have been placed in a difficult spot by the emergence of a radical, militant wing

among the black youth; they felt they had to stay out in front to protect their leadership and perhaps their lives. (Witness the recent murder of a moderate black leader of the 1976 Soweto uprising.) In fact, the radicals seek not progress but chaos. For them, it can be said that the worse it is, the better it is. They want to create a cycle of repression and radicalization. As one said: "God is in heaven, the police are on earth."

What now for the United States? A procedure for review should be created without delay. Congress should set up a practical investigation of the effects of sanctions on the blacks with a firm reporting date. The President should invoke the spirit of Camp David and convene a meeting there of black and white leadership of South Africa to discuss a program of major reform. In addition to simply making moral pronouncements, American leadership here should produce positive gains for the blacks rather than just symbolic deeds—or actions that have the reverse effect. ■

