The Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa (COBLSA) has been without a national coordinator since June 1980. As a result, although local COBLSA affiliates around the U.S. have continued campaign activities, the Campaign as a whole has suffered from a lack of coordination, of joint strategizing, and of sharing of recent information on activities and relevant banking developments. A new national coordinator will begin to work out of Washington, D.C. beginning in May 1981.

Below is a brief summary of some of the local activities undertaken by COBLSA affiliates recently. Taken together, they suggest some promising directions for broadening the Campaign against bank loans through linking up with groups protesting banks' red-lining of poor neighborhoods, banks' poor affirmative action policies or union-busting practices, and banks' subsidizing of nuclear energy. In the wake of Reagan Administration policies in these areas, broad coalitions have been forming around the country to protest federal cutbacks and other Reagan policies which give greater power and profits to banks and corporations at the expense of poor and minority communities, labor unions, and consumers of energy. They represent an array of constituencies which are increasingly aware of the power of banks and corporations over their everyday lives and of how the international lending policies of these banks are the reverse side of what these banks do at home. In making the connections between banks' support for Apartheid and their refusal to invest in job-creating ventures in poor communities at home, the Campaign is beginning to develop more potential for bringing the issue of bank loans to South Africa into the agenda of more grassroots coalitions and movements.

Following the summary of local activities is a list of questions which local affiliates hope will be taken up in whole or in part at this seminar.

BOSTON, MASS.

The Boston Coalition for the Liberation of Southern Africa (BCLSA) was part of a coalition of citizens groups which protested outside the shareholders' meeting of First National Bank of Boston on March 26. The joint action included the Campaign for Nuclear Divestment (a splitoff from the Clamshell Alliance protesting 1st National's involvement in funding the Seabrook, NH nuclear facility); the Mass. Urban Reinvestment Advisory Group (MURAG; protesting the bank's red-lining policies); STOP (a tenants' group protesting lack of investment in low-income communities); 9 to 5 (a women's clerical workers' group protesting 1st National's involvement in setting clerical wages at minimum levels); and Mass. Divest (a state-wide group focussing on pension fund divestment from banks & corporations active in S.A.). Media
coverage was fairly good. (Business page of daily paper; several local radio programs and one TV station). Several people spoke inside the meeting and specifically opposed 1st National's involvement in financing trade with So. Africa. The President of 1st National said the bank was financing trade between Brazil and So. Africa; BCLSA wants to learn about what kind of trade (in weapons? vehicles? etc.) is being financed through Brazil. BCLSA noted, as well, that the Community Reinvestment Act (requiring banks planning to expand branches to document to the Comptroller of the Currency how well they are serving all neighborhoods) had been used to good effect last year in finding out more about the bank's activities, especially when local hearings are held (since they can be used as an organizing vehicle).

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The D.C. Bank Campaign was able to use the CRA (described above) to confront Riggs Bank officials in public debate at a hearing about Riggs' compliance with the CRA before the Comptroller of the Currency, which regulates commercial banks in Washington, D.C. Over 100 people and 12 community groups (representing senior citizens and housing groups as well as merchant associations) came to the November 12 meeting to challenge Riggs' assertions that it was meeting the credit needs of Washington, D.C.'s low and moderate-income residents. Testimony focused on Riggs' failure to provide basic community services (including distribution of food stamps) as well as their lending policies to Chile and South Africa.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Clergy & Laity Concerned and 8th Day Center for Justice (part of the Chicago Coalition on Southern Africa) recently held a meeting with Continental Bank officials March 25. The meeting testified to the success over the past few years of pressure by churches and other groups at the annual shareholders' meetings, when an officer noted that only with loans to South Africa do loan decisions have to be approved by their Board and by their President "because of all the questions you've been asking all these years". They said that currently they have no loan amount outstanding to governmental agencies in South Africa. In 1980 Continental Bank did make foreign exchange loans for capital goods. During the meeting, they noted "Is there some other way we can not be bothered each year at the shareholder meeting?" The bank wants to hold open the door for loan possibilities which support social projects. Negotiations are continuing.

The Chicago Coalition on Southern Africa has been meeting since November with staff of the National Training and Information Center (the technical assistance arm of the National People's Action, a broad coalition of community activist groups around the country) to see if a common strategy can be developed to target the banks from a variety of angles (loans to South Africa; red-lining activities; refusal to invest funds in ways that create jobs in local neighborhoods or keep Illinois plants from closing or relocating; role of the banks in creating Chicago's school fiscal crisis). A number of fact sheets have been developed for use in community meetings linking overseas loan activities to local bank practices. Discussions have begun on how to jointly target the American Bankers Association meeting in San Francisco this October. A member of CCSA spoke at a workshop at NPA's national conference in Baltimore, Md. (about 2000 attendees from around the country; about 150 people attended the workshop on Employment Problems).

WEST COAST

Top Banking on Apartheid has continued to act as a resource for local groups
and more recently is working with the Northern California Center for Corporate Responsibility in targeting work with local parishes. Local groups have produced a Packet of materials specifically geared to religious groups. They are working through the Northern California Ecumenical Council to obtain an intern for the Human Rights Department that would link up work on South Africa, Chile, Nicaragua, North America, and the Death Penalty. Focus seems to be less on withdrawal days and more on education around alternative investments (including initiatives in Los Angeles, Fresno and several northern California towns). Bank of America is considering funding housing nr. Alexandria.

In Oregon, focus has been less on banks and more on state legislation that would take state funds out of companies active in South Africa. This is because their local banks don't have very visible loan links to South Africa any more (although U.S. National Bank, which committed itself to divesting itself of stock in PEFCO, now says it's been unable to find other institutions to buy the stock). Local groups in Portland, Eugene, Salem and elsewhere have worked with the Oregonians for Responsible State Investment on this campaign. They feel very dependent on groups like ACOA and ICCR for the basic research on what banks are lending.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

In touching base with a few of the local affiliates in preparation for this Seminar, several touched on issues that they would like to see explored or better researched. These include:

- tactics of European groups in their campaigns; how do they organize?
- Do European groups have information on how US banks are using their Eurodollars and European affiliates to make loans with less visibility (e.g. Wells Fargo and its UK branch); how can this information be researched and shared?
- new loans from European banks (which might enable us to target their affiliates here)
- So. Africa's role as a Uranium producer and salesman of energy technology (esp. any information on uranium that might be coming to the US)
- What information is available on banks financing trade with So. Africa? How is this researched locally? internationally? Specifically, what trade exists between Brazil and So. Africa?
- what are the most recent statements by liberation movements and by others from within South Africa on bank loans?
- would an international sanctions campaign (and local groups' support for such a campaign) be more effective than a bank loan campaign in each country's strategy? What about UN petition campaign?
- Need for a research guide on how to research banks in your area. What questions to ask? etc.
- More information on trade financing & Citibank loan.
- criteria used in other countries for loans to SA (i.e. how define majority rule?)
- information on withdrawals by international agencies, org'ns
- Re Zimbabwe parallel: did sanctions work? How? (needed as ammunition in debates with bank officials)

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