

GM-South Africa

Profit Partners

Frank H. Joyce

1967

Arthur P. Hughes is a short, timid appearing young man of 23. He wears thick glasses and a large turquoise ring.

On May 19, Mr. Hughes, a painter who resides in New York City, stood before hundreds of stockholders of the General Motors corporation assembled for their annual Freakout in Cobo Hall.

He announced that a few days before, upon learning of the nature and extent of GM's investments in South Africa, he had divested himself of 955 shares of General Motors stock by turning it over to the African Aid and Legal Defense Fund. The stock was worth more than \$80,000.

Before finishing his remarks, Mr. Hughes was cut off by the GM Chairman of the Board Mr. Frederick Donner who said contemptuously, "You are trying to say we're bad aren't you?" Without waiting for an answer to his question which would, of course been "Yes," he continued. "The General Motors Corporation is following its usual policy of non-discrimination within the laws of the country," he said.

The laws of South Africa are the most viciously racist of any place in the World, known as the apartheid system (total separation of the races). They constitute the epitome of legalized oppression and exploitation in the name of white supremacy. It is a police state country in which the position of black people is even more difficult to describe and understand for whites than the situation of blacks in Watts or Harlem.

Outside of the meeting more than 40 pickets representing People Against Racism (PAR), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the American Committee of Africa also protested GM's support of racism. They carried signs which read "GM Supports Racism in South Africa; "GM and South Africa Partners In Apartheid"; "Bring the Money Home Now-; and "GM get out of South Africa."

In a leaflet distributed to the stockholders as they entered the meeting the ad hoc group said in part, "The official policy Of the United States is opposition to apartheid. Yet General Motors is allowed to do business there in a way which substantially supports the economy and government of the country. What would happen, we wonder, if GM sought to develop industry in North Vietnam?

Why does American opposition in South Africa take the form of loans, grants and investment by U.S. corporations for private profit instead of total boycotts and economic sanctions and negotiation and persuasion by the U.S. government, instead of napalm, bombs and the marines."

As the meeting progressed, the pickets attempted to carry their protest inside. They were first ordered by the Detroit Police to leave because picket signs are not allowed inside Cobo Hall. The signs left but the pickets didn't.

The group then confronted GM officials who informed them that they had revoked their earlier policy of admitting anyone who wished to attend the meeting regardless of whether or not they were a stockholder. Mrs. Lucy Haessler, who is a token stockholder in GM was finally allowed to take six members of the group to the meeting as her guest. Others gained entrance through means used frequently by GM not only in South Africa but throughout its world wide empire—namely deceit.

Once inside, spectators were treated to the biggest freak show since Ringling Bros., Barnum and Baily.

The American Stockholder like the American Voter doesn't DECIDE anything. The reason one owns stock is to make money. GM makes so much money that 97% of the proxies (votes) were in the hands of the management (which technically is supposed to be in the "employ of" and responsible to the stockholders). Those present could not have gone against the management even if they wanted to. Most didn't want to.

In order to perpetuate the illusion, the management was compelled to go through the motions of listening to debate on four proposals they already knew the fate of—because they had already been decided. They did not however tell anyone what the votes were.

Not that it matters since none of the proposals had to do with anything important anyway.

I can hardly wait until next year.

fifth Estate

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