

Overseas investment in SA

Black workers attitudes

Extract from a study by Lawrence Schlemmer

Up to now we have seen results pointing to a very poor image of industrial management held by black workers in South Africa but also to an acceptance of capitalism and to a general rejection of the use of organised labour in the political struggle, despite high levels of politicisation and serious political grievances. There is, thus, a mixture of frustration and pragmatism in the consciousness of black workers which does not contain any clear indications of what their attitudes to disinvestment and trade boycotts might be.

Disinvestment and trade boycotts of South Africa are complex issues which are not likely to form part of popular debate among black workers. Therefore these issues had to be approached with great care in the interviews. Fairly detailed explana-

tions of the issues in clear and simple language were given before questions were posed. The same themes were also addressed in several different questions in order to make the results as valid as possible. The results are given in the sequence of Ta-

bles which follow (Tables 13 to 17). Each Table includes the exact phrasing of the explanation and the questions asked. In each question alternative answers were rotated in presentation in order to eliminate recall bias.

TABLE 13 PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERESTS PROMOTED BY FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Item	Overall Sample %	Employed in US Company %
<i>'Which one of the following is true. When American companies build factories in South Africa, who do they help most?'</i>		
Help the African people to progress	38	26
Help the whites	16	31
Help the South African Government	46	44
	n = 451	n = 55

These results give an inconclusive result. While in the sample as a whole over one-third see blacks as the main beneficiaries of US investment, this, oddly enough, drops to just over 25 percent among those employed in US companies. It is probable, however, that even though most respondents saw whites or the government as the main beneficiaries, they did not necessarily see blacks as not gaining at all from external investment. This is clarified in Table 14 below.

Although very slightly more employees in US companies support the disengagement position than among black workers in general, very clear majorities of employees in both the overall sample and the subsample support engagement. Variations in the degree of support for disinvestment are listed below.

TABLE 14 SUPPORT FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT VERSUS DISINVESTMENT AND TRADE BOYCOTTS

Item	Overall Sample %	Employed in US Company %
<i>'One man, Samuel says: "Overseas people and banks and companies must stop buying South African goods and stop sending money to build factories in South Africa so as to frighten the South African government into getting rid of Apartheid.'</i>		
<i>'Another man Joseph says: "People and banks and companies overseas should continue to buy South African goods and send money to build factories because it makes jobs for all people in South Africa.'</i>		
<i>Which man would you agree with, Samuel or Joseph?</i>		
Support for Samuel (Disinvestment/Boycott)	25	29
Support for Joseph (Constructive Engagement)	75	71

<u>Support for Disinvestment/ Trade sanctions</u>	%
Overall	25

16 - 24 yrs Worker radicals (support for use of labour in political action)	33

35 yrs and older Under Std. 4 education	20

There is thus very little variation in the results. Trade union members, for example, are no more likely to support disinvestment than other workers. The higher support for disinvestment among employees in US companies is in large measure due to the fact that these companies have a higher proportion of 16 - 24 year old people in service (33% US Co's, 24% overall) and also have fewer people with lower educational qualifications.

It should be noted that the item reported on in Table 14 has a built-in incentive to support the disinvestment position, namely the phrase '*... frighten the South African government into getting rid of Apartheid. . .*' Given this deliberate suggestion in the question, it is remarkable that only one-quarter of the respondents support disinvestment.

At another point in the interview the same theme was explored, as indicated in Table 15.

The results overall are remarkably similar to those in Table 14. It is the workers from Pretoria, the nerve centre of apartheid, who are most inclined to support disinvestment. The reasons for such support make it clear that even among the disinvestment group, one important position taken is aimed at improving wages and conditions rather than being aimed at a complete ending to foreign investment. The reasons in favour of disinvestment also emphasise political factors rather than intentions to harm management, while the reasons against it feature fears of loss of employment and the consequent harm to blacks as the most prominent factors.

TABLE 15
SUPPORT FOR OR OPPOSITION TO EXTERNAL INVESTMENT

'There are groups of people in America and England who try to encourage banks and organisations not to invest money in South Africa — not to put their money in factories which are in South Africa. Do you think this is a good or a bad thing?'

	<u>Overall Sample</u> %	<u>Employees in US Companies</u> %
Good thing (Disinvestment)	26	24
Bad thing (Engagement)	74	76

'Why do you feel this way?'

<u>Good (Spontaneous)</u>	<u>(Base 100%*)</u>	<u>(Base 100/*)</u>
Warn South African Government/ Frighten South African Government	30	62
Weaken Government/whites	18	23
Weaken managers/employers/ capitalists	9	15
Encourage better wages/conditions	39	54
Encourage political rights for blacks	28	46
Other	4	—

'Why do you feel this way?'

<u>Bad (Spontaneous)</u>	<u>(Base 100%*)</u>	<u>(Base 100%*)</u>
Fewer jobs	54	50
South Africa becomes poorer	19	26
Harms blacks	41	48
Makes no difference/no effect	5	5
Harms South Africa/Government	12	19
Other	2	—

* Answers exceed 100% because more than one answer was given

Variations in support for disinvestment as measured in the results in Table 15 show the following pattern.

<u>Support for Disinvestment</u>	%
Overall	26

Pretoria	35

Employees at non- US multinationals	19
50+ years	16
East Rand	15

A very similar question was asked but one relating to trade sanctions rather than disinvestment. The results obtained are so similar to those given in Table 15 that it is unnecessary to repeat the full table. Some 26 percent supported trade sanctions against South Africa (24 percent among employees in US companies) while 74 percent felt that trade sanctions were bad. Once again the effects of sanctions on employment opportunity and therefore on black welfare were prominent among the reasons given.

Finally, among the range of questions on disinvestment, a third type of question was posed, the details of which plus the results appear in Table 16.

TABLE 16 SUPPORT FOR DISINVESTMENT, CONTINUED
INVESTMENT OR CODES OF CONDUCT FOR
COMPANIES

Which of the following would you prefer to see happen — What is best?'

(The alternatives were read twice, reversing order on second readings.)

	<u>Overall sample</u> %	<u>Employees in US companies</u> %
'American companies should build as many factories in South Africa as they can, making as many jobs for blacks as they can.'	59	60
'American companies should only run factories in South Africa if they can pay blacks high wages, give good pensions and help with housing, even if they make fewer jobs.'	32	33
'American companies should not run factories in South Africa because they make the government of South Africa stronger.'	9	7

Among trade union members the support for complete withdrawal rises very slightly to 13 percent, among people in Soweto it is 14 percent and in Port Elizabeth it is 12 percent. Other variations between sub-samples are even less significant. Thus here again there is consensus in the sample.

These results are noteworthy. Even when the option of codes of conduct including higher wages and other benefits is built into the probe, as is the case in Table 16, the majority of respondents still hold firmly to an opposition to anything which might remove US investment from South Africa. Furthermore, when the option of codes of conduct is presented to respondents, the proportion in favour of disinvestment drops from the 24 - 25 percent recorded in Tables 14 and 15 to a mere 9 to 12 percent. Hence one must conclude that the promotion of total disinvestment by US companies operating in South Africa has virtually no support among black workers in the very representative areas surveyed.

The reasons given in Table 15 indicate some of the major factors inclining workers to support continued investment. There are other factors as well, one of which is the image of

US companies in South Africa. Results on this are given in Table 17.

The results in Table 17 are remarkably favourable for US companies as far as employment image is concerned. The slightly but consistently less flattering image held by the actual employees of US companies shows that the image outstrips the performance to some extent. Even among the US company employees, however, the employment image is consistently much more favourable than unfavourable.

Given the outstanding reputation that US companies appear to enjoy among black production workers it is not surprising that so little support for disinvestment exists. The fact that the employees in the US companies themselves share almost as favourable an image would strongly suggest that the codes of employment practice (the Sullivan Code) has had a very salutary effect on personnel policies in these companies.

Results from the Durban sample (n100) not presented thus far tend to confirm the broad pattern of reactions to disinvestment which has been noted. The interviewing in Durban was conducted by a separate team of interviewers working under

different supervision, yet the results obtained are virtually identical. The following are comparisons of percentage support for the disinvestment positions between the Transvaal/Port Elizabeth and the Durban samples on the items in Tables 14, 15 and 16 respectively: 25% vs 28%, 26% vs 28% and 9% vs 7%. The Durban respondents, however, gave less favourable evaluations of US company employment performance. The average endorsement of the view that US companies are better than South African companies on all the issues listed in Table 17 for the Durban sample was 60 percent versus 69 percent for the Transvaal/Port Elizabeth sample. The 60 percent average for the Durban sample nevertheless shows that even in an area in which very few US companies operate they are viewed in a more favourable light than South African companies.

Generally speaking, then, the results accumulate to show a very substantial majority opposition to disinvestment policy. It might be argued that too great an incentive was given to support the disinvestment position by mentioning the effect on job creation in the wording of the items. This incentive, however, was matched by the opposite incentive which was worded as '*frightening the South African government into getting rid of Apartheid*'. Generally speaking black people have great faith — often unrealistic faith — in the capacity of the Western powers to influence the South African government. There is no reason why the wording of the disinvestment position should have been any less attractive than the wording of the pro-investment alternatives.

It might also be argued that these responses cannot be generalised for the black population as a whole. Some observers would expect a better educated and more sophisticated population like that of Soweto, for example, to support a pro-disinvestment position.

Results from the sample in this study itself, however, would contradict this view. The following is a comparison between the percentage support for disinvestment in the Transvaal/Port Elizabeth sample as a whole and in the Soweto and the high-school subsamples, across the items presented in Tables 14, 15 and 16:

	<u>Overall Soweto</u> (n451)	<u>High School</u> <u>Educa-</u> <u>tion</u> (n146)	<u>High School</u> <u>Educa-</u> <u>tion</u> (n175)
	%	%	%
Table 14	25	26	31
Table 15	26	26	26
Table 16	9	14	11

From this comparison it would appear to be highly unlikely that a Soweto sample would give majority endorsement to a disinvestment position. A white collar and student sample in Soweto might produce a substantially higher proportion favouring disinvestment but then this would have to be interpreted as a black *middle class* viewpoint. Given the very small size of the black middle class in South Africa it could never be taken as representative of rank-and-file blacks in any part of the country.

Concluding discussion

The results of this study form an interesting pattern. There seems little doubt that black industrial workers are responding to the present socio-political climate. Generally the effects of the economic recession are also clearly evident in their attitudes.

There is evidence of sharp discontentment among clear majorities of black workers. There is also a clear majority awareness of political policy as it affects blacks and a dominant rejection of the present policy dispensation. Added to this there is a militant sentiment evident in well over half of the black workers surveyed.

This militant sentiment among the better educated workers could be largely rhetorical, reflecting the fact that they have absorbed the mood of the black media and the black intelligentsia in the townships. There is, however, also strong evidence that categories of workers who were probably formerly less politicised are reacting with anger to conditions and constraints.

This is evident in the attitudes of even less well-educated workers in places like Pretoria and the Vaal Triangle, where race relations tend to be worse than in, say, Johannesburg. In other words, the militancy

TABLE 17

IMAGE OF THE EMPLOYMENT PERFORMANCE OF US COMPANIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

'There are a number of American companies in South Africa. How do you think these companies compare with South African companies? Even if you do not know for sure, please tell us what you have heard or what you think is true.'

		More	Same	Less*
Wages 'Do American companies pay blacks more, the same or less as South African companies?'	% All	74	17	6
	% US Co. empl	67	27	6
Help with housing and education 'Do American companies help blacks with housing and education more, the same or less than South African companies?'	% All	71	18	6
	% US Co	58	29	13
Training of blacks 'Do American companies train blacks for better jobs more, the same or less than South African companies?'	% All	75	16	7
	% US Co	67	22	11
Dealing with black unions 'Are American companies willing to negotiate and deal with black trade unions more, the same or less than South African companies?'	% All	60	24	7
	% US Co	46	31	16
		Better	Same	Worse
Supervision 'Do American companies have better, the same, or worse supervision, that is, supervisors and foremen, than South African companies?'	% All	65	24	4
	% US Co	58	33	7
Disciplinary practices 'Are American companies more fair, the same, or less fair in discipline than South African companies?'	% All	70	20	5
	% US Co	51	35	11

* Balance making up 100% consisted of 'Don't Know'.

of sentiment expressed in these results is not by any means only due to any fashionable radical political culture in places like Soweto. These results give evidence of very serious grass-roots anger in places not usually expected to be at the forefront of black political thinking.

Despite these clear trends, however, the major pattern is for black workers to separate political issues from the industrial sphere. Not-

withstanding a very poor image of employers and management in general, the workers do not allow their political feelings to colour workplace strategies. Hence a minority of workers emerge as being sufficiently militant to infuse labour issues with wider political objectives. It should be borne in mind, however, that the minority is substantial; roughly one-third of workers seems to have the sentiments which would incline

them to use labour power to gain political objectives.

Most black workers, therefore, have a split consciousness at the present time, with a minority, albeit substantial, having a consistent militancy which covers both labour, community and political issues. The majority appear to value the benefits of wage employment sufficiently not to wish to see their work opportunities destabilised by political action.

This is valid for the present, but the minority whose political and labour attitudes are consistently militant could grow over time if political discontents increase or become more intense.

This pattern of consciousness is compatible with the finding that black workers do not reject capitalism as a system, even though they are very emphatic in wishing to see it improved so as to produce equality of opportunity. The black workers may be very angry but they have not yet become ideologically estranged from the present industrial system.

The results of the present study in many ways support those of Nasser (1984) in showing that a great deal of resentment and mistrust of management exists. Nevertheless they still appear to perceive prospects of the employment system of industrial South Africa being improved to eliminate the discrimination they appear to experience. It is noteworthy, however, that in some areas, like the Vaal Triangle and Pretoria, the results show (tentatively because of small subsample size) that resentments are so great that majorities reject the capitalist system in these areas. This is a clear indication of the danger inherent in not eliminating race discrimination in industry.

Given the broad pattern of findings, however, it is perhaps not surprising that black production workers in South Africa are not likely at this stage to support the programmes abroad to promote withdrawal of Western or more specifically United States capital from the South African economy. The conclusions are based on a variety of probes in the survey, some of which included a rationale for disinvestment which would be politically persuasive for black people. The pattern of replies, however, remained consistent, showing a large and firm majority in

favour of continued and increased US investment in South Africa.

These findings are very consistent with other results, which show that those blacks employed in US companies are likely to have a slightly more favourable view of employers than other workers. There can be little doubt from this trend, as well as from the very favourable employment image which US companies enjoy, that for black workers the presence of US capital in South Africa is highly valued.

Quite obviously the motivations of the black production workers are very pragmatic. They perceive the issue of external investment and trade policy with regard to South Africa in bread and butter terms. They take an unabashedly short-run and material view of the issue. Nevertheless, they are the people on whose behalf the disinvestment campaign is waged abroad, and for that reason their preferences should be heeded by protagonists in the campaign.

There is perhaps another reason why the preference of these black production workers should count in the debate. Their replies on political issues show clearly that they are no dull, apathetic and crushed proletariat who must be saved from a morass of false consciousness by liberated minds abroad. These production workers have very firm political views and very substantial proportions are inclined to express support for the very agencies who are pursuing the objectives of disengagement abroad. If ever these agencies achieve formal influence in South African policy and affairs black production workers of the kind sampled for this study will be among the first supporters of that leadership.

In the meantime, however, these production workers have to weigh their political commitments against their responsibilities. While very aggrieved and fairly radical in regard to their political circumstances they realise that the system of industrial production, for all its weaknesses which they are the first to recognise, spells survival for the black proletariat.

This awareness may be heightened at a time of recession and high unemployment like the present, but comparative results over time which have been quoted show that the attitudes of these workers are not ephemeral but have a consis-

tent pattern. They wish to see the benefits of the industrial system protected, no matter what the other aspects of political change might be. They are prepared to express support for banned organisations and over a third of them are even prepared to say that they will participate in a mass political strike, but they want their employment and material opportunities protected. Disinvestment by US companies and trade sanctions are a threat to their material and work interests, and therefore they oppose them with firm consistency.

In short, black workers make a balanced, strategic assessment of their position and of potential gains and losses. It involves a necessary (for them) distinction between alternative roles for trade unions. They appear not to see it as functional for unions and labour organisation to become involved in a political campaign. The extent to which they achieve a notion of specific domains of activity is remarkable, and it contradicts many a thesis that black workers are non-modern men who cannot separate specific principles from diffuse and general grievances.

Some people may argue that it is precisely this tendency among South African blacks to give priority to short-term survival and security that has crippled the black liberation struggle. This is the kind of prescriptive stance that can only be taken by well-educated middle class activists, however, for whom survival and security is not an issue. Change in South Africa is not primarily to be sought for the benefit of the disaffected middle class activists, and therefore any 'liberation' must occur with the support and involvement of the black working classes unless it is to be yet something else which is imposed on black people. It is perhaps appropriate, then, for programmes of change in South Africa to work within the priorities and possibilities of the black working classes. In this sense the disinvestment strategy, whatever its validity as a means of providing opposition to vested white interests and structures, cannot claim to be a campaign on behalf of the black rank-and-file people of South Africa.

Perhaps the major implication of this study is that most black workers in South Africa at this stage keep the spheres of politics and labour action

separate. This should not comfort employers and the authorities unduly, however. A majority of these black workers appear to realise that their labour power could be a powerful political weapon should they wish to use it. Furthermore, a substantial minority has sufficiently militant

sentiments to have bridged the separation between the political and occupational spheres. Unless policy reforms occur to alleviate the frustrations and grievances of black workers in their daily lives more and more of them will draw their political views into the sphere of labour.

Given the increasing militancy which this study has demonstrated, reform in urban policy, community development and influx control laws has become a critical necessity.

• **The full study is available in the Black Sash office in Johannesburg**

The Research

In the interests of the greatest possible validity field-work was carried out by means of lengthy face to face interviews conducted by highly trained and experienced black interviewers in the language of choice of the respondent. In order to win the confidence of people interviewed a good deal of time was devoted to establishing sound rapport, and interviews took an average of 110 minutes each. Although contact with respondents was made in industrial areas all the interviewing took place in private, most of it in the homes of respondents. No interviews were conducted on factory premises. The interview schedule used in the field work is not reproduced since items are given in the text.

Since the aim was to generalise for the people most intimately involved in the capitalist system and particularly in the sector in which most multi-national companies operate — the manufacturing sector — the sample was restricted to black male production workers. No list of people in this specific category of work is available as a sampling frame and therefore a normal random sample could not be drawn. The basis of the sampling method was the so called quota sample. In such a sample the selection of respondents is controlled by certain criteria in order to achieve representativeness. The detailed procedure was as follows.

Industrial areas in the following urban complexes were defined: Johannesburg, Pretoria, the East Rand, the West Rand, the Vaal Triangle area, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Pinetown. Contact points were selected randomly across the industrial areas. Within each selected area interviewers sought respondents who qualified as black production workers according to age criteria. In all a total of 551 interviews was conducted, distributed as follows:

Johannesburg	—	146
Durban-Pinetown	—	100
Port Elizabeth	—	100
East Rand	—	68
West Rand	—	59
Pretoria	—	49
Vaal Triangle	—	29

There was deliberate over-representation of the Port Elizabeth and Durban areas so as to allow adequate assessments to be made of regional variation in attitudes. If the results had been significantly different according to area it would have been necessary to weigh the results in order to rectify for over-representation. As it turned out, however, the differences according to area were generally not significant and the results could be combined. However, the patterns are always also specified separately by area so that any patterns of difference which do exist between regions are not obscured or hidden. The age and occupational characteristics of the sample are as follows:

Age	%	Occupation	%
16-24 yrs	—	25	
25-34 yrs	—	35	
35-49 yrs	—	27	— 35
50+ yrs	—	14	
		Higher Semi-skilled and skilled	
		Lower Semi-skilled and skilled	— 65

In the report the data for the subsample in the Durban-Pinetown region is provided only in summary form and is not included in presentations of combined results since the major interest as far as this report is concerned lies in the results for those areas in which most multi-national and US companies are to be found, namely the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereniging area and the Port Elizabeth area, where most of the multi-national motor companies are situated.

Thus the Durban results are provided by way of comparison, and the interest as regards these results lies mainly in the fact that the Inkatha position, which is dominant in Natal, openly favours a constructive engagement strategy. Hence Durban results appear as a separate comparison and as already indicated, are not included in the category of 'overall' results.



The needlework stall at the Jhb morning market is well known for the excellence of its products and the money it makes throughout each year — left to right: convenor Molly Smollan, Dea Lowitt, Truda Hemp, Esther Raphaely



Freda Lloyd (co-convenor with Lesley Hermer, bending over next to her) at the white elephant stall; Margaret Kirk seated at left.



Ann Cohen at the cake stall

photos: Gill De Vlieg



In front, from left: G Makhawulu (President CRADORA), Di Bishop, M Goniwe (organizing secretary, CRADORA), S Mkanto, Molly Blackburn

On trial at Cradock

The rents and schools protests in Cradock, where the unrest continues and where 4 500 black schoolchildren are still out of school, were recorded in *Sash*, vol 27 no 2, August 1984.

Arising out of their work among the residents of the Cradock township, Ilingelihle, our members MOLLY BLACKBURN and DI BISHOP (both also PFP MPCs) were charged with illegally entering the township. They were found guilty, cautioned and discharged.

BRIAN BISHOP writes about the trial

Background

Security police activity in the Eastern Cape is notorious, so that events that might cool down elsewhere often develop into a cycle of anger.

Ilingelihle outside Cradock is a neglected township and, following the announcement of a rent increase, the Cradock Residents' Association (CRADORA) was

formed in September 1983. It is now a UDF affiliate.

The Chairman of Cradock was Matthew Goniwe, acting principal of the local high school and an outstanding mathematics and science teacher. Security police warned him that involvement would 'have consequences.' In November 1983 he was told that he was transferred to Graaff Reinet; then in January 1984 he was fired when he refused to accept the transfer. When his application for