

American Policy on Africa

To the Editor:

The resignation of Congressman Charles Diggs from the U.S. delegation to the United Nations to protest the recent reversal of Administration policy toward Africa was an act of courage and high principle, and I applaud him for it. What clearly has happened is that the Administration, for reasons which are most difficult to understand, has now abandoned its earlier rhetoric of support for racial justice and peaceful progress toward majority rule in southern Africa to a policy of active collaboration with the white governments in the suppression of the blacks, by force if need be.

The signs of the erosion of the Administration's earlier position have of course become increasingly frequent recently — easing of the embargo against shipping military materials to South Africa, ready compliance with the move in Congress to abrogate U.N. sanctions against Rhodesian chrome, and extraordinary solicitude for the sensibilities of Portugal and South Africa in our U.N. voting.

But the action of according some \$435 million in economic credits to Portugal is nonetheless astonishing — in its amount, and above all in its indifference to the outrage which such an action was bound to arouse throughout independent Africa and within the American black community. The sum is about triple the current annual level of U.S. credits to all of Africa.

On a per capita basis, it means that each of Portugal's nine million citizens stands to receive some 100 times the economic credits from the U.S. which each of the 300 million black and brown Africans received this past year. And all this as rent payment on a military facility, the Azores air and naval base, which many high-ranking officers in the Pentagon regard as outdated and no longer essential.

Not only a mistake, but a major mistake has been made. In ten years of close observation of African developments, I have never known an American action which has stirred the depths of bitterness among black people everywhere as much as this one. It is interpreted not as a further sign of official indifference to Africa and Africans, but as a deliberate, aggressive insult, as a definitive alignment of American policy with racism.

The rumblings to be heard are ominous, and I am afraid American business, and American relations with Africa generally, sooner or later are going to pay a very heavy price for what has now been done.

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