

# To GM, Ford and Chrysler APARTHEID MEANS SUPERPROFITS

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Ford, GM, and Chrysler together have \$270 million invested in South Africa, 20% of all U. S. investment there.

All of these companies have established plants in South Africa for the same reason. Apartheid, the South African system of legal racism, guarantees them higher profits than they can make at home. The African workers, who are almost 100% of the production work force in the South African plants, are forbidden by law from forming unions, striking, or obtaining skilled jobs. With the South African police ready to squash all workers' protests, it isn't hard to imagine how these workers are treated. The actions of the auto companies are a good example of the activities of all U. S. corporations in South Africa.

While corporate PR men talk piously about equal opportunity, respect for the dignity of the worker, and partnership in production, the wage levels of African workers tell the true story of how the company feels about the people who produce its wealth.

The first eight categories, in which 99% of the Black and 98% of the Colored (racially mixed) workers are confined pay less than poverty level wages. In real buying power 0.69 Rands (minimum hourly rate in grade 8) is equal to about \$2.00 per hour. Labor grades 10 and 11, reserved exclusively for whites, include all skilled work. The average wage of whites, who are members of a union, is about three times that of Colored workers, and four times that of African workers.

It is important to realize that these wage levels are determined by the company, not by the government and that while the Job Reservation laws prevent Blacks from entering the skilled trades, Ford's actual practice goes far beyond what the law calls for. It is clear that given a free hand, Ford and the other companies will intensify their racism as much as possible to obtain the extra profits it yields and to divide the working class.

White workers are taught that Africans are inferior, but they are constantly threatened with the loss of their privileges if they go against the company's interest. Now with South Africa on the defensive, the government and corporations are calling in their debts. An Anti-Inflation Pact between business, government and labor has largely frozen wages in a time of intense inflation, and more and more South African whites are being pressed into military service in foreign countries.

## CORPORATE WORDS, ACTIONS DIFFER

Publicly, Ford, GM, and the rest express their concern for the problems in South Africa, but state emphatically that they are not political. They claim they are merely obeying the law of the land in their racist practices, and are quick to say that there must be no violence or law-breaking in solving the racial problems of South Africa.

While opposing violent solutions to the oppression of Black people, the auto corporations do not recognize as violence the starvation faced by African children because the wages they pay cannot support a family. They do not recognize as violence the harsh conditions on the assembly lines where there are no unions to offer any resistance to speed-up, unsafe conditions, arbitrary firings, etc. For Black and Colored workers, there is no such thing as seniority or job security.

U.S. workers know quite well the record of the auto corporations in obeying the law of the land. Laws which help increase their profits are obeyed. But on laws which may hurt those profits, such as those requiring safety procedures, outlawing discrimination in hiring, or protecting the right of workers to organize unions, the record is clear. These laws are evaded by all possible means.

When the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 provoked the greatest crisis in South Africa prior to the current uprisings, Ford and GM were among the first U.S. corporations to express their confidence in the racist government by announcing major new investment plans.

While in the U.S. these corporations publicly recognize the right of workers to form unions, in South Africa they refuse to deal with the unions of Black workers



OUTSIDE A CHRYSLER PLANT, CAPETOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. Because of the brutal exploitation of Black labor, this plant produces much higher profits than one like it in the U.S.

in their plants. Although these unions are technically illegal, some industries and employers have bargained with them without government interference, because of the unions' real strength within the plants. The automakers continue to ignore them, and rely on the police to end strikes and job actions which have occurred over the years in Port Elizabeth, the "Detroit" of South Africa.

### LESSONS FOR AMERICAN WORKERS

What has all this to do with U. S. auto-workers? For one thing, it should make clear that the only thing separating us from this kind of treatment is our organized strength, both directly through our unions and indirectly through the laws which we have won that protect our rights.

It should also point out that our strength is dependent on the unity we achieve between Black and white workers, and on our struggle against racism. The wedge of

racism between Black and white workers opens the door not only to economic attacks on all workers, but to the weakening of the political strength of the working class in general. For example, in South Africa all union contracts are subject to approval by the government, and laws against strikes, even by white workers, are much stronger than in this country.

Another important lesson we can learn from the condition of autoworkers in South Africa is that there is a close relationship between our struggles with the companies. 25% of the investment and profit of Ford and GM come from overseas, and it is increasing. These investments provide an important cushion with which to fight the demands of workers at home. Just look at the fact that almost 50% of the rubber industry's profits come from abroad: this was an extremely important factor in allowing the companies to hold out as long as they did in the recent United Rubber Workers strike.

The companies would like to see working conditions in all countries reduced to the conditions of the worst and do everything in their power to prevent unity across national boundaries. We can recognize the need for unity between Black and white in each plant, between the different plants in one company, and within the entire union in our fight with the corporations for better wages and working conditions. Similarly, we should be able to recognize that unity among workers must extend as far as the corporation extends -- that is, to workers in other countries.

Although the forms of support for their struggle are different from those we would show a sister local, they do exist. Direct financial support to the Black and multinational unions of South Africa, boycotts of corporations whose practices are particularly vicious, and pressure on the government to end its support for the racist regime: these all strengthen the position of the South African workers, and ultimately our own position, in relation to the auto giants.

## DON'T BUY THE "BUY AMERICAN" CAMPAIGN

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--by ANNA GOLD

It's 2 pm on a hot muggy day and your boss comes up to you and says, "take the rest of the day off and go demonstrate with your union." Impossible? That's just what happened on April 14th when anti-import demonstrations were staged across the country by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Apparel manufacturers who make a habit of threatening their workers for even wanting to talk to their union officials sent everyone off early with their blessing for this particular union function.

Officials claimed that 2000 Philadelphia workers attended the Independence Mall event to hear politicians and labor leaders denounce Jimmy Carter's refusal to impose quotas on imports. Rank and file workers present estimated the number at half that however, and said that many of those there were either union officials or supporters outside the union.

"There isn't anything in it for us," a presser told the *Organizer*. "Our contract is up at the end of May. They're using the whole imports thing as an excuse to sell us down the river in the negotiations."

**"If they were really serious about our jobs they would organize down south and they would enforce our contract here. As it is, our contract isn't even worth the paper it's printed on and they go and blame our problems on some poor worker overseas who's in even worse shape than we are!"**

### UNION CAMPAIGN PLAYS TO RACISM

In the past several years, the needle trade unions have been waging a consistent campaign to stop foreign imports. Union materials carry the barely veiled suggestion that workers in Taiwan and Korea are responsible for our problems here. In an industry that has large numbers of underpaid immigrants, including a growing Asian workforce, this logic plays to racist attitudes towards these workers.

But while most workers are suspicious of the union's explanations, there is a tremendous amount of confusion around the question of imports and justifiable cynicism around Carter's attitudes. After all, the facts are that one out of every four garments sold in the US is imported, compared to one in 20 a decade ago. Two-thirds of these imports come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost because they were sent overseas.

In 1975 and 1976 alone, close to 35,000 apparel workers were certified by the government to apply for special unemployment benefits as victims of "import penetration."

It is also true that wages in the Far East and South American apparel centers are abysmally low -- often falling to 14 cents an hour compared to the \$3 in this country. While low wages are an incentive for any business, they are particularly important in the clothing industry, because wages represent a higher than usual percentage of the cost of the finished product. This is because the overhead costs are relatively low and because the industry still uses mostly simple and non-automated machinery. The industry is therefore much more competitive than monopolized industries such as auto and steel.

### STOPPING IMPORTS THE ANSWER?

On the face of it then, it might seem logical that the solution to the problem is lower import quotas to prevent cheap competition from entering the country. In reality, however, these quotas not only will do nothing to insure increased employment, but in fact they will do just the opposite in the long run -- they will mean more unemployment. Furthermore,