

# American Committee on Africa

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Dear

You will no doubt have been following the recent reports of strikes involving over 50,000 black workers in South Africa in actions aimed at improving their present starvation wages.

There has been little reporting about U.S. corporations hit by the strikes apart from brief references to the shutting down of the Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola plants in Durban. We have just learned that the Colgate Palmolive plant in Boksburg was also affected by the wave of workers' actions. The management there acted swiftly and brutally to prevent the strike speeding. Ten black members of the laboratory staff, who, according to the firm, had been given jobs previously held by whites, presented a letter demanding 28%-40% wage increases. They refused to work for a day - and were immediately dismissed. According to a company spokesman two of the men have been rehired, but "not the known agitator". (It should be remembered that loss of a job may also mean endorsement out of the city under South Africa's pass laws.)

Not surprisingly the company has been very defensive about the incident, refusing to release any substantial information about the strike or general conditions at the plant. In 1966 Colgate Palmolive employed 830 workers - there is no information about the number of black and white workers, pay scales or job categories. But Colgate Palmolive's management in South Africa appears very comfortable with the system of apartheid. In a 1966 article the General Manager, Roy Hill commented "The majority of Bantu, having no industrial skills of their own, are employed as manual workers, while the trained workers... are drawn from the white population ... There is therefore a good supply of unskilled and semi-skilled labor currently available in South Africa." And "South Africa has an impressive record of industrial peace... This lack of dissatisfaction among workers is largely attributable to the advanced industrial legislation governing wages and working conditions." This is the way Colgate sees laws which specifically exclude Africans from the definition of "employee", which prohibit African workers from striking and deny Africans the right to organize in recognized trade unions.

Consistent with this racism and acceptance of South African attitudes is Hill's report that "Another employee benefit is a medical aid scheme which the company administers for white employees. In line with local policy non whites are excluded from schemes, as they are able to participate in free



Government hospitalization and medical care." In fact blacks have access to almost no medical care at all.

There is almost \$1 billion of U.S. corporate money invested in South Africa today. Observers as diverse as Congressman Charles Diggs, Fortune Magazine and the Ecumenical Church team which visited South Africa in 1972 have found that U.S. corporations go about their business in a way no different from South African companies, and serve to re-inforce the whole white regime. The case of Colgate Palmolive supports this argument. But U.S. corporations are now being called to account for their actions by the American people. In this spirit we call on those who believe in the rights of all workers to equal access to jobs, to training, to wages and organization, and above all to the power to participate in their own government, to protest Colgate's actions in South Africa.

We urge you to call on Colgate Palmolive to make a full public disclosure of all its operations in South Africa, including details both about investment and profit, as well as the size and racial composition of management and the work force, the distribution of black and specifically African workers in each job category and the relations of Colgate with the South African government.

We ask you to call on Colgate to immediately re-instate all workers victimized because of their support for the strike and to comply with the demands of the workers in a just manner.

Yours sincerely,

George M. Houser  
Executive Director

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