The state of Massachusetts has just passed legislation that will—over the next three years—pull approximately $88.8 million out of investments in companies and banks doing business in South Africa.

Council 93 Exec. Dir. Joseph Bonavita—an AFSCME International vice president—explained why Council 93 lobbied for the legislation: "The potential impact of this legislation is huge." He added that the Massachusetts public employees who own pension monies negotiated by Massachusetts public employees should not be used to support a government that tramples on the rights of its black citizens.

In Connecticut, Council 4 put on a strong lobbying effort for divestment at the state and city (Hartford) level. As Exec. Dir. Dominic Badolato noted, "AFSCME represents more than its membership; it represents public service, and thus it represents all of the people."

"We got involved," continued Badolato, "because of the justice of the cause. We owe it to our membership to be active not only when it comes to negotiations, but also for social change." He concluded, "When any people on the globe are enslaved, each of us is a little less free."

In states and cities around the country, AFSCME councils and locals are working with public-spirited legislators and citizen coalitions to re-examine the local investment portfolio and to withdraw financial support for the repressive South African government.

In addition to Connecticut and Massachusetts, Minnesota and the cities of Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware, have passed comprehensive divestment legislation. Michigan has pulled state money out of banks lending South Africa money, and the state university system is selling any stocks it holds in corporations doing business with South Africa. Michigan pension fund divestment legislation is being re-introduced.

Dumisa Kukalo, field representative for the American Committee on Africa and an AFSCME New York Local 107 member, believes that much of the impetus for state and local divestment activity came from a Conference on Public Investment and South Africa held in New York City in June 1981.

At that conference, explained Kukalo, legislators and political activists learned of the potential impact of divestment activities, and they gathered valuable information for their local campaigns. The conference provided support for ongoing work and encouraged new divestment programs in states around the nation: California, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin.

AFSCME members are asking, "What is the human cost of South Africa's apartheid system on its black citizenry?"

A 1980 "Country Labor Profile: South Africa" produced by the International Labor Affairs Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor includes these statistics:

EDUCATION—schools are free and compulsory for white children aged 7-16, but not for blacks. Black parents who send their children to school must generally pay for books, supplies, and uniforms.

PUBLIC HEALTH—the 1975 infant mortality rate for whites was 14.9 deaths per 1,000, 80.6 per 1,000 for blacks. The segregated medical system means things don't get better as blacks grow up.

EMPLOYMENT—the official 1978 unemployment rate was estimated at 3.6 percent for whites, 11.1 percent for blacks. But black unemployment has been estimated by others to be between 15 and 20 percent.

WAGES—a 1978 report showed annual earnings averaging $6,930 for whites and $1,502 for black workers. One-third to one-half of the black working population is estimated as living below the subsistence level.

SOCIAL SECURITY—maximum monthly benefits for war veterans in 1978 were $120 for whites, $38 for blacks. Pensions for the blind and elderly were $104 for whites, $38 for blacks.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING—unions must register with the government to function legally in South Africa. Black unions may register but only for black members employed fulltime with permanent residence rights in white areas. This disqualifies most members of black unions who are commuter and migrant. Once registered, black unions may participate in Industrial Councils where bargaining takes place—but only if they are approved by all other union and employer members of the council.

This data gives some idea of life in South Africa, a country whose racist regime—according to a 1982 AFSCME Convention resolution—"is an insult to civilized society—the only nation in the world that predicates its national policy on racial superiority."

The AFSCME resolution called for the United States to "impose sanctions against South Africa and halt all diplomatic, cultural, sporting, military and economic relations with that country until South Africa's racial policies are dramatically reformed to ensure majority rule."

By working to divest public funds at the local level from supporting South African programs, AFSCME members are helping carry out the mandate of this resolution.