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CAMPUS ACTIVISM SURGES AROUND SOUTH AFRICA*

by

David Alexander, Iris Young and Robert Miller

Social scientists and educators have been quietly writing off the campus activism of the late sixties and early seventies as the aberrant nonsense of a disaffected generation. By now it has become a truism that the students of the seventies are uninterested in politics. There is no question that the economic crunch of the seventies has forced students to think more of sheer economic survival than did the students of the sixties. But the recent upsurge in campus activity around the issues of U.S. corporate involvement in South Africa shows that campus politics is not merely a part of the buried past.

The last year has brought a number of dramatic examples of student militancy in the face of immediate reprisal, as well as some significant successes. For example, in the spring of 1977 over 1000 students out of a student body of 6500 at the University of California at Santa Cruz demonstrated to demand that the university sell stock in corporations with investments in South Africa. 401 of that 1000 were arrested. In November 1977 a large demonstration at the University of Wisconsin at Madison culminated in a march to a meeting of the board of regents. Police sprayed mace on the crowd as they tried to make their way up the stairs to the meeting. A few months later, however, at the advice of the Wisconsin State Attorney General, the regents voted to sell \$9,000,000 worth of stock invested in corporations with interests in South Africa. After almost a year of campus activity, the Oregon State Board of Education, which administers 13 colleges, voted to divest stock valued at \$6,000,000 in corporations with interests in South Africa.

Campus activity concerning South Africa is part of a growing movement to put pressure on U.S. corporations to cease their economic support of the apartheid regime. While this activity has been going on for over a decade, in the last two years it has snowballed into a major national movement. The origins of the current activity can be traced directly to the student uprisings in Soweto in the summer of 1976, which focused world attention upon the oppression and the militancy of the black South Africans.

* This is a reprint from *Moving On* Monthly Magazine of the *New American Movement*, June 1978. p.8-10.

Since that time a number of city governments--including Gary, In., Madison, Wisc., Washington, D.C., and Davis, Calif.--have decided to cease doing business with corporations with investments in South Africa. An increasing number of labor unions have voted to withdraw funds from banks lending to the South African government. Among these are United Auto Workers, Furriers Joint Council, and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America.

High Return

Almost all of the campus movements have been directed at calling for the respective colleges and universities to sell their stocks in U.S. corporations with significant business interests in South Africa, in order to pressure those corporations to pull out of South Africa. Without such pressure, of course, corporations are quite reluctant to take any such steps. South Africa contains some of the world's richest deposits of minerals essential to industrial production. Investment in the South African economy, moreover, brings a high return. Before the current recession return was as high as 18% and even now stands well above the world average.

Despite a resolution of the U.N. General Assembly calling for world economic boycott of South Africa, the policy of the Carter administration has been to support U.S. economic presence in South Africa. As recently as June 1977, Ambassador Andrew Young expressed confidence that the presence of U.S. corporations in South Africa can have a positive effect in promoting progressive change in the condition of black South Africans and in pressuring the government to change its racist policies.

The bankruptcy of this policy, however, is becoming clear to almost everyone. The NAACP and numerous church groups have called for withdrawing U.S. investments in South Africa. Even the January 1978 report of the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee says: "The net effect of American investment has been to strengthen the economic and military self-sufficiency of South Africa's apartheid regime, undermining the fundamental goals and objectives of U.S. foreign policy."

In calling on their trustees to divest of stocks in corporations involved in South Africa, students have used various tactics. Last March in only three days the anti-apartheid committee at Swarthmore College collected the signatures of half the student body on a petition calling for the board of trustees to divest. Students at Miami University, in Ohio,

passed a divestment referendum by a three to one margin. At several colleges, including Yale and Oregon, there have been pickets and protests of companies with South African interests who do on-campus recruiting. Student groups have picketed and sat in at administration buildings and picketed meetings of their boards of trustees.

At several schools students have tied the issue of investment in corporations with business ties to South Africa with other issues of racism and imperialism. The Santa Cruz Coalition Against Institutional Racism's program of demands links the divestment of South Africa holdings with overturning the Bakke decision, establishing a Third World Studies Board, expanding the special admissions program and other measures supporting third world students. At Wesleyan University students marked a day of tribute to Malcolm X by sitting in at administration offices to demand University divestment. Some campus movements, including Oregon and Chicago, have participated in community campaigns against local sale of the South African gold coin, the Krugerrand.

Links with Banks

Several campus movements have linked the question of South African investments to that of the corporate interests of their trustees. At Northwestern, students demonstrated in front of Johnson Products to urge the company's president, a Northwestern trustee, to support divestment. In conjunction with a community coalition demanding that Chicago based banks end loans to South Africa, students at the University of Chicago have been protesting the links between the university and banks such as First National and Continental. The university has twelve trustees who are directors of banks which lend money to South Africa.

There can be no question but that the protests are meeting with significant success. After students at Hampshire College occupied the Cole Science Center in the Spring of 1977, the Board of Trustees voted to sell \$39,000 of stock invested in corporations with South African interests. When Firestone Rubber Company did not respond to requests about its investment policy in South Africa, Smith College sold shares in that company valued at \$688,000. In September 1977, after two years of student agitation, the board of trustees at the University of Massachusetts voted to sell \$600,000 worth of stock in 20 corporations. Harvard University sold \$600,000 worth of shares in Citicorp and Manufacturer's Hanover in February 1978. The University officials have denied that the sales were politically motivated, but it can be no coincidence that they occurred soon after the South Africa Solidarity Committee collected

3000 signatures on a petition demanding their sale. The Board of Trustees at Ohio University recently voted to divest of \$52,000 of stock in Getty Oil, ITT, Mobil Oil, Emery Air Freight and Monsanto.

Colleges and universities which have refused to divest have nevertheless been forced by the political pressure on their campuses to face the issue of U.S. Corporate involvement in South Africa. A number have made weaker gestures. These include writing letters to corporations asking that they work for changes in South Africa, and supporting stockholder's initiatives which call upon corporations to change their policies with relation to South Africa. Some base their compromise position on the "Sullivan Principles". Supposedly humane guidelines for corporations in South Africa, the bankruptcy of these principles has been exposed by the American Committee on Africa's pamphlet, "Too Little, Too Late".

The pressure on banks and corporations to withdraw their economic support from South Africa has yielded some action. Citicorp, for example, recently made public a decision to cease lending money to the South African government or government owned enterprises. Carole Collins, national coordinator of the Coalition for the Liberation of Southern Africa, points out, however, that "this does not mean that Citicorp money will not find its way to South Africa. Money can be lent to U.S. corporations which in turn may lend money to the South African Government."

Cost of Management

The Polaroid Company recently withdrew its operations from South Africa after it was discovered that the local affiliate was selling film and cameras to the South African government for use in making "passbooks" of the South African blacks. The March 9, 1978 newsletter of the Investor Responsibility Research Center reports that in recent months several banks have said that "the cost of management time spent in responding to people questioning loans to South Africa or the possibility that depositors might withdraw funds or complain publicly about lending practices have become factors to be weighed carefully in evaluating future loans."

Perhaps the most significant success of the campus movement on South Africa, however, is the degree to which it has reawakened student interest in politics. "The work on South Africa is attracting a large number of people who were formerly politically inactive," observes Judy Johnson, a member of Chicago Southside NAM, "as well as many people who have done

no political work since Vietnam." Sharon Peeples, member of the Committee Against Apartheid at Miami University and a NAM member, reports that "this is the only issue which has stirred up people on this campus since Kent State. Miami is a rather conservative, quiet campus, and we feel we've had real success raising consciousness and moving some people toward political involvement."

One of the most promising aspects of the campus movement has been its success in drawing together a wide diversity of individuals and groups, including Third World groups, left groups and church groups. At Wesleyan University, for example, a Black student group, a Latino student group, and an Asian interest group were among the members of a coalition which sponsored sit-ins and a letter writing campaign.

NAM has also been an active part of the movement. NAM members have been involved in campus coalitions around South Africa at the University of Oregon, University of Wisconsin, Miami of Ohio, Yale University, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and University of Chicago.

Organizers agree that the movement has been successful in mobilizing students, raising consciousness and bringing together white and black students. At some campuses there have been some problems, however, keeping up involvement and carrying forward its momentum to other issues. This reflects, at least in part, some of the problems of time and academic schedule that the campus based movements have. Many people consider it necessary to remedy these weaknesses by forming strong ties with community groups and other non-campus organizations.

In spite of problems, though, the movement grows. A recent East coast conference drew 400 activists who hope to form a more coordinated campaign against corporations investing in Southern Africa. The heightened activism on campuses may well show that it was the apathy of the mid-seventies, not the sixties activism, that was the exception on American campuses.

A number of regional and national organizations have been or are being formed. Groups to contact for more information include:

American Committee on Africa, 305 E. 46th St., NY, NY 10017.
Coalition for the Liberation of Southern Africa, 615 W. Wellington Ave., Chicago, IL 60657.
Committee to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa, 305 E. 46th St., NY, NY 10017.

*Stop Banking of Apartheid, 2160 Lake St., San Francisco, CA
94121.*

*UN International Year of Struggle Against Apartheid, c/o
Dennis Brutus, Northwestern Univ., College of Arts and
Sciences, Department of English, Evanston, IL 60201.*

*Washington Office on Africa, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington,
DC 20002.*

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The African Activists Association would like to add
to the above list of organizations doing solidarity work for
liberation in Southern Africa:

*All African Peoples' Revolutionary Party
P.O. BOX 1163 P.O. Box 3307
Inglewood or Washington
California, 90301. D.C. 20009*

*Committee of South Africans (Los Angeles)
P.O. Box 25030
Los Angeles
California 90025.*

*National Anti-Imperialist Movement in Solidarity with
African Liberation (N.A.M.S.A.L)
1 Union Square West, Rm 713
New York, N.Y 10003*

*The North East Coalition for the Liberation of
Southern Africa (N.E.C.L.S.A)
c/o Catalyst Project
P.O. Box 177
Amherst
Mass. 01002.*

*South African Military Refugee Aid Fund (S.A.M.R.A.F)
Don Morton, Coordinator
138 Berkeley Place
Brooklyn
New York 11217.*

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