

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
SPEECH ON SOUTH AFRICA
IN LONDON - DECEMBER 1964
(en route to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize)

I understand that there are South Africans here tonight - some of whom have been involved in the long struggle for freedom there. In our struggle for freedom and justice in the United States, which has also been so long and arduous, we feel a powerful sense of identification with those in the far more deadly struggle for freedom in South Africa. We know how Africans there, and their friends of other races, strove for half a century to win their freedom by non-violent methods. We have honoured Chief Lutuli for his leadership, and we know how this non-violence was only met by increasing violence from the state, increasing repression, culminating in the shootings of Sharpeville and all that has happened since.

Clearly there is much in Mississippi and Alabama to remind South Africans of their own country, yet even in Mississippi we can organise to register Negro voters, we can speak to the press, we can in short organise the people in non-violent action. But in South Africa even the mildest form of non-violent resistance meets with years of imprisonment, and leaders over many years have been restricted and silenced and imprisoned. We can understand how in that situation people felt so desperate that they turned to other methods, such as sabotage.

Today great leaders - Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe - are among many hundreds wasting away in Robben Island prison. Against the massively armed and ruthless state, which uses torture and sadistic forms of interrogation to crush human beings - even driving some to suicide - the militant opposition inside South Africa seems for the moment to be silenced: the mass of the people seems to be contained, seems for the moment unable to break from oppression. I emphasise the word "*seems*" because we can imagine what emotions and plans must be seething below the calm surface of that prosperous police state. We know what emotions are seething in the rest of Africa.

The dangers of a race war - of these dangers we have had repeated and profound warning.

It is in this situation, with the great mass of South Africans denied their humanity, their dignity, denied opportunity, denied all human rights; it is in this situation, with many of the bravest and best South Africans serving long years in prison, with some already executed; in this situation we in America and Britain have a unique responsibility. For it is we, through our investments, through our Governments' failure to act decisively, who are guilty of bolstering up the South African tyranny.

Our responsibility presents us with a unique opportunity. We can join in the one form of non-violent action that could bring freedom and justice to South Africa - the action which African leaders have appealed for - in a massive movement for economic sanctions.

In a world living under the appalling shadow of nuclear weapons do we not recognise the need to perfect the use of economic pressures? Why is trade regarded by all nations and all ideologies as sacred? Why does our Government, and your Government in Britain, refuse to intervene effectively *now*, as if only when there is a bloodbath in South Africa - or a Korea, or a Vietnam - will they recognise the crisis?

If the United Kingdom and the United States decided tomorrow morning not to buy South African goods, not to buy South African gold, to put an embargo on oil; if our investors and capitalists would withdraw their support for that racial tyranny, then apartheid would be brought to an end. Then the majority of South Africans of all races could at last build the shared society they desire.

Though we in the civil rights movement still have a long and difficult struggle in our own country, increasingly we are recognising our power as voters; already we have made our feelings clear to the President; increasingly we intend to influence American policy in the United Nations and towards South Africa.