

Editorial

Reagan and State Terrorism in Southern Africa

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This issue of *Crime and Social Justice* addresses the legal implications, both internationally and domestically, of the criminal system of apartheid in South Africa. The timeliness of such a focus is self-evident. The profound social transformation now taking place there brings with it lessons of incalculable value for the further development of international law and justice on a global scale. The world community of nation-states, through the instrument of the United Nations, declared the practice of apartheid a crime and South Africa's occupation of Namibia illegal. To bring about the thoroughgoing changes in the internal and external policies of the South African state, the U.N. proved to be an imperfect instrument, partially because changes of this scope are the result of massive popular initiative, not of legislative decree, but also because the United States consistently undermined the efforts of the world community of nations to effectively restrict the power of the racist regime.

Apartheid is a system of legally sanctioned racism; it is a form of institutionalized violence practiced against South Africa's black majority. It has moved beyond the pale even of denial of civil and political liberties to the denationalization of that majority. South Africa's legal system reflects the repressive necessities of counterinsurgency: opposition has been systematically criminalized and the independence of the judiciary undermined. States based on programmatic racism and militarist expansion have historically found legal justification for the most inhumane forms of exploitation. For apartheid to end, its entire legal scaffolding must be dismantled. As we will argue below, the Reagan administration

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has colluded with the most reactionary forces in South Africa to retard this process, in the face of both domestic opposition and international condemnation.

As we write this editorial in early September 1985, President Reagan has just announced a set of mild sanctions. Experts and news analysts alike agree that the sanctions imposed by Reagan's Executive Order are a cynical maneuver designed to have little impact on South African government policy. Clearly there was no reason to expect more from a man who said that South African President P.W. Botha's August 15, 1985 declaration to defend the basic tenets of white supremacy in South Africa contained the seeds of the end of apartheid.

If, in the midst of the greatest challenge that the black majority has ever mounted to the racist system, President Reagan chose to stand by the side of the white racist government in Pretoria, we must analyze whatever alterations he makes very carefully indeed. Reagan's most generous critics viewed the Executive Order as a cynical move to protect himself from the political embarrassment of a congressional veto override, while others have charged him with attempting to give breathing space to the Botha regime.

Bishop Tutu's remarks about the Reagan Executive Order are probably more to the point: "The South African government is laughing all the way to the bank. They know it is not even a flea bite." The cautious Tutu was moved to retract an earlier statement that Reagan is a "crypto-racist" and pronounced him a "racist" pure and simple. Mary Frances Berry of the Civil Rights Commission said Reagan was "giving aid and comfort to the Botha government. Instead of standing on the side of justice, he has chosen to issue a fig leaf, a smokescreen behind which the dirty business of apartheid can continue" (*Washington Post*, 9/10/85).

Even experts on international trade were quick to announce that Reagan's sanctions will have a negligible impact on the South African economy, pointing out that the sanctions simply validate changes already in effect. Bank loans to South Africa have all but dried up because of the banks' fear that political turmoil there would jeopardize repayment; American investors had already abandoned the Krugerrand, as can be seen in its decline from \$485 million sales in the U.S. in the first half of 1984 to \$88 million in the first half of 1985; American computer companies refuse sale of computer equipment to the apartheid-enforcement agencies; sale of nuclear power equipment was all but halted by the Carter administration. According to Gary Hufbauer of the Institute for International Economics, the President's sanctions "don't even add up to 1 percent of the country's per capita income of \$2,400" (*New York Times*, 9/10/85).

South Africa, Reagan, and the American Way

Although the South African government has received considerable aid and comfort from the Reagan administration's policy of constructive engagement, taking it as license to destabilize its black-ruled neighbors, the refusal of the black majority to conduct business as usual brought the whole house of cards tumbling down. Reagan, who had disregarded world opinion concerning Central America, and whose facility at public relations had helped avoid irreparable political damage, was finally forced to show his true colors.

In the wake of a government state of emergency, which by early September had left nearly 700 dead and 2,600 arrested without charges, the Reagan administration continued to applaud the Botha administration as a "reform" administration. Even a timid press that had tolerated Reagan's earlier outrages chided him. Many had been gravely alarmed at the press collaboration with the "American celebration" being revived by the New Right. In contrast to the "American celebration" of the immediate post-World War II period, which to some represented a stand on principle, the issue now had no such pretensions. The issue was simply the assertion that "we are number one," the exercise of naked power. The Vietnam Syndrome which had constrained the hands of the militarists in the foreign policy establishment for the last 10 years was tested and overcome in Grenada. Thus we have the spectacle of the world's most deadly war machine mounting an invasion of tiny Grenada, a country equivalent to a medium-sized American college town.

This revival of militarism is in part justified under the guise of combating terrorism. In view of the lack of support among the American people for its militarist policies, the Reagan administration attempts to frighten people with the specter of terrorism disrupting the lives of innocent Americans and their allies. Yet in the past four years the Reagan administration has spent over \$2 billion around the world to maintain dictatorial regimes that rule by corruption, terror, and murder. In reality the Reagan policy in South Africa is part of a continuing global policy to entrench right-wing dictators and destabilize Third World countries, especially socialist and new nations who will not subject themselves to the will of Western capitalism.

For the Reagan administration the primary issue in Southern Africa is strategic control of the African continent. The main threat to U.S. control in Africa is the existence of independent revolutionary states, viewed through the Cold War prism of the Reagan administration as vehicles for Soviet influence on the continent. Related to this concern is the view of leading U.S. policy makers that white South Africa is "a part of the West" and the convergence of interests with the South African government extends throughout the region of Southern Africa. Thus, South Africa attempts to undermine independent governments in Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe have received the explicit support of U.S.

officials. The tactics used—destabilization, terror, and sabotage—are identical to those used by the Reagan-supported “contras” against Nicaragua. We term this state-supported terrorism, consistent with the case brought against the United States in the International Court of Justice by Nicaragua.

Marketing Apartheid

When the American right wing was a part of the lunatic fringe in the 1960s, South Africa was viewed not only as respectable but as an admirable country whose virtue (and white leaders) had enabled it to escape the poverty and one-party “dictatorship” which had engulfed black Africa. The rise of the Right to a controlling position within the federal government created the conditions for a liberal-sounding policy like the Reagan administration’s “constructive engagement,” which allegedly seeks to use quiet diplomatic pressure to promote change in South Africa. In reality, “constructive engagement” is a transparent public relations maneuver designed to break through the worldwide condemnation of Pretoria’s wanton violation of international law and to deflect the challenge to apartheid as a crime against humanity.

Reagan’s policy of “constructive engagement” mimics the language of hypocrisy in fashion in South Africa. Chester Crocker, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, frequently pontificates about the world’s failure to recognize the reformist notions in Botha’s speeches, claiming that the South African President uses “code language” to avoid alarming his conservative white supporters. Crocker is right about the code language, but he deceives us about what it means. Code language is an old tactic in South African politics; its intent is not to conceal the modification of white supremacy, but its entrenchment. An example is the evolution of the name of the government department responsible for governing the lives of the black majority, which has changed over the years from the Department of Native Affairs to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development, to the Department of Plural Relations, and presently to the Department of Cooperation and Development (*Washington Post Weekly*, 9/2/85).

The name given by the white minority to its white supremacist policies has followed a similar terminological evolution. The term “apartheid” had as its predecessor an Afrikaner phrase “wit baaskap” which meant “white mastery.” Later it was changed to “separate development,” and recently Botha has taken to calling it “cooperative coexistence.” The phraseology of co-existence, of course, represents an attempt to justify white domination in South Africa by describing South Africa as a country of many “minorities,” some black and some white (*Ibid.*). Similarly, Ronald Reagan, in his 1980 campaign for President, told *Jet Magazine* that the problem in South Africa was not so much racial as it was tribal. In this racist logic, it is the white supremacist

South Africans who are the defenders of democracy, against the blacks who would come together to deprive the whites of their rights and impose a "black dictatorship" in South Africa, as the Western press alleges has been the fate of independent black nations in Africa.

Botha's real attitude toward reform can be gleaned from his August 15, 1985 statement: "Destroy white South Africa and our influence, and this country will drift into factional strife, chaos, and poverty." Minister of Constitutional Affairs Chris Heunis was even more specific in a statement made a few years ago: "It is in the longterm interest of South Africa that the Afrikaner should always have the leadership role" (Ibid.).

After the recent intervention of Moral Majority leader Rev. Jerry Falwell (who in the 1960s said that "separate but equal" in the United States was God's law, and that the true Negro did not want integration) (*Washington Post Weekly*, 9/9/85), not only did Reagan defend Falwell, he also asserted that the Botha administration had made "substantial changes" in eliminating "the segregation that we once had in our own country" (*New York Times*, 8/27/85). Repeating Botha, he stated that the black majority is a "combination of minorities" with at least 10 tribal divisions. This is the basis of the Botha policy of denationalization, of stripping black South Africans of any claim to rights in South Africa by making them "nationals" of an artificial country, cynically created by the Afrikaner government to guarantee white domination of the resource-rich section of South Africa, forcing relocation of blacks to arid and undesirable portions of the country.

There is a clear parallel between the garrison mentality of the white supremacists in South Africa "digging in for the White Man's last stand—defiantly, tragically, and suicidally," and the aggressive militarism of the U.S. New Right in its determination to restore the U.S. to its "rightful" position as leader of the "free world." P.W. Botha's "Total Strategy" is allegedly directed against the "total onslaught" of Soviet-directed subversion of South Africa. In reality, the "Total Strategy" is the final defense of white supremacy and privilege in that country and is a variant of Reagan's war against "the evil empire of communism." The bottom line is to brandish the specter of communism to justify support for undemocratic practices. Those who call for popular sovereignty and popular control over the country's resources are deemed "communists."

In Defense of White Supremacy I: The Reformist Faction

Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement" is premised on the notion that there is a reformist government in South Africa and that to apply pressure would weaken its hand and set the stage for the rise of the far Right to power. In contrast to Reagan's and Botha's claims that the current regime in South Africa is reformist, a review of the facts indi-

cates that there have been changes, but the changes reflect alterations in the needs of South African capitalism rather than the extension of rights for black people.

Despite recommendations for cosmetic changes in the sphere of pass laws and laws affecting influx control, virtually nothing changed until September 12, 1985, when the President's Committee for Constitutional Affairs recommended the abolition of the pass law. Similar to other Botha administration proposals, this reform does not presage the end of white minority rule but is rather designed to ease the pressure on the regime. Black South Africans question the reformist intentions of these weak declarations by spokesmen for a regime whose real policy is clearly based on detention and assassination. Thus it is too little, too late. In 1984 alone, 238,000 people were arrested for influx control offenses. People risk such imprisonment for economic reasons. For example, if a Ciskeian goes to Pietermaritzburg "illegally," is arrested and annually spends nine months in jail and the other three working, his standard of living nevertheless rises by 234%. This is because of the inability of the Bantustans to which the black majority have been consigned to support the existence of their inhabitants (Naudé, 1985).

Although the provisions of the Labour Relations Act gave blacks the right to form their own trade unions, the Internal Security Act and other legislation covering assembly on both private and public property negate its effect. The quashing of the mine workers' strike is ample evidence of the strangulation of the black trade unions. Qualitatively, the government has increased its military control of the population, and the role of the military has grown in size and in influence in the government. In fact P.W. Botha is one of the main architects of the "Total Strategy" for defending white supremacy in South Africa.

The reality of South Africa is, of course, broader than Reagan seeks to portray. He is able to brandish the so-called far right wing as a danger which he seeks to keep from power, because he limits our attention to a narrow spectrum of South African politics. The far Right is already in power, for it is these two wings of Afrikaan whites whose will is implemented by the government. Reagan's equation omits the progressive British, Indian, and mixed-race populations. Thus he is using one section of the South African Right to justify his policies, but there is much more pluralism in South Africa than he admits.

In Defense of White Supremacy II: Anticommunist Unity

A justification for supporting South Africa is that it is a reliable partner in the worldwide struggle against communism. Although anticommunism is usually put forward as a defense of human rights, in this case the Right readily admits that the anticommunist stance of the Pretoria regime is more important than "human rights." Although the Vietnam War shattered U.S. government pretensions that it is the guar-

antor of order and justice in the world, the rise of the New Right in the 1980s seemed to indicate a widespread consensus that the liberal cloak for the U.S.'s interventionist role was no longer needed. Naked power, arrogantly racist and self-centered, became the prime rationale for the role of the U.S. in the world. Ideological anticommunism, long a screen for the U.S. to assure a favorable business climate throughout the capitalist world regardless of its cost to whole states and regions, has now assumed its fundamentalist form.

The most salient feature of the contemporary world-system, known in the past as *Pax Americana*, is the decline of the U.S.

...from pre-eminence as a world power unchallenged economically, politically, and to a lesser degree militarily. The elite of the nation have responded to this loss of empire by electing to support the reactionary political forces of the new radical Right with its desire to resort to reckless military interventions to preserve policies favorable to U.S. interests; the radical Right, in its turn, is more interested in serving the ideological ends of its own imperial vision and crusading anticommunism. To the radical Right the source of evil is the "evil empire of communism," the godless socialists at war with the individual freedom of the "free enterprise system of American capitalism"; like the fascists of the first reaction to socialism after World War I, the neofascists of the post-World War II reaction have their bogeyman, the same Bolshevik "red devil" in league with conspiracies, if not now with the "Elders of Zion," then with the teeming millions of the blacks or Hispanics—upon whom they heap all of their and the world's woes. Thus the anticommunist crusade so devoutly embraced by Reagan is also a crusade to purge the world of evil and usher in a new world of Christian peace and bountiful capitalist enterprise. Reactionary and nationalist chauvinism, combined with white racism and religious fundamentalism, has created in the Reagan administration a terrifying context for U.S. strategic doctrine in the post-hegemonic period.

Today, the U.S. under Reagan and the radical Right has become so politically discredited and so morally bankrupted that it has removed itself from the company of lawful states which respect the authority of international law and the jurisdiction of the World Court; the United States of America, like the reactionary and aggressive powers which preceded it, has become an outlaw state. Today Reagan's America is no longer the pre-eminent leader of the "free world," no longer the moral force of "Western" democracy and the keeper of world peace, the very model of the "democratic" state; it has become rather a militarist power and is, furthermore, now openly cynical and self-conscious as a reactionary and fanatically capitalist power,

willing to follow militarist policies of nuclear intimidation and conventional military intervention to protect its politico-economic interests (Dixon, 1985).

The Strategy of State-Supported Terrorism

Although we have shown the ideological similarity between the racist government in South Africa and the U.S. New Right, there are larger global issues binding Reagan and the U.S. corporate elite to the white supremacists in South Africa (although the continued unrest has made the banks wary of loans to South Africa). The declining strength of the U.S. as a world power and the weakening position of the white racists in Southern Africa provide the basis of unity for the two groups to agree on the ruthless use of military and economic power to defend their interests. This is the political conjuncture that has given rise to the Reagan administration's policy of rolling back the revolutionary and socialist states throughout the Third World.

The strategy of state-supported terrorism combines a sophisticated repertoire of boycotts, sabotage, denial of aid and expertise, physical destruction of vital economic facilities, and terrorizing of the civilian population. It is a strategy designed to slowly sap a nation of its strength and foster social unrest, to lay the groundwork for a direct military intervention or a coup.

South African Terrorism

Sponsorship of armed bands posing as dissident national movements has been a vital part of South Africa's attempt to perpetuate its dominance of the Southern Africa region since 1975, when Angola and Mozambique, after centuries of exploitation, broke free from Portuguese colonial rule, providing inspiration and support for Namibian and South African liberation. Such mercenary bands exist in Mozambique, Angola, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, committing mass murder of innocent noncombatants and carrying out extended campaigns of economic sabotage. In famine-stricken Mozambique, where hundreds of thousands of people have starved to death, the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) has sabotaged international relief efforts by disrupting the delivery of food and murdering relief workers.

South African destabilization has affected virtually the entire Southern Africa region, with economic pressure, border provocations, commando raids and in the case of Angola, large-scale military offensives. The cost to the developing countries of the region has been extremely high. In Angola alone, the total damage inflicted between 1975 and 1982 was estimated at \$10 billion. The severity of the attacks on Angola becomes clearer by comparing this \$10 billion to Angola's annual Gross Domestic Product of \$3.32 billion. The political cost has also been high. In 1984, Mozambique was forced to sign the "Nkomati Accord,"

which sought to limit the extent to which the African National Congress (South Africa's most prominent anti-apartheid organization, currently banned from South Africa) could operate within its borders. The South African regime is also attempting to force Angola to sign a similar agreement (ISLEC, 1985).

Reagan's War in Southern Africa

Destabilization in Southern Africa has received explicit support from the Reagan administration. "We do not perceive South Africa to constitute an external imperialistic threat to even its close neighbors," said Charles Leichtenstein, former U.S. Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations. "Destabilization will remain in force until Angola and Mozambique do not permit their territory to be used by terrorists (Namibian and South African liberation movements—Eds.) to attack South Africa." Reagan administration support has become formalized in the "constructive engagement" policy, which rests on the assumption that friendly persuasion will result in changes in South African society. In fact, South African racists are rewarded for attacking their neighbors and continuing the illegal occupation of Namibia, while in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas are portrayed as a threat to the national security of the U.S. for engaging in the legitimate defense of their nation.

Though Reagan clearly wishes to preserve the vast riches of Southern Africa for U.S. and transnational corporate interests, the use of state-supported terrorism implies a larger political purpose. In the mid-1970s, the liberation of Angola and Mozambique represented a new hope for the people of Africa, particularly South Africa. Reagan seeks not only to roll back these revolutions, but also to crush even the dream they represent. He wants to convince other Third World countries that socialism (chosen by Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe) is to blame for the economic misery of the frontline states (those states in close proximity to South Africa), when in truth that misery is based in the legacy of colonialism and active destabilization. The ultimate message of the strategy of state-supported terrorism is that people and nations will not be allowed to be free to determine their own destinies should those destinies conflict with U.S. interests.

Thus we have, in the United States under the Reagan administration and the racist government in South Africa, two prototypes of the international outlaw. We have attempted to illustrate how such international lawlessness is not idiosyncratic but is systematically related to the defense of an international system based on the power and privilege of the white Western capitalist elite. (It is only recently that South African business has really put pressure on the Botha regime, indicating that their "survival depends on making the necessary structural changes to uphold the political, social, and economic values of" their "major trading partners") (*Newsweek*, 9/9/85). When white South Africa boasts that it is an

outpost of Western civilization in Africa, it contains an element of truth. Authors in this issue of *Crime and Social Justice* speak of the various ways in which the inequalities of the world capitalist system undergird the injustices of South Africa.

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