Introduction

In December, 1976, the Boston Coalition for the Liberation of Southern Africa received a grant of $900.00 from the Haymarket People's Fund. The grant was administered as a special project of the Boston-Cambridge Ministries in Higher Education and was intended to support activities that raised the issues of United States involvement in Southern Africa among working class and community constituencies in the Boston area. After a year, the Coalition has accomplished many goals and has become well-established as an information clearing-house and mobilizing group, and the level of activity in opposition to U.S. support for the white minority regimes has increased dramatically. Obviously, much of the reason for this increased activity is people's recognition of the critical juncture reached in the struggle of the people of Southern Africa in the past year. But the Coalition also takes credit for some part in raising consciousness in the Boston area and wishes to thank the Haymarket People's Fund for providing financial assistance for our work.

Chronology of events

In the Winter of 1977, much of the activity of the Coalition was focused on the sale of the Krugerrand (South African gold coin) by the Merrill Lynch brokerage house. After several attempts to arrange a meeting with Merrill Lynch representatives to express our outrage at this shameless support of the apartheid regime (see Appendix), the Coalition called a demonstration with other anti-imperialist groups. At the same time, members of the Coalition were meeting with community groups and showing the film, "Last Grave at Dimbaza." A representative of the Coalition participated in planning a conference on Boston's Fiscal Crisis; it was held at the Quincy School in Chinatown (Boston) and focused on continuing work to expose the role of the banks, particularly First National Bank of Boston, in helping to create and then reaping windfall profits from the city's fiscal crisis. The Coalition representative pointed out the First National Bank's (FNBB) role in supporting the apartheid regime in South Africa.

In the Spring of 1977, the Coalition participated in a conference called by the American Friends Service Committee on Big Business and U.S. Foreign Policy. Representatives of the African National Congress of South Africa spoke at the Coalition's workshop at the conference. A mobilization calling for an end to racism from Boston to South Africa was called for April 30, 1977. The Coalition, along with Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF), African Students and Workers for African Liberation (ASWAL), Eritreans for Liberation in North America, and the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC), sponsored the march and rally at the Boston Common and Arlington St. Church. Over eight hundred people turned out for the most successful anti-racist rally of the year. A threatened counter-march called by the South Boston Marshalls did not materialize in the face of the size of the rally. Also in the Spring, the Coalition's campaign against the First National Bank of Boston got underway. Meetings were held with church representatives from several Protestant denominations and the Black Ecumenical group in the City; a contact with the Jamaica Plain Tenants Action Group flowered into a demonstration at the local branch of the FNBB and participation in a picket line at the FNBB main office on June 16, the anniversary of the Soweto uprising in South Africa. Subsequently, a meeting with the Vice President of FNBB revealed that the bank had no intention of withdrawing its support of the South African regime and U.S. corporations doing business there.
In the Summer of 1977, the Coalition embarked on a study program for members and representatives of groups with whom we work closely. Some of the study sessions were conducted by ANC members and focused on the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. The Coalition received donations from the Hedge School, Resist and other individuals to continue its work; a slide show was produced by Packard Manse which featured the campaign and demonstration against the FNBB. Coalition representatives met with the People's Alliance and the Eritrean Liberation Support Committee to discuss the nature of our work and its relevance to other progressive groups in the area. Shoes and clothing were collected at several locations in Boston to be sent to Patriotic Front forces in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. A contact with the Clamshell Alliance produced a disclosure that a Massachusetts based corporation was providing material support for the development of a nuclear power plant in South Africa.

In the Fall of 1977, the pace of events picked up rapidly. Students at several Massachusetts colleges and universities, notably U.Mass - Amherst, B.U., Brandeis and Harvard raised the issue of disinvesting university stock in corporations that do business in or otherwise support the South African regime. Coalition members either participated directly or gave support to these activities, while at the same time we co-sponsored a talk by the noted Australian correspondent Wilfred Burchett. A hopeful new development came on the heels of a speaking tour by a representative of the South African Congress of Trade Unions in the Boston area. A Field Representative of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union (UE) attended a Coalition meeting and beginning plans were made to develop a trade union solidarity committee in the Boston area.

After the dramatic death and protest of the police murder of Steven Biko in South Africa, a group of Black media people in Boston formed the Steve Biko Memorial Committee. The Coalition worked with this committee on a picket and demonstration at the National Association of Broadcasters' meeting in Boston; the purpose of the action was to protest the advertising of the Krugerrand in Boston newspapers and on TV. WBZ-TV was the target of one demonstration organized by the Coalition. A partial success was achieved when, after repeated demonstrations, the TV stations and most of the newspapers stopped carrying the ads and several of the coin shops stopped selling the gold coins. Throughout, African National Congress members spoke at press conferences and on Black media shows about the quickening pace of repression in South Africa.

The other major event of the Fall was a march and rally to protest U.S. support of apartheid held at the Church of the Covenant on December 10. This was part of a national mobilization and was remarkable in that five hundred people came out on a windy, sub-freezing day. Participants in the event included the Coalition, YAWF, ANC, Steve Biko Memorial Committee, and the Winnie Mandela Solidarity Coalition. (Two Coalition members are formally part of the latter group, a predominantly Black organization which formed and sponsored a forum in Boston this Fall.) This event, about which we have some criticisms and self-criticisms, received quite widespread coverage in the local and national progressive news media.

Conclusion

The Coalition has had a good year in that our list of contacts and recipients of mailings has steadily increased. At least two new community groups (in Jamaica Plain and Mission Hill) have started working of Southern Africa solidarity work, the FNBB campaign has received some attention, a trade union solidarity group is in its beginning stages; church groups have become active and several new groups in the Black community and on campuses have taken up support work for the African liberation struggle. We are making plans to set up an office in the next year. Events in South Africa have shown the clear intention of the apartheid regime to hold out to the bitter end - our work will not stop until that end has been reached.