Dear friends,

The following is a report on the activities of the Philadelphia Committee to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa (PCOBLSA) with comment on mood/difficulties and relations with the national office.

Since July, 1979 Banks Campaign activity in Philadelphia has been on the rise, with modest but important gains made. We have clarified our structure by establishing PCOBLSA separate from the United People's Campaign Against Apartheid and Racism (UFCAR). Separate organizations allows individuals and organizations to participate actively in the Banks Campaign who may, for one reason or another, not want to join UFCAR but who do want to organize against the banks on the basis of three general principals:

1. Oppose all bank loans to South Africa.
2. Oppose redlining in Philadelphia; for utilization of bank funds in the interest of the community.
3. Recognition that both funding apartheid and redlining are primarily racist and should be actively opposed on that basis.

While most of the initiative for the Banks Campaign continues to come from 8-10 members of UFCAR, we are already seeing participation and interest from other organizations and individuals.

Among religious organizations a couple of congregations have shown interest and requested educationalists. In October we contacted the local Clergy and Laity Concerned group for the first time, who in turn sent out Banks Campaign leaflets to their mailing list.

Several union locals and activists within other locals are also beginning work. Also, among community organizations, several, who are organizing against redlining, endorsed a November picketline at Philadelphia National Bank (PNB).

In addition to monthly committee meetings, PCOBLSA planned and participated in three activities in the past period.

In November UFCAR presented an educational on questions that arise while organizing in the Banks Campaign. (18 common questions and answers were reproduced and will be available at the conference).

That same week we organized an informational picket line at PNB. Thirty people participated and 3000 leaflets were distributed in the preceding three weeks. (see enclosed leaflet and flyer).

In December UFCAR held a potluck and program to raise funds for the Banks Campaign. Forty people saw the film strip on bank loans and heard a brief presentation. We were happy with the success of the event, both due to the interest generated and the strong multi-national composition of the gathering. We are also pursuing other funding for PCOBLSA, hopefully allowing us to hire a part-time organizer in the near future.
Finally, we are also continuing to research the particulars of bank investments in South Africa and redlining. This will be our primary work in the next month or two. Through the CDE and past letters to banks, we have determined that five banks and one insurance company headquartered here have invested in apartheid. We are currently sending another letter to all 28 banks in the city, questioning them on their banking practices (copies will be available at the conference). We are also investigating where union locals have their money and have a relationship with a project jointly sponsored by a university and community organization who are researching redlining. Meanwhile our primary target for withdrawal has been FNB, building for the national week of withdrawal in April.

As to the mood or attitude of the public, it is clear that support and knowledge of the campaign is severely limited. However, we maintain that it would be an error to conclude that the conditions for building a mass campaign have radically changed in the past three years. In light of an advancing struggle in southern Africa and an intensified offensive by racist forces in the US, the need for building a mass movement is actually greater than before. To the extent that we do our work, our modest experience shows that people will respond. Greater efficiency by finance capital in its attempt to diffuse our struggle calls for determination and aggressive work on our part.

At the same time we recognize difficulties. A good number of the activists in the community, churches, and unions are supportive of the campaign but already maintain busy schedules that do not allow taking up the campaign in an active way. Activists in UPCAAAR have demonstrated the same inability to devote the necessary time to making the campaign work without at the same time ignoring other areas of our work.

In the past we have also been sloppy about concretely defining what the banks do to bolster apartheid and what the goals and tasks of the campaign are. As a result we have not gotten out and talked with people and organized until recently. Here we must continue to improve.

We must also continue to consolidate our understanding of the Banks Campaign as an anti-racist campaign and to make this primary in our agitation. The fight for consistent democracy for the Black peoples of southern Africa and the US is a struggle for the unity and well being of all who are exploited by a system that places profit before people. Surely we would all agree to that in our heads but too often we approach the campaign as if we were only aiding someone else's struggle without believing or showing that winning is a victory for us all.

Because we have not taken enough initiative in developing relations with the national office, we are not in a position to offer much evaluation. However, particularly in the area of research the national office has been most helpful. Dumisani was here for a day in November and gave us valuable advice and aid by telling us what to look for and what to ask.

Because much of this has been fairly general, we will be glad to amplify on our experience and are looking forward to hearing from you and seeing you on the 19th and 20th.

Sincerely,

Bob Bucher

Bob Bucher for PCOBSLA