COUNTER-VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL CHANGE
IN SOUTH AFRICA

This paper grows out of the experience of the Southern Africa Study Seminar sponsored by the National Student Christian Federation during the summer, 1966. After two months of travel, study, and discussion, a sub-committee of the Seminar presents this brief analysis for serious consideration by those persons in the United States, especially within the churches and the student Christian movements, who are concerned for social change in South Africa.

The purpose of the paper is four-fold:
1. To show the necessity for counter-violence to bring about effective social change in the South African apartheid system; and to show why non-violent methods, including economic sanctions, have and will fail to bring this change.
2. To show why the South African situation is a threat to world peace.
3. To explore an alternative course for the United States.
4. To give some reflections on a Christian's attitude toward violent social change in the context of South Africa.

It is assumed that the facts and history of apartheid are known to the reader. They are easily available through other sources. It is also assumed that the reader is familiar with the nature of U.S. investments in South Africa, and the laissez-faire attitude of the U.S. government toward the actions of private companies. The actions of the United Nations condemning apartheid represent the opinions of most of the world toward this system of racial separation. U.N. studies have shown that the "separato development" plan, the Bantustan policy, advocated by the Afrikaner nationalist government will not work, now or in the future, because of the economic interdependence of the whites and non-whites.

The present system of apartheid ensures a position of power and privilege for a small white minority, and is a system which subordinates and frustrates the great majority of the non-white South African population. The aspirations of the non-whites are the same as those which have inspired the other African states toward independence: the creation and stabilization of a social order that will provide the maximum of free choice and self-determination for all citizens, regardless of wealth or poverty, race or language.

The Organization for African Unity is the expression of those aspirations. The independent states of the O.A.U. are united in their hatred of the racially oppressive systems which still dominate Southern Africa. They are determined to liberate their fellow Africans from the oppressions of a white minority. While there are yet contradictions between the principles espoused and the actions taken by these newly independent states, there is unity in the opinion that the Southern Africa situation (including Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa) can be solved only with the help of outside powers and that violence is inevitable. The explosive Southern Africa complex is seen by the rest of Africa as a threat to world peace, potentially a racial war, and her leaders cannot understand the failure of the so-called "democratic," "peace-loving" countries of the West to see the impending crisis and to act upon it. The system of apartheid has been repeatedly condemned as inhuman and socially unjust by the U.N., church organizations, and most sovereign states, including the U.S.A. However, the time for moralizing and statements is over. The African people want action. The task is to find effective means of action, from within and from outside of South Africa, which will bring the necessary changes in the social, economic, and political system, in order to establish racial justice, self-determination, an egalitarian distribution of wealth, and ultimately racial harmony.
The Failure of Non-Violent Methods of Social Change

Several non-violent methods for effecting change in South Africa have been attempted by different groups during the past 50 years. In each case these methods have failed.

1. Non-Violent Resistance has been attempted by non-whites within South Africa. The aim was to change the apartheid system by changing the minds of the whites in power. The 50 year old African National Congress, now banned in South Africa, has been the organizational expression of this resistance. It was hoped that through the withdrawal of labor and through civil disobedience against unjust laws, the white power structure would be forced to change. Hundreds have suffered imprisonment or death through the non-violent campaigns. Yet, there has been no negotiated settlement of grievances. In fact, the apartheid system has become increasingly severe and entrenched. Today it is very difficult, if not impossible, to organize a resistance movement. The whites have a tight web of informers, and those who are suspected of trying to challenge or change the system are quickly banned or imprisoned. (In 1963, a total of 67,637 Africans - 1 out of every 236 - were held in jail.) The leadership of the African resistance movement has been silenced or forced to leave the country. The people live in constant fear of the whites, and of their own people who, for a few pieces of silver, will sell their own brothers to the mercy of the Special Branch.

2. Economic Development is the position taken, implicitly, by the countries with large investments in South Africa, primarily the USA and UK. Explicitly, this position is expressed by private investors who have injected large capital investments into the developing industries and mines. Those men justify their actions to the world and to themselves by asserting that investments from outside will be a "liberalizing force" which will bring revolutionary change. However, they rarely mention that their profit of 27%, the highest return in the world, depends upon the continuation of the apartheid system, which insures a large African labor supply at the cheapest wages with the fewest benefits. It is a recognized fact that USA and UK investments, which have increased steadily since the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, help to support the Afrikaner nationalist regime. This position has failed to be a liberalizing force. If it had succeeded in any way, the present South African government would not be so anxious to win friends and capital investments from the USA and UK.

3. Economic Sanctions is the position advocated by the other African countries, and supported by many sympathetic friends in the USA. While admitting that sanctions would hurt the African population first, this position assumes that by undercutting the economic base of the country the prevailing government would be forced to negotiate a political settlement of a more democratic nature. This is essentially a non-violent tactic, which would need the co-operation of all countries to be effective. In addition to a ban on trade with South Africa, it would include withdrawal of all capital investments, private and public, and possibly a blockade of South African ports. (Prime Minister Wilson has said that an oil embargo would be equivalent to a declaration of war.) Sanctions may be considered a "violent" tactic.

Why Sanctions Will Fail

Since sanctions are advocated by many concerned people in the United States, especially among those who look for a solution which will be non-violent, causing the least amount of bloodshed and physical destruction of the country, it is necessary to show why the "theory" of sanctions is unrealistic and will not bring about the desired change in South Africa. To continue to wish on this pipe dream is to delude oneself and to give false hope to the African people. It can be argued that
because sanctions have not yet been tried, it is premature to say sanctions will fail. It is our position, however, that sanctions will, in fact, never be tried. The sanctions theory will not work for the following reasons:

1. South Africa is too profitable for investors. The profit motive, not moral principles, is what determines corporate investments. South Africa is the most profitable place to invest. Companies are interested primarily in their returns, and not in the socio-political morality of the country. This is not to say that individual capitalists cannot be moral men. Rather, it is the institutions which they represent that are guided by another set of principles. One cannot expect the same "morality" of institutions as one expects of individuals.

2. While the U.S. economy could absorb the loss of trade and investments (less than 1% of her total world trade), the UK economy could not afford this loss. The US would have to back Britain's economy if mandatory sanctions were imposed. This is highly unlikely and without precedent.

3. If only the major powers were to withdraw, other countries (Japan, Eastern Europe, etc.) would rush in to fill the vacuum. This is what happened shortly after Sharpeville when many companies withdrew trade, and the U.S. and U.K. quickly stopped in to undergird the South African economy with increased investments.

4. The U.S. has a vested interest in keeping the South African economy and government "stable." As long as the present regime is effectively keeping the African population in "control," the US can ignore the situation. In the event of a revolution from within, or a racial war, the US would feel obligated to try to settle the dispute. At the moment, Asia is a higher priority for our government.

5. Other African countries are forced to trade with South Africa, as she is the only country on the continent which can supply many of the vital food and manufactured products needed by the underdeveloped countries to the north. Economically, few countries can afford to cut these trade ties, which is an increasing embarrassment to the governments of the African states which are trying so desperately to act on moral principles.

6. Sanctions have not proved effective in any other situation. The glaring example is Rhodesia. After nine months of sanctions, the Smith rebel regime is even more firmly in power. It is also known that trade is still continuing secretly between Rhodesia and companies in the USA and UK. Supplies from these two countries are easily reaching Rhodesia through South Africa, especially oil.

7. The South African whites are too wealthy and their economy is too self-sufficient for economic sanctions to be effective.

8. The U.N. and the World Court have failed to bring about any change in South Africa, and, in fact, have only made the South African whites more hostile. The black Africans have lost faith in these world organizations, for after several years of pronouncements, studies, and court cases, they have taken no effective action against apartheid.

Counter-Violence as a Means of Social Change

Few people within Africa need to be convinced that a violent situation already exists in South Africa. The whites are already at war with the Africans. Since Sharpeville, there has been a tremendous increase in the budget for national defense ($61 million in 1960; $321 million in 1965-66). White men and women
(civilians) are being trained to use guns, and many already have arms in their homes for "protection." The Defense Minister is reported to have said as early as 1959, "You must not think we are arming against an external army - we are not. We are arming to shoot down the black masses."

While there are many non-whites who have been killed by the use of guns, imprisonment, and execution, there are millions more who are being killed in spirit and mind by the oppressive system. And there are many who are not allowed to live a full life because of apartheid. There are children who die unborn or at an early age. (Infant mortality rate among non-whites per 1,000 births in 1962 was above 200, whereas it was only 27 among whites). The average life expectancy for non-white males is 36 years; for white males, 70 years. There are many ways to kill a man and to destroy a nation. The system of apartheid, like a vampire, is slowly sapping the life blood out of the African people who form a majority of the population there (over 4 to 1 population ratio of non-whites to whites).

With the failure of non-violent resistance, recognized several years ago by the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, the South Africans themselves have decided on the necessity for a violent response. There have been numerous incidents of planned sabotage since 1961. This is just a forerunner of what is to come unless some progress can be made. It is clear now that the whites will have to pay for their mistakes of the past, perpetuated in the present. The unjust will pay for their sins and for the sins of their fathers. The black leaders of Southern Africa speak for their people:

"People here in the United States ask: Are there any chances of violence in South Africa? What do they mean? There is already violence in South Africa. Sharpoville is only one case in several hundred. Perhaps this dual standard by which the fact of violence is judged arises in part because white Americans have believed for so many, many years that black people are a different breed of humans and are not expected to react as other human beings. But let me assure these people that when the whites shoot us, beat us, trample us under their boots, we will react. It is, therefore, inevitable...that Africans should begin shooting back."

In responding to this situation of violence, the United States should realize its own responsibility for the failure of non-violent methods.

"If there is an explosion, it will be because the world outside, and especially the United States, permitted non-violence to fail. If the thrust is anti-Western, it will be because the present white governments sustained themselves by Western indulgence. If it is anti-white, it will be because an official white racism has infected an entire society and because white men failed for so many years to oppose convincingly that which is anti-black. As the situation is developing, both things are likely to happen. Nothing within South Africa itself can change the somber prognosis." (Emphasis added.)

Men cannot fight without arms. If it is impossible to get support from the "democratic" countries (USA, UK, etc.), it is likely that the Africans will turn to those countries who are sympathetic to revolutionary social change, and who, for whatever motives, see the South African situation as a critical frontier for revolution.

It is not the intention of this analysis to fall into the trap of seeing every conflict in terms of the ideological struggle between communism and capitalism, between East and West. It is our opinion that the South African struggle is primarily a struggle for humanization, and for political and economic freedom. The
danger is, however, that the governments of the West will see this struggle only through preconceived ideological glasses. This is the danger with which we must deal.

South Africa Is a Threat to World Peace

This explosive situation is a threat to world peace because it may draw into conflict the major military powers. The danger expressed above is a real one, especially given the present foreign policy of the United States and the conflict with China.

What will be the response of the USA to a violent revolution in South Africa? Either the USA will recognize the situation for what it is, the strong desire of 13 million people to be free from the yoke of slavery, and thus give support to this struggle for humanity and justice; or the U.S.A. will face the possibility of military intervention on the side of the white regime in order to protect her investments and to oppose a revolution which may be supported by the Communist countries. Here are the beginnings of a global conflict and a racial war. Military aid is most likely to be forthcoming from China. However, the Africans do not want the Chinese ideology; they want only their weapons; they do not want yellow domination to replace white domination. Yet, by refusing to recognize the situation and by refusing to give aid (in the form of sanctions or military support) to the Africans, the U.S. is in fact pushing the Africans toward the only sympathetic source of help.

If the USA intervenes in South Africa, it will be in her own "interests." The bitter experiences of the Dominican Republic and Vietnam indicate that the USA is ready to suppress revolution anywhere in the world, especially if her economic investments are endangered (Dominican Republic) or her "national security" is threatened by Communism (Vietnam). If the USA has been implicitly supporting the white apartheid regime even in the face of adverse world opinion, it is quite likely that she will intervene directly on the side of the whites should an all-out war develop in Southern Africa. Add to this the white racial identity, and intervention seems even more probable.

The results of US intervention would be disastrous for both the US and the South Africans. For the US:

1. Investments in South Africa would be greatly damaged and possibly lost forever, especially in the event of a Communist "take-over."
2. There would be total alienation of the whole African continent from the West and its democracy. Investments in other countries would also be lost.
3. Even though Africa wishes to be non-aligned in the ideological struggle between East and West, she would be forced to move closer to the Communist countries.
4. The image of the USA as the advocate of freedom and justice would be forever smashed in the eyes of the rest of the world. The USA would be identified with the powers of colonialism and neo-colonialism.
5. Such action would turn the racial tensions within the USA into a civil war of whites and Negroes, a war which is already boiling beneath the surface in the urban ghettos.
6. A small war could escalate into a nuclear war which would endanger the future of the whole world.

U.S. military intervention on the side of the white regime would be disastrous for the Africans. Faced with the technologically advanced military complex of the USA, combined with the South African army and air force, the African revolutionaries would not stand a chance of being successful, even if supported with arms and men
from outside. The terrain of South Africa makes guerilla fighting extremely difficult, and the segregation of Africans into townships and Bantustans makes them easy target for the enemy. The logistics of a counter-violence campaign from within South Africa are uncertain, and beyond the scope of this discussion. However, the Africans will have no chance of succeeding in their freedom struggle if the Afrikaner nationalists are aided with superior weaponry from the West.

Alternativo Course for the United States

The aim of our position is that a situation must be created in which counter-violence can effectively bring about social change in South Africa with the least amount of destruction of human life and natural resources. In light of the above analysis, to bring about effective change it is necessary to prevent US intervention on the side of the whites.

Ideally, we might hope that the US would give direct aid to the South African freedom fighters (money, arms, training). However, this is unrealistic given the present U.S. policy toward South Africa. Therefore, we would urge individuals and private organizations within the US to give this kind of direct assistance to the freedom struggle.

Realistically, we would advocate the following actions, the primary goal of which is to prevent US military intervention which would only cancel out the efforts of the Africans:

1. Continue and increase the educational program about South Africa for the American public. Stress the responsibility of the U.S. for maintaining apartheid, for the failure of non-violent resistance, for the present situation of violence, for the inevitable civil war, and for helping to create a threat to world peace.

2. Continue to work for sanctions and economic disengagement at every level, putting pressure on U.S. companies and banks involved in South Africa through boycotts, demonstrations, and publicity. We have no illusions that sanctions will ever be applied, nor if applied, that sanctions alone would change the situation within South Africa. We see the sanctions tactic as useful in three ways:
   a. to educate public opinion in the U.S. not only for the present, but more importantly, for the future;
   b. to prepare the situation within South Africa for effective use of counter-violence;
   c. to raise the moral and economic issues for American businessmen (can they afford a civil war, or a Communist take-over?).

3. Continue to work for U.N. intervention, direct action, and not more pronouncements.

Can a Christian Support Counter-Violence as a Means of Social Change?

Our answer to this question is yes; a Christian can support a position of counter-violence if the goal of that action is to bring about a more human social structure in which men, women, and children of all races are free from fear, ignorance, poverty, and oppression. Ultimately, the goal is reconciliation between men. However, reconciliation cannot come about until the conflict has been brought into the open. The cancer must be dealt with at its roots. The Christian must understand that by not recognizing the violent situation which already exists in South Africa, he is, in fact, supporting the violence of the whites and the death of the Africans.
It is said that by supporting a position of violence, we are condemning both whites and non-whites to martyrdom. Therefore, it is argued, a Christian cannot support the use of violence for his brother. It is for those within South Africa to decide how they will live and die. This is a valid argument, and it has been our belief that those within South Africa, both whites and non-whites, have already decided on a path of violence.

As Christians we see the situation in South Africa primarily as a struggle for human life and dignity. The present regime has a dehumanizing effect on all the citizens of South Africa, both white and non-white. Those deprived of political freedom and economic opportunity suffer physically and spiritually. Those who cause this deprivation enjoy only a false freedom and security: their lives are directed by fear; their rationale for existence vitiated by guilt and an obsession with self-justification. In their desperate attempts for self-preservation, whites are, in fact, signing their own death warrant.

As Christians we should be free from the obsession to see every social or political revolution in terms of an ideological struggle between East and West, between Communism and Capitalism. At present, the Afrikaner nationalist government interprets any attempt to change the social system as a "communist threat." Is it possible that the U.S. will fall for this myth too? We believe it is quite possible, and almost inevitable if aid is forthcoming from non-Western countries. If those are the only grounds on which the US government and businesses can be convinced that the situation is a threat to world peace, then we must be willing to argue on these grounds. But let us remember that the basic desire of the Africans is freedom, not a new ideological master.

Even as we support the Africans who have chosen the method of counter-violence, as Christians we stand with them under the judgment "Thou Shalt Not Kill." We confess that a peaceful way may have been possible at one time, but due to our own blindness that crucial time has now passed. Certain paths are no longer open. The task now is to try to prevent an even larger, global war between whites and non-whites, between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

The haves are those people who share the affluence of the developed countries, who have access to political and economic power, education, health, adequate food, technological skills, and weaponry. The majority of those people are white. The have-nots are those people who have no share in the world's wealth, who are deprived of political and economic power, who lack education, health, adequate food, skills, and arms. They are mostly non-white. The people with nuclear powers are an increasing threat of domination and annihilation to those without this power.

South Africa is the most glaring example of a situation which is developing on a global scale - a few rich men are hoarding the wealth at the expense of the many. This situation calls for radical action on the part of Christians and other men who share the same concern for humanity. The wealth of the earth, and life itself, is a gift. It is the use of these gifts for which we are responsible.