

The Southern Africa Media Center

A Project of California Newsreel, 630 Natoma Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 (415) 621-6196



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MEMO TO: Advisory Board
DATE: September 12, 1985

Not unsurprisingly, this past year's upsurge of activity around South Africa was reflected in a dramatic increase in the use of Media Center films. While Randall Robinson was organizing the series of arrests at the South African Embassy last November, the Media Center was bringing into the U.S. three new films on apartheid: **Woza Albert!**, **Allan Boesak: Choosing for Justice**, and **Namibia: Africa's Last Colony**. A month later we placed 25,000 catalogs and resource guides in the hands of activists and educators across the country so that the films could be used to help build the ensuing anti-apartheid campaign. Since then, thousands of screenings of these and our other titles have been held across the country. By this Christmas, almost one million Americans will have spent an hour or two of their time viewing and discussing a Southern Africa Media Center release and considering appropriate policy initiatives. Many of you have been among those organizing and leading these screenings, classes, and forums.

We were fortunate to receive small grants from the Ford Foundation, the Funding Exchange, the National Council of Churches, and two denominations which helped us import these new titles and use them to help introduce into national foreign policy debate a point of view too rarely heard: that of the black majority population. The new films are unique in that, unlike most media, they were deliberately designed to allow black South Africans to speak in their own voice to a Western audience.

Rev. Dwight Hopkins, formerly administrative assistant of the Black Theology Project, was hired specifically to liason with Black denominations and religious organizations to help them use the films to bring this missing perspective before their membership. He arranged screenings and workshops at a number of national conventions this summer and has been working to translate the insights and enthusiasms generated into on-going programs at the local level.

In what represents a further maturing of our activities, we have been consulting with student and

divestment groups and religious denominations in an attempt to help them move away from ad-hoc events to the more purposeful integration of screenings into a larger organizational strategy to broaden anti-apartheid participation. The coordination of two-dozen screenings of **Namibia: Africa's Last Colony** with a United Presbyterian Women-sponsored national speaking tour by Nora Chase this summer offered one successful example. In another, our films were screened in six statehouses (including California and Michigan) and before a number of city councils and pension boards as part of the current divestment debate.

As some of you know, we've also been lobbying PBS, pressuring them to present a South Africa series - and equally important, trying to prevent a typically wrong-headed approach. Though the result is not entirely what we had hoped for, it should be an improvement over most network coverage. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was eventually prevailed upon to provide finishing funds for **Mandela**, produced by Peter Davis and the National Black Programming Consortium. More immediately, PBS will be presenting a special week of programming beginning Sunday evening, September 29 with our **Allan Boesak: Choosing for Justice**. On Tuesday, they will telecast a film on strategic minerals which we are not familiar called **The Cobalt Connection**. On Wednesday they will broadcast three hours of programming, beginning with a two hour "primer" they have asked WGBH (Boston) to produce, followed by the broadcast of our **Woza Albert!** introduced by Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee. **Capitol Journal** and **Tony Brown's Journal** on Friday will both be devoted to South Africa and **McNeil Lehrer** will be featuring special reports throughout the week.

It is the "primer" we worry about. Apparently the producer at WGBH is Steve Atlas, the executive producer David Fanning, and the line producer Tug Yourgrou. Fanning and Yourgrou are both white South Africans. While certainly they will not present apartheid in a sympathetic light, the real issue is how they will frame the current developments in South Africa and perhaps even more importantly, public debate in this country. Politically, they seem aligned with Prof. Robert Rotberg and all have a great addiction to the notion of "balance," particularly when discussing policy issues.

We are attempting to put together a "media watch" to monitor and critique the show with the results to be presented to the Boards of both PBS and CPB, circulated to critics, and published in a journal such as the Columbia Journalism Review. Those of you interested in participating should contact us for further information.

Additionally, we hope to mid-wife at least one of three new productions which our research indicates would be useful in the coming period: comparing the assumptions behind differing points of view held by the parties debating the divestment issue; a history of U.S. foreign policy towards Africa beginning with

America's first consul in Capetown in 1799; and comparing and contrasting the South African freedom movement to our own civil rights movement through the eyes of two civil rights veterans who travel to South Africa (perhaps inappropriate now). Unfortunately, we have yet to find able producers willing to spend the time necessary to develop and fund any of these projects. We continue, of course, our customary world-wide search for films of excellence and will release new titles as they become available.

Lastly, we were paid a little visit by the IRS recently, their task to challenge our tax-exempt status. To date we have withstood their disputations.