

gateway

Tuesday, January 18, 1983

"At these prices you won't see many more"

...a porcupine spotted in RATT.

South Africa

Boycotts: A black and white issue?

Con

commentary by Andrew Watts

The issue of boycotting Rothman's products is not a new one. In 1978 the Students' Union here at the U of A passed a resolution through council condemning South Africa and its apartheid policies. This resolution was endorsed again in January 1982. The resolution also included the authorization of a boycott on all Rothman's goods that would normally be sold at Student Union outlets. This includes all cigarettes made by Rothman's and all Carling products of which Rothman's owns 50.1 percent. Because of an A.L.C.B. regulation, however, the Students' Union cannot actually boycott Carling products so the boycott is carried out in spirit. The problem with Rothman's is this: Rothman's is wholly owned by Rothman's of Pall Mall Ltd. which is 72% owned by Brinkhams of West Germany. Brinkhams is 100% owned by the Rembrandt Tobacco Co. of South Africa. Because of this company's huge investments in that country and its discriminatory labour practices it is the target of this consumer boycott. My position is this: I do not believe such a boycott will have any positive impact. I do not believe that boycotts, in general, are the way to achieve change in South Africa.

This does not mean that I support apartheid, I do not. This does not mean that boycotts have no function, they do. They can serve to educate and inform people who otherwise would be left ignorant. But as method to achieve change in South Africa, they are at best, ineffectual and worst, dangerous.

One can cite examples, though, of consumer boycotts having an impact.

The most famous and recent example is the boycott and pressure to stop the Canadian seal hunt. Public pressure throughout the world for an international trade boycott forced many governments to take a stand against the hunt. Recently, the European Economic Community (EEC) wrestled with the issue. In a vote taken only a few weeks back the EEC decided to let the individual countries involved make their own choice on whether to import seal skin products. Many have opted for the banning of such imports. Certainly it's a landmark decision. It also shows that a consumer boycott, if organized correctly and one that takes on big enough proportions can have a desired effect on an individual market product. But the key to this boycott was the fact that governments became involved in

The only way to ensure concrete, positive steps toward change in S.A. is to work with both blacks and whites.

the boycott. No longer was it just the consumers and pressure groups crying for a halt but now the major importers of the seal products were joining the fray. The marketing of seal products became an international issue. Although apartheid is an international issue it is not a seal hunt. The countries of the world cannot afford to cut all trade ties with South Africa. It's all a huge form of international hypocrisy.

Every year the United Nations, at the beginning of its general assembly, condemns the apartheid policies practised by South Africa. Yet every year the countries who voted for condemnation continue to import Krugerands, diamonds, tobacco products, wine products and a host of others. West Germany, one of the loudest voicing the abolition of the seal hunt allows to exist within its borders a wholly owned subsidiary of Rembrandt's Tobacco of South Africa in Brinkhams. Realistically then, foreign governments cannot afford to cut off trade with South Africa or place embargoes on any foreign capital going



photo Martin Beales

The government of South Africa maintains the political status quo of that country by a policy known as apartheid.

Under the policy of apartheid the government recognizes three types of people: Whites, blacks, and Cape Coloureds. Only whites are allowed to vote in a government election. The law forbids any relationship between whites and the other peoples of South Africa; the penalties are severe for all concerned.

This is what apartheid is basically all about; keeping whites and the other races of South Africa separated, and stratified,

into the country. Sensibly, they dare not. Any move of that sort would create a catastrophe.

Economic instability is not a good base from which to work towards change. South Africa is not another Rhodesia. When trade ties were cut off to that country in 1965, the whites could already see the inevitability of their situation. When in 1976, Ian Smith declared he reached an 'internal settlement' the regime had lasted 11 years. Certainly, South Africa's would last longer. Even now, after power was handed to Bishop Muzorewa the fighting has continued. The forces under Robert Mugabe took control but skirmishes are commonplace. But neither side in this conflict are strong enough to quash the other or to escalate the fighting into a full blown civil war. The situation in South Africa is entirely different.

Although South Africa is suffering from the recession her economy is still firmly based. The government, now guided by P.W. Botha, is still quite strong and committed to stay that way. In recent years with the number of unemployed growing in urban areas of South Africa, the knee-jerk reaction of the government is to increase restrictions placed on the population. There is evidence to show that the government is committed to maintain the internal security of South Africa.

One remembers the student uprising in Soweto in June 1976. Reports put the death toll over that conflict at 268. In 1978, Defense Minister P.W. Botha guaranteed sweeping powers to the military. He has

with whites alone occupying the upper layers.

Apartheid is a horribly repressive policy.

How to combat it?

The method which is being argued here is consumer boycotts. In two opposing written arguments we have presented enough material for you to formulate an opinion about the value of consumer boycotts. We are not trying to offer a defense of apartheid. What we are trying to do is enable you to make consumer decisions after having read both sides of an argument.

Pro

commentary by David Cox

The Gateway staff has been having an ongoing internal debate this year on the merits of boycotting advertisement from South African companies in general and DeBeers diamonds in particular.

There are many reasons why these companies should be boycotted, so for the sake of clarity I have divided the most major ones (as I see it) into four categories.

These reasons are: 1) The South African government has a policy known as apartheid which is highly repressive of blacks, who form the majority of South Africa's population; 2) As human beings we are morally obliged to condemn this every way we can; 3) Advertising is effective, and boycotting can be just as effective against companies that support the oppression; and 4) Boycotts do not hurt the blacks, buying South African products maintains the white regime.

Conditions in South Africa are horrendous for the blacks. If you think this is an exaggeration, allow me to cite an article by Jack Hicks of the Brandon University Quill: "South Africa is a country of 4.5 million Whites and 25 million Blacks. The White minority in South Africa lives luxuriously, with standards of living comparable to our own, and supplemented by inexpensive Black servants.

The Black population is confined to bleak 'townships', or slums outside of White cities, or reserves on which White wealth is based, and can only come into White areas with permission, or for their jobs. At night, they must return to their

'townships' or risk imprisonment.

The Bantustans are home to 20 million Blacks. Their total area constitutes only 13 per cent of some of the bleakest land in the country, and they are chronically overcrowded and over-cultivated. Surrounding the Bantustans are the large farms of the well-off Whites, who use the impoverished Black population as a source of cheap labour.

Infant mortality rates on the Bantustans are among the highest in all of Africa. The reason is hunger. The few hospitals are crowded with children under five years old suffering from malnutrition.

The poverty of the Bantustans and townships coexists with the huge wealth of the White population. South Africa is a fabulously rich country, producing most of the world's gold and diamonds, as well as other minerals and agricultural products. Yet it is only the Whites who benefit from this wealth, and they suppress any attempt by the Black population to change this system.

South Africa's government is elected only by the Whites, all non-Whites are prohibited from voting. They have developed a system of laws called 'Apartheid' which have denied the Black people basic human rights.

Blacks can be arrested for virtually any political activity. All major political movements by the Blacks have been banned. Laws have regulated wages so that Blacks are paid an average of less than one-tenth of the rate of White workers, and are restricted from managerial positions. Even sexual relations between the races are illegal. The entire South African law system is based on racism.

A state of virtual slave labour exists: Bantu labour laws provide for maximum legal wages for blacks (which are about 1/5 the wage of whites in the same jobs). Average white mine workers in South Africa get 880 rands per month in salary. Blacks, who make up most of the mining workforce, only get 148.

There is also a dual system in the areas of job safety, education, working conditions and grievance procedures. The Pass Laws require each black or coloured person to carry pass books, listing personal data and government approval to be outside their "homeland".

In the face of this situation, our moral responsibility is clear. It would be evading the force of conscience that should act in us if we fail to act against this crushing of

Boycotts would help the blacks by cutting off funds used to maintain the South African government through arms and economic power.

human potential. People speak out against boycotting as an end in itself, as if it were not a benefit to us to resist joining in these immoral actions.

I don't want to play the 'heavy', but moral commitments are real, and provide the basis for society. By inaction - in this case by running the ads - we legitimize the involvements and actions of these companies in South Africa.

It is just as evasive to say "Someone else will run the ad if we don't." If someone else will run it, let them. A movement to stop such advertising has to start somewhere - why not in the relatively free-thinking student press? If we run the ads, it is clear that we are helping the sales of these companies. Otherwise why would they advertise?

The issue people bring up most frequently is the potential effectiveness of ad boycotts. A scattergun approach

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