REPORT ON U.S. STUDENT ANTI-APARTHEID ACTIVITY

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Dear Comrades,

With the liberation struggle intensifying in South Africa, along with increased repression, it is important that the world-wide anti-apartheid movement step up its activities, and do so in a strategically effective manner. I thus consider this conference to be of utmost importance and am honored to participate. For as activists from many different countries we have an opportunity to heighten international coordination against apartheid as well as learn from each other.

In this report, I will present an analytical overview of the U.S. student anti-apartheid movement, as well as an up-date on the most recent developments. My main point is that despite sophisticated attacks against divestment, the student movement has been able to maintain its momentum and develop politically by linking up to other campus and community struggles. The future of our work will depend on the extent to which we can maintain and strengthen these links.

HISTORICAL SUMMARY

U.S. student opposition to apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa has a history going back to the early 1960's. In one of its first actions, SDS sat in at the Chase Manhattan Bank (a major lender to South Africa) and in the Sixties there were anti-apartheid demonstrations at Cornell, Princeton, Harvard and other universities. In the late Sixties the anti-war movement overshadowed anti-apartheid work on and off-campus, but as the struggle against Portuguese colonialism escalated there were massive demonstrations in support of the liberation movements, notably 50,000 people at the first African Liberation Day in 1972.

The real spark for the U.S. student movement, however, was the Soweto Rebellion of 1976 in which hundreds of students faced up to the guns of the apartheid regime and the liberation struggle took a major step forward. Throughout the school year 1976-77 numerous student groups formed and began calling for divestment of their school's corporate stocks linked to South Africa. In that year, the successful occupation at Hampshire College and the massive sit-in at Stanford were catalysts to the spread of the movement to dozens of campuses throughout the country.
For the past four years the student divestment movement has had an important impact both on campuses and on the country at large. With the liberation struggle going forward in southern Africa, along with South African and corporate propaganda, it is important for us to clarify what our successes have been and how we can build upon them.

SUCCESSES OF THE STUDENT ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT

The "success" of the student movement must be judged on several levels. First of all, both the actual divestment of stocks and the process of struggling for divestment are not ends in themselves but means to achieve the following goals:

1) The withdrawal of U.S. corporations from and the cessation of bank loans to South Africa.
2) Affecting the political climate domestically, so as to curtail U.S. government intervention in southern Africa and build support for the liberation movements.
3) More broadly, the delegitimization of corporate power both in its foreign and domestic manifestations.
4) And related to this the activation of a student left that combats racism and other forms of oppression in this country.

Let me try to assess the extent to which we have succeeded in achieving these goals.

1) First of all to what degree have we forced corporate withdrawal from South Africa and curtailment of bank loans?

Partial or total stock divestment at nearly two dozen schools plus mass student pressure at many others have had concrete effects. Certain corporations, such as Polaroid, have curtailed operations, and the student movement has helped create pressure to hamper direct bank loans to South Africa. (It is important to note that universities such as Harvard, Columbia and Yale have found it very difficult to justify their holdings in banks that lend to the South African Government). In addition, the passage of Eximbank financing restrictions and regulations against corporate sales to the South African military are at least indirectly the result of student activism.

Of course, overall U.S. corporate investment continues to rise in South Africa and relatively few schools have been willing to divest all their holdings. To see this as evidence of our "failure" is to look at the movement too narrowly. For we have made major progress in regards to our other goals:
2) Looking at our second goal of curtailing U.S. government intervention and building support for the liberation movements, we have had an important political impact.

We were at least partially responsible for the maintenance of sanctions against Rhodesia, and numerous campus groups have raised material aid and consciousness for the liberation movements. Beyond this we have sown the seeds for mass opposition to U.S. intervention when the struggle reaches its decisive stage in South Africa itself. One should note that there has been a dramatic increase in community anti-apartheid organizing over the past year—in part due to the raising of the issue on campus. State legislative actions have been of particular importance, and unions are beginning to play a more active role.

3) In terms of our third goal, the student movement has helped delegitimize corporate power in this country, especially on campuses.

The achievement of divestment as well as the process of building campus support have undermined corporate claims of blamelessness while bringing the issue of corporate complicity in apartheid to millions of Americans. A new wave of student activists have come to share a radical perspective as they have challenged the myth of corporate benevolence and institutional neutrality.

It is crucial that our attack has been directed at the key ideological pillar of the System, the University, which is controlled by the same white male elite that runs Corporate America. The effect of demonstrations, educational forums and sit-ins has been to unmask power relations within the university and at least on the ideological front put its spokesmen on the defensive. A testament to the seriousness of this challenge is the immense amount of time and money university and corporate officials have devoted to dealing with our movement. These officials have held several large strategy meetings over the past year, and thus far employed the Sullivan Code as their principal shield. This Code and national tours by corporate apologists such as South African Helen Suzman are closely linked to U.S. foreign policy which aims to control change in southern Africa. In this regard, what separates the student movement from university trustees and the Carter Administration is not simply tactics but goals. We support revolutionary change in southern Africa, they do not.
4) Besides winning individual students to a radical outlook, the movement has been largely successful in achieving its fourth goal: the reactivation of a Student Left in this country.

The process of organizing against apartheid has helped spark renewed activism on many fronts. Our work has fed into struggles against racism in the University, and more recently student activity against the draft and nuclear power. In the process, hundreds of students have gained valuable organizing skills and a commitment that extends beyond Graduation.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MOVEMENT

During the past school year, the ability of the student movement to maintain its momentum has been apparent. In large part this continued momentum has been due to political development within the movement which has had several interrelated aspects:

1) Increasingly activists have come to understand that stock divestment is not an end in itself but a means to support the liberation struggle in southern Africa. With this understanding organizers have had the patience to engage in essential and painstaking educational work—and avoided frustration over Trustee refusals to divest school stock.

2) At the same time, anti-apartheid organizers have been making links to other campus struggles notably against campus racism, nuclear power and the draft. One key development has been the increasing initiative of Black students in the movement. In this respect the New Jersey Coalition of Black Students (a grouping of a dozen schools) has been central in drawing the links between racism at home and abroad.

3) In addition, there has begun to be greater coordination with community anti-apartheid activists, particularly on actions dealing with banks and legislative work.

These developments are best illustrated by looking at several key campuses:

1) First of all there is Princeton University where the People's Front for the Liberation of Southern Africa has been active throughout the year. In the fall, the Front held its 2nd annual "Run for Liberation" that raised $5300 for the liberation movements. Following a series of demonstrations, there occurred a sit-in of 80 students in March, protesting Princeton's links to South Africa and refusal to send a telegram in support of ANC activist James Mange (who is scheduled to be hanged). The sit-in set the stage for a successful student strike on April 4, in honor of Martin Luther King and in support of the liberation movements.
2) Dartmouth College in New Hampshire has also been a hot-bed of anti-apartheid activity. During this past semester, activists staged 6 pickets of corporate recruiters from such friends of apartheid as Citibank, Morgan Guaranty, and IBM. The greatest strength of the Upper Valley Committee for a Free Southern Africa has been its ability to link up to other campus struggles and groups. The Committee is part of a larger coalition that has made 25 demands, focusing on institutionalized racism and sexism, as well as Dartmouth's links to the nuclear industry. This semester Dartmouth students took part in a demonstration at the First National Bank of Boston (a major lender to South Africa) along with the anti-nuclear Clamshell Alliance and several community groups.

3) The University of Tennessee is the "South Africa of American Academia." According to one campus activist, in Fall 1978, three anti-apartheid activists were arrested and more repression has followed as well as resistance. This spring 18 Black students were arrested by police in riot gear following a building takeover protesting Administration attacks on the Black Cultural Center which has been the center of anti-apartheid and anti-racist struggle. The occupation lasted five days and was accompanied by support rallies of up to 500 students.

4) Activists at Williams College (in Western Massachusetts) have been working on many fronts of the liberation support struggle. From April 17-19 about 25 students staged a sit-in at the campus Administration Building, and two of them went on a hunger strike. The action coincided with a Trustee meeting on campus, and over 40 faculty members and 400 students backed the protesters' divestment demands and actions. The action was followed by a well-attended showing of "The Shield"—a play by a South African Black that deals with the liberation struggle in South Africa—as well as a campus-wide fast that raised $960 for southern African refugees and families of political prisoners.
5) Following intense student pressure, Rutgers University divested itself of seven of its 13 stock holdings linked to South Africa earlier this year. However, the university still has $12 million invested in firms that have investments there and activists continue to call for full divestment. Throughout the Spring semester petitions have circulating for divestment and several educational events have been held. The first was in honor of Paul Robeson and stressed the links between racism at home and abroad. Following this there was forum that featured a representative of the ANC and was attended by 200 people.

6) The Boston Coalition for the Liberation of Southern Africa has acted as an important link between community and student anti-apartheid struggles. This past Fall the Coalition worked closely with Boston-area schools (notably Harvard) for the successful Cambridge Referendum that calls for an end to city investments linked to South Africa. More recently, the Coalition has worked with campus groups on demonstrations against the First National Bank of Boston and highlighted its redlining of Third World communities as well as its loans to South Africa. Another important area of work has been Zimbabwe. Coalition activists prepared a slideshow on Zimbabwe that has been shown on several campuses, among them Tufts, and in mid-February they organized a successful benefit for the Patriotic Front. Brandeis University has also been in contact with the Coalition, and on that campus there was a three day teach-in that set the stage for a large rally against their Trustees in April. Most recently the Coalition arranged for Dumisani Kumalo (an exiled Black South African) to speak before the entire Massachusetts State Legislature for divestment, and held a celebration of Zimbabwean Independence on April 17.

7) On April 12 regional student anti-apartheid strategy conferences were held that pointed to and helped further the political development of the movement. The conferences were held at Columbia University and at Western Michigan University and explored strategies of linking anti-apartheid work to other campus struggles against racism, the nuclear industry, the draft and sexism. The two conferences not only succeeded in discussing these matters but came up with concrete proposals for broadening the impact and politics of student anti-apartheid work. The conferences set a priority on anti-racist work as well as the preparation of an organizing pamphlet for next Fall.
CONCLUSION

In sum, the student anti-apartheid movement has continued to build upon its past successes in a strategically oriented way that bodes well for the future. Most importantly we have come to understand that the victory of the liberation struggles in southern Africa, will help our own struggle for a more just and equitable society. The struggle is one.

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