7-20-1984

Letter from a Dutch Supporter in South Africa to Geraldine Ferraro

Geraldine Ferraro

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https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/vice_presidential_campaign_correspondence_1984_international/80
July 20, 1984

Dear Mrs. Ferraro,

This morning the news came through on the radio about your election as Democratic nominee for the Vice-Presidency of the United States of America, and I want to congratulate you on this achievement. It surely is very special that a woman has been chosen for the first time to stand for election for this post. Because my own mother was in politics for many years, I can more or less imagine what this means to you, and to many women in the U.S.A. as well.

What worried me however, was your statement about South Africa at the Democratic Convention in San Francisco, and that is why I write you this letter.

I am a Dutch national (The Netherlands), who has been living in South Africa for about 2 years now. I got married here to someone with British nationality, who was born and raised in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and who has gone through the guerilla war there as a regular soldier.

I am by no means in favour of the Apartheid system, but I believe that statements such as yours about it, when you accepted the nomination, are highly dangerous. You have never been here, and have no firsthand knowledge of the situation. I have been here only 2 years and I am slowly but surely gaining some insight in it. It is a much more complicated situation than people like the Rev. Jesse Jackson make you believe. It is clearly an issue to attract the attention of especially the black voters away from the internal problems of the U.S.A.

Let me try to explain to you what consequences a strong American stand against South Africa would cause. Take disinvestment. You know who will get hit the hardest as a result of that? The black people you so desperately want to help. Because, what will happen? Disinvestment will cause factories and businesses to close down. People will be laid off. An estimated 150,000 people will lose their jobs, and counting dependents and all, it would mean poverty for 600,000 people. The white people will find work elsewhere, the blacks will probably remain unemployed as there are already ca. 2 million unemployed blacks in this country. That means that they will not have money to buy food nor to send their children to school, resulting in the kids hanging on the street corners to sell newspapers. A vicious circle from which they cannot escape.
Investment on the other hand means work; as a result, money, food, schooling etc., elevation of the level of subsistence. The problem is that this country has too few white people to man (woman) all the available jobs. The more jobs there are, the more will have to be filled by non-white people, which implies that they get trained for a job which requires more skills.

Another example: boycott. The example of Rhodesia still stands fresh in our minds: they eventually started producing whatever they needed themselves. According to my husband and parents-in-law, luxury goods were not always easily available, but the basic foodstuffs were always there. A contrast with the situation at present, where people have to line up for whatever food is available. Very basic items are often not in store.

And look at the rest of Southern Africa. What about Angola and Mozambique? These countries have been plundered by the Communists and ravaged by internal strife. People are starving and fleeing to Zimbabwe, which does not have enough food either. Dutch missionary friends of mine went to help the Mozambican refugees in Zimbabwe and told of starving, emaciated people. Zimbabwe moreover has enough political strife of its own with 2 rivalling tribes, who do not trust each other.

If you would interfere as U.S. government in the situation in South Africa, it would create murder, bloodshed and poverty. There are not 2 tribes of black people here, but many, not to mention the Indian people, and those of mixed blood, and then either English or Afrikaans speaking whites. The black tribes are often not friendly among themselves, and the rivalries can easily explode, just like in Zimbabwe.

Another missionary (elderly) friend from the U.S.A. went on a trip through various African countries. When he came back, he said, "The blacks in S.A. are well off in comparison with those in other countries in Africa."

What I would like to ask you is please, do not interfere with the internal policies of South Africa. Allow the government here time to sort out their own very complicated problems. There are many blacks in the U.S.A. who need help in many areas, please, devote your attention to them.

If ever you want to gain some firsthand experience of the situation here, I would like to invite you to come and even stay in our home. If you do intend to continue with these policies, then may God help South Africa, but then I hope and pray that you will never reach the Vice-Presidency of the U.S.A.

Sincerely yours,