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DIGGS TO PRESS U.S. FIRMS FOR "FAIR EMPLOYMENT"  
PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

After meeting with South African plant managers of Ford Motor Company and General Motors, Congressman Charles C. Diggs (D-Mich), charged the two U.S. firms with operating on a "double standard".

The Congressman made the observation that after talking with the GM and Ford plant managers in Port Elizabeth, "I was quite frankly upset to walk into an American enterprise and see the complicity with the local system of apartheid". Congressman Diggs exclaimed, "I had an emotional reaction to this, because it seemed so inconsistent and obviously represented a gap between company headquarters in the United States and their operations in South Africa."

Mr. Diggs, the first Black member of Congress to visit South Africa, said, "I was surprised to learn, for example, that the Chairman of the Board of Directors of General Motors, Mr. James Roche, has not even seen his South African plants since 1964, and that the head of Ford Motor Company, Mr. Henry Ford II, has not seen his South African plants since 1968.

He suggested that the heads of major corporations with investments in South Africa would find a visit to that country "revelatory". Mr. Diggs said: "I would love to be at Jan Smuts Airport when Chairman James Roche of General Motors Company stepped off the plane accompanied by the Rev. Leon Sullivan, a Black member of the General Motors Board, and to see them going to Port Elizabeth together."

Mr. Diggs is Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Africa which has been holding recent hearings on U.S. business involvement in South Africa. A visit to the American plants was high on the Congressman's agenda during his fact-finding trip to South Africa. "We were particularly interested in observing the employment practices and policies of U.S. firms," he said. But the Sub-Committee Chairman expressed displeasure with the U.S. businessmen he questioned about "discriminatory practices and race problems" and found them to be "equivocal, apologetic or overly cautious".

The Congressman said that much more could be done within the law to improve conditions of non-white workers in the Republic, but that many American companies hid behind "the apartheid excuse" to keep salaries down. He expressed the view that although the situation was changing for the better, these changes were taking place too slowly. Mr. Diggs plans to make a report of his observations.