

Remarks on the Occassion of the Presentation of the Patricia L. Beeman Southern Africa Committee Collection to the Michigan State University Library, March 19, 1998

By Anabel Dwyer

Many people in this room contributed enormously to the success of the anti-apartheid movement. We all owe much gratitude to your willingness to stand up for an end to apartheid at a time when it was not popular. In the front row, for example, are a number of members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom who in 1971 testified at a General Motors stockholders' meeting in favor of a resolution requiring G.M.'s divestment from South African holdings.

It wasn't until the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 passed by the US Congress over the presidential veto that U.S. corporations like G.M. were required to divest their South African holdings. Even so President Mandela was not released from prison until 1990.

The focused struggle against apartheid in the United States covered about 20 years. We are here today to formally acknowledge and honor the sustaining and central role that Pat Beeman played in removing U.S./Michigan complicity with apartheid for her daily and dogged work for at least 15 of those 20 years.

Our role here of course was minor and secondary compared to the century-long struggle in Southern Africa. Our lives were not constantly in danger or ravaged by apartheid itself. Indeed the brilliance and commitment involved in the organization and program of the African National Congress (ANC) still provides us with great inspiration. Major and positive social change can occur.

The ANC was and is a grass-roots organization, now the ruling party. It was and is based on a true commitment to the African Freedom Charter. In this year which is also the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the abolition of apartheid has been accomplished but much work remains.

How then do demands for economic and social justice become reality? What exactly did Pat and Frank Beeman do that we now recognize as so important, as an example for us in our present organizing?

First Pat never waived from the ANC position that apartheid must be eliminated. Compromises with such a fundamentally unjust system were not possible. Put simply Pat could not be bought off.

Pat and Frank never let the realities and horrors of apartheid be far from our consciousness. Every film, picture, story or the grimness of the townships, the brutal repression, the demeaning daily lives, the murders, imprisonments, every unjust piece of legislation became part of the displays and information packets.

This is no easy task. It involved enormous amounts of materials and

information now in neat piles in the library collection but in Pat's and Frank's living room and in the Peace Center, the information swirled around with Pat and Frank compiling and designing various presentations of it. Information, in other words, is one thing, making it relevant to every day lives in Michigan is quite another and giving people a chance to act for ending their complicity with such a system is another still.

It's actually relatively easy to design the overall strategies of various campaigns from selective purchasing, through the lists of divestment acts, resolutions that you have on your handout. Making them happen is quite another matter and in the implementation it was Pat who directed and acted.

The Patricia Beeman Collection contains the record of most of the myriad meetings attended and the packets speeches presented. It doesn't contain the intensity, the strain, the nastiness of reactionary and powerful people. Nor does it contain adequately the strength and positive outlook Pat conveyed, the absolute faith that we human beings can do better in relation to each other, that we are or at least want to be and can be decent and fair.

So what does Pat's example have to tell us as organizers today?

Dear President Mandela and the African National Congress,

A story of the Michigan anti-apartheid movement to the tune of Frankie and Johnnie.

Pat and Frank were actors
Or lordy how they did swing
They papered your detractors
Gave divestiture sure ring.

Pat and Frank pushed Bills
At ev'ry meeting they appeared
Soon 'twas everyone's will
With pinked green stickers
McGoff Off achieved.

In backwater Michigan
Corporate heads faced chagrin

Grassroots action in Michigan
Helped dump apartheid in the
bin,

Pat and Frank took your lead
Make sure that all agreed
To apartheid we said no
Michigan's complicity had to go.

In backwater Michigan
Trustees faced chagrin

Pat and Frank found all pictures
Of apartheid's inhuman strictures
Papers swirled with the smoke
But never did they drink Coke.

In backwater Michigan
Legislator's got it on the chin.