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# What have we gained? What can we do?

## The aftermath of the hunger strike and the future of a movement

by Andrew Levin

The Williams Anti-Apartheid Coalition ended its hunger strike on Thursday for several reasons. First, it had become clear at that time that the trustees would allow the hunger strikers to fast to the point of doing permanent damage to their bodies without making further concessions to the overwhelming campus sentiment favoring divestiture. Second, we had accomplished a great deal in the educational and organizational realms, and we felt it was time to move on to other methods of pressing for full and permanent divestiture. Finally, campus and media attention was focusing increasingly on our tactics rather than on the issues involved. In this article we hope to clear up any confusion about why the hunger strike ended when it did and about where WAAC go from here.

To begin with, let us make it clear that the hunger strike was NOT ended as a result of an agreement between WAAC and the administration on a mutually satisfactory compromise on the fulfillment of WAAC's demands. We are pleased that the trustees have agreed to an open meeting in the spring and that President Chandler has accepted a restructuring of the ACSR providing for direct election to the Committee of faculty and student members by their constituents, assuming both groups prefer direct election to Presidential appointment as a means of selecting ACSR members. (The College Council, for its part has already decided in favor of the democratic route. We hope the faculty follows suit when it meets later this month.) Both of these changes are direct results of the hunger strike, being as they are clear departures from previous college policy.

However, with regard to our first two, more substantive demands, the College's position as outlined by Dean O'Connor in his statement last Thursday remains totally unacceptable. Rather than committing itself to divesting itself of any specific holdings or accepting any reputable outside agency (such as the Arthur D. Little Company) as a legitimate source of information with which to judge corporate employment practices in South Africa, the College merely agreed to a six month time limit for ACSR investigations of corporations which have been criticized for non-compliance with the Sullivan Principles.

We fail to see why the College thinks letters sent in reply to ACSR inquiries by the PR people of these corporations will more likely produce an accurate picture

of their real employment practices than the carefully researched reports of the Arthur D. Little Company, the Investment Research Resource Center, or other monitoring agencies.

With regard to the second demand to stop making deposits in banks which loan money to South Africa, we are pleased to have so distinguished an advocate as Prof. Vince Barnett to attempt to sway the trustees on this issue. But we have seen no movement since 1981, when the trustees backed out of their commitment (made in the face of an April 1980 hunger strike by two WAAC members) to avoid making short term deposits in these banks.

In response to the contention that it would be an administrative nightmare to keep track of all banks extending loans to South Africa, we have said we would settle for withdrawal by the College from the well-known handful of banks which are the major lenders. Perhaps Mr. Barnett can elicit a serious response to this compromise.

No, it wasn't an agreement with the administration which ended the strike, but, conversely, a realization that we could expect no more serious dialogue with College officials before the health of our friends fell into serious danger. We ended the hunger strike because it had yielded tremendous fruit and because with each passing day it drew more attention to itself as a tactic, obscuring

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the fundamental issues of Williams' investment in South Africa in particular and U.S. corporate involvement in South Africa in general. When media people began calling us up to ask what kinds of vitamins the hunger strikers were taking, we knew it was time to call the strike.

In the meantime, we had succeeded in putting divestiture back at the top of this community's agenda and in giving the national and international anti-apartheid movements a boost. This latter, accomplished largely through

national media coverage, was marked by a high level of interest in our story by the South African press and communications of support from the U.N., student, community, and national anti-apartheid and peace groups, and members of the Mass. legislature and the U.S. Congress.

Here at Williams, the gains of the hunger strike were both educational and organizational. An average of 100 students attended daily teach-ins led by members of the faculty all week long; about 200 students (including delegations from Amherst, Hampshire, Harvard, and Wesleyan) heard speakers from all over the Northeast at our informational conference on divestment on Thursday; hundreds of students stopped by our information tables located in the dining halls almost every lunch and dinner to read our fact sheets and to discuss the issues with WAAC representatives; and of course the whole campus followed the debate between the trustees and WAAC, carried on through all-

the spontaneously organized faculty support committee and the successful faculty petition drive (which continues) indicate a greater level of faculty commitment to getting the College's money out of South Africa than we have seen before; and WAAC, which last year consisted of two core members, grew during the hunger strike to become a political organization with eight working committees and upwards of 40 committed members, and with extensive contacts with campus political and religious groups and anti-apartheid groups in communities and colleges throughout the region. Many underclassfolk gained hard political experience by taking on major responsibility during the strike, and the full group has already met several times after the end of the strike to begin mapping a strategy to push for full divestiture this spring.

Thus, the end of the hunger strike is really the beginning of the next chapter.

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campus mailings, WCFM, and the college newspapers. All of this belies the Record's characterization of the hunger strike as an "emotional plea" which was not conducive to "informed, intellectual debate" which is discourse on the trustees' "level."

Not only was the hunger strike a highly rational and carefully considered political act (which isn't to deny that we have a strong emotional commitment to this issue), it also led to a level of serious discussion about the College's relationship to apartheid which wouldn't have been possible on this campus if we hadn't forced it into the limelight.

Williams students know more about the complex range of factors involved in this issue now than they ever have before, and we plan to continue learning and teaching and listening in the hope that the open meeting with the trustees in April will be a milestone in informed student input in the decision-making process of Williams College.

In terms of organization, the hunger strike has begun one of the major political mobilizations seen at Williams in recent years: about 20 campus and local political and religious groups endorsed WAAC's demands, and most of these also endorsed the hunger strike—this includes College Council and the BSU;

and it will be an intensified one of the ongoing struggle (now in its seventh year at Williams) to convince our trustees to divest completely, once and for all, of its holdings in companies doing business in South Africa. We do not call for divestiture so Williams can feel good ("moral masturbation").

Divestiture is an effective political action which lets South Africa know that one of America's most prestigious institutions will no longer participate in the outside economic support without which apartheid could not survive, and which lets Washington know that we, as an ethical member of the community, cast the only vote we have against continued U.S. involvement in South Africa.

Our goal now is to convince those still in doubt in the College community that divestiture is the only step we can take against apartheid, and that it is a step which will not undermine the main responsibility of the trustees: insuring the economic well-being of the college. Towards this end, we will be very active this winter and spring doing economic research, forming an Alumni Anti-Apartheid Committee, and stepping up the campus dialogue on this issue. This Winter Study has been an unusually educational one for WAAC. May we put our lessons to good use.