

462-3478 Martin Legassick

5819 Gregory Ave  
L.A. 38



~~SAFAC~~

SOUTH AFRICA FREEDOM ACTION COMMITTEE

#### WHAT WE HAVE DONE - A PROGRAM OF ACTION

The South Africa Freedom Action Committee was founded in Los Angeles in November 1964 by a small group of South Africans and Americans dismayed by the South African Government's monopoly on the distribution of information about conditions in the Republic, and by general American apathy.

The founding meeting of the Committee agreed that it was necessary to initiate the group with a project combining maximum publicity with minimum expense. A picket of the South African Tourist Corporation in Beverly Hills, one of two such offices in the United States, was chosen as the best means. The week of December 16 was selected to coincide with Human Rights Week in the U.S. and with the anniversary of South Africa's Day of the Covenant, which commemorates the Voortrekkers' defeat of a Zulu army on December 16, 1838.

A picket line alone, however, would have been too unimaginative in this era of the sit-, lie-, and other-in; SAFAC decided on a 90-hour hunger strike as a minimum-risk, maximum-impact gimmick (as we had no money for bail). To increase our impact on Beverly Hills, we constructed a replica of a 90-day detention cell on the back of a borrowed pickup truck. With our hunger striker sitting inside, we parked in front of the Tourist Corp. for parts of the day and evening; at rush hours the truck was driven round the block. A check with local police revealed that sleeping on the streets is frowned upon in Beverly Hills, so the truck was removed during the wee small hours.

We were fortunate in having a competent artist on the Committee to construct the cell and to do posters; the professional quality of these increased public interest, as did the required sombre dress of our picketers. CORE, SMGC, Catholics United for Racial Equality, The African Students' Ass'n. of Southern California, and other groups,

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were notified of the demonstration and their members were asked to participate as individuals. We tried to arrange a roster of picketing times to ensure maintaining a line for the entire ninety hours; we did manage to keep the line for all but a few off-peak hours.

One-page handouts were mimeographed for us by CORE, and we distributed about 2,500 of these, as well as several hundred of the ACOA's South Africa Bulletin.

The mass media, whom we had notified beforehand, provided a fair amount of coverage on the first day, but we found it difficult to get them to follow up their initial stories, which would have been desirable in the case of a hunger strike. The Los Angeles Times and the Herald-Examiner ran short pieces, as did several neighborhood papers. The best coverage was a two-minute interview with the hunger striker on the NBC Los Angeles evening news over television. With local commercial radio, we were less successful, one station commenting adversely on our "professional picketers--one might almost call them mercenaries."

The picket line swelled to about 100 on the last night of the hunger strike after James Baldwin, in response to a SAFAC telegram, encouraged support of our action at a public meeting he was addressing.

The chief gains of the demonstration were contacts with organizations and individuals who participated, and with passersby whose curiosity was transformed into interest. We increased our membership and got ideas for further action. The demonstration inevitably announced our existence as a group, which was useful in extending our contacts further.

The Committee still lacked operating funds: our only resources were collections from members at our (fortunately) frequent meetings. We now had the manpower to do some letter-writing, and to organize something more ambitious which would combine fund-raising with a constant informational aim. Athol Fugard's play, The Flood Knot, was about to open in Los Angeles, and we felt the play had particular relevance to the purposes of the Committee in addition to its fund-raising possibilities. We were able to arrange a benefit performance by renting the entire theatre at a price (\$250) substantially

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below the usual rate (\$325), after protracted negotiations between members of the Committee and Mr. Frank Silvera, the producer.

In the courtyard of the theatre, our artist constructed a large graphic display which has remained as a permanent part of the décor. We sold pamphlets, and in addition distributed with programs a sheet describing conditions in South Africa--using the Government's own statistics and publications to condemn it--and a membership form detailing the origins and aims of SAFAC. These handouts were photo-lithographed: the cost of this was \$2.95 for the first hundred and 50¢ for each subsequent 100. (It therefore pays to get larger numbers and use them for later occasions.)

From the benefit performance we raised about \$300. The normal ticket prices had been \$3.25 and \$4.00, but we reduced most tickets to \$2.50 to encourage students to come, and raised a limited number (50 out of a house of 165) to \$5.00 for those who could afford it.

While this fund-raising project was under way, we were considering further action projects, among them trying to persuade dockworkers to refuse to unload South African cargoes, and stimulating United States entertainers and playwrights to boycott South Africa. The latter project coincided with a similar ACOA scheme, and we used their petition to approach the entertainers. The difficulty is to make personal contact with top-flight people, since they do not seem to answer letters and cannot be reached through their usually unlisted telephones. To date, in fact, we have not had much success with this but with more publicity and more time we are hopeful of achieving something.

One of the most fruitful areas of our own activity has been in radio. Listener-sponsored stations and university broadcasting stations have been most cooperative, although the demonstration later brought an interview of the hunger striker with a syndicated radio personality; this half-hour interview was broadcast over 250 stations throughout the United States and Canada. Members of SAFAC have also written and narrated a series of broadcasts on South Africa for the University of Southern California

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station. Broadcasts were titled: "Contrasts of South Africa", "South Africa's Rule of Violence", "The Bantustan Plan: Fragmentation of a Nation". We have continually tried to stress the extent of American involvement, and the type of critical activity needed from the American people. Because the FCC requires each station to schedule a certain proportion of public affairs broadcasting, commercial stations make use of the USC distribution network. Our programs thus went out over ten Southern California stations.

A branch committee of SAFAC formed at UCLA has recently been partially responsible for organizing a Sharpeville Week campaign. UCLA's SAFAC worked on an ad hoc committee together with World University Service and local campus groups such as B'nai B'rith-Hillel, the Young Democrats, and the university's Christian fellowships; the whole campaign was under the auspices of USNSA's national Sharpeville Week. Funds collected from programs, dances, and literature/button sales are to go to World University Service. SAFAC's purpose in participating is to inform students and to recruit membership among them--and hopefully, to draw some local citizens to hear qualified persons discuss South Africa. The week included noon-hour lectures (one of which was attended by 300 students who heard Newsweek correspondent John Nugent describe his expulsion from South Africa), a church service of intercession for Sharpeville and Selma, and a table on campus. A photographic display was arranged at the table, from which pamphlets and "SAFAC Mourns Sharpeville" buttons (25¢) were sold; the buttons cost SAFAC \$25.00 for 300. SAFAC also organized on Saturday, March 20, a picket of Rexall Drug Stores Home Office in Beverly Hills; a report on this is not available yet.

KPFK, the listener-sponsored Pacific Radio station in Los Angeles, is also recording a panel discussion which SAFAC organized for Sharpeville Week: the discussion, entitled "The Feasibility of Sanction Against South Africa" has a panel including Professor Rupert Emerson, Dr. Massell of the Rand Corporation, Dr. Leo Kuper (South African Professor of Sociology at UCLA), and Dr. Michael Lofchie (Professor of Political Science at UCLA). KPFK also allowed us one and one-half hours of station time on Sharpeville Day, for which we wrote a program dramatizing the events and consequences of Sharpeville. Dubs of all SAFAC's broadcasts are available from the Committee on receipt of a blank tape.

Apart from these public projects, members of the Committee have

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have approached individuals in Los Angeles who might be sympathetic to SAFAC's aims, and in particular those who might sympathize in a concrete financial form. We have also sent speakers to meetings of church groups, high school groups, and political groups such as the Americans for Democratic Action. Progress is slow because of our lack of time and manpower; our active members are working people or graduate students. We have begun to enroll supporting members at a fee of \$6.00 per annum and \$2.00 per annum for students.

We offer these suggestions in such minute detail to aid those people who may be stimulated by the Conference to begin local campaigns of concrete education and action.

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South Africa Freedom Action Committee  
1433 $\frac{1}{2}$  Federal Avenue  
Los Angeles

Martin Legassick  
Ren Magubane  
Judy Dollenmayer  
Kris Kleinbauer