DISCUSSION PAPER

Proposals for March 21 National Action on the Bank Loan Campaign

Prepared for the March 3-4, 1979 national meeting of the Bank Loan Campaign by Carole Collins, Alternate Delegate, Midwest Region, BLC

Introduction

Last August in Chicago, the national Bank Loan Campaign (BLC) decided to work toward three mass regional mobilizations (in the East, Midwest and West) to be held on or around Sharpeville Day, March 21, 1979 and to be focussed in whole or in part on the BLC. Local groups were also urged to demonstrate their solidarity with the BLCs in Canada and Europe through some sort of action on a day to be selected in the fall (December 1st was finally selected).

In the following, I want to explore what progress has been made in accomplishing these tasks, where problems have developed and why, and make some immediate and longer-term suggestions for action. The following is based partly on discussions in January 1979 with Carolyn Long, Chris Root and Ted Lockwood in Washington, D.C.; I take personal responsibility, however, for the observations, analysis and proposals below. (I also criticize myself strongly for the lateness of this document, which has contributed to hindering the BLC in dealing with this topic as early as it should have.)

Progress toward regional mobilizations:

It is very difficult to assess progress on regional mobilization for a national day of action focussed on the Bank Loan Campaign at this point, primarily because of several organizational weaknesses and shortcomings:

(a) lack of sustained communication on what chapters have been doing and how well they feel they have been doing it. This was compounded by the loss of Prexy as national coordinator in December 1978 and the lack of an immediate replacement.

(b) inability to hold a national meeting during Nov. 1978-Jan. 1979, which represented a crucial time for any joint planning to be done for spring mobilizations. Thus, as a national organization, the BLC lacks a unified approach to:
   (1) the overall political/content of the proposed mobilizations (programmatic strategy)
   (2) how such mobilizations could be brought about (organizational strategy)

(c) lack of collective assessment of the success or failure of recent BLC activities (especially actions on December 1st, 1978 and the $BOA California campaign of November 1978). This is a high priority for the next BLC meeting.
Because of the above, it does not seem realistic to assume that the BLC will play a leading role in initiating mass mobilizations for this March, though local chapters may be playing strong roles in more local mobilizations. However, several questions remain which need to be answered:

* What can the BLC accomplish in relation to local Sharpeville Day commemorations? (or during the alternate dates of April 4-11, selected as the national week of action against Apartheid by regional student coalitions)

* What should we be working toward in the months following March 21st? How can regional mass mobilizations be achieved in the future?

Immediate proposals for BLC action around Sharpeville Day (March 21/April 4-11)

The BLC needs to develop a more visible and unified national presence, such that chapters are perceived as part of a national campaign irregardless of the type or extent or diversity of their other local activities or work within or outside Coalitions. The following are proposed as feasible accomplishments which would further BLC work and could be achieved by March 21:

(1) development of decision on a name and visual symbol for the BLC at the March national meeting, for use on buttons, posters, stationery.

(2) development of a central core of unified BLC slogans/demands to distinguish the BLC in members' publicity and posters.

(3) coordination of press releases by all member groups on/around Sharpeville Day which would include a "core content" supplemented and modified by local chapters where relevant to their local conditions; such "core content" should include what is happening in other cities. (This proposal implies, to some extent, the development of a 'phone tree' to keep chapters up to date on what is happening as Sharpeville Day approaches.)

Given lack of collective discussion on what the focus of activities should be around that day, suggestions include leafletting bank and corporate targets; picketing at local banks involved in loans to South Africa; walking tours of bank/corporate supporters of Apartheid in your city; demonstrations/'jam-ins' at local banks (coupled with withdrawals of funds where feasible); and teach-ins on the banks and the role they play domestically and internationally (such as NY-COBLSA is planning for late February).

Conditions for success of regional mass mobilizations:

The key word here is mass. To successfully mobilize substantial numbers of grassroots folks on a regional basis to support the BLC, we need to tackle the following questions:

(1) Programmatic strategy: What do we want to accomplish with such regional mobilizations? Do we have 'facilitating' goals or ultimate goals we want to meet
with such mobilizations and which are primary or secondary?

(The goals of such mobilizations might include any of the following: involve new types or significant numbers of groups/constituencies in the mobilization; achieve a certain level of withdrawal of funds by the date of the mobilization; achieve greater publicity and indirect pressure on banks and corporations and politicians; catalyze grassroots work at the local level to achieve citizen input into bank policies or creation of investment alternatives to investing in Apartheid; focus on the bank loan campaign or on southern Africa issues generally. Which goal is defined as primary, however, will affect how such mobilizations are planned, executed and assessed.)

Two aspects of any programmatic strategy must be dealt with more coherently;
(1) what other formulations of southern Africa issues, or focuses, do we see as compatible/incompatible with the BLC (i.e. what programmatic limits to set for these mobilizations); and
(2) what measurable objectives can we define and assess our effectiveness against. (This is essential to measure how far we've come and how far we've still got to go. An in-depth discussion of the withdrawal tactic vs. other tactics and how they advance our overall BLC goals, as proposed in the Sept. 1978 BLC memo, would help begin this process.)

(2) Organizational strategy: How are we going to 'mobilize the masses'? How can we broaden our racial and (esp. working) class constituencies? How can we, in the process as well as content of our work, bring about such broadening of our base and the southern Africa solidarity movement generally? What tactics work best in generating mass support for BLC goals?

In August, the BLC defined work with the following specific constituencies as of high priority in the coming months:
* local churches whose national church bodies have verbally supported the BLC but not acted on that support;
* local unions whose national or international unions have verbally supported the BLC but not withdrawn their accounts from banks investing in Apartheid;
* student groups, via BLC participation in regional student conferences and joint targetting of a local bank for coordinated student/community action; and
* black and other minority communities via interlinking of domestic and international issues (e.g. racism; redlining) more closely and development of materials in Spanish.

The BLC, however, needs to be clear on how national Days of Action, or mass mobilizations, will contribute to working closer with these constituencies and how any contradictions in working with organized groups within these constituencies (e.g. sectarian struggles within the student coalitions and work with national political organizations) can be handled. The BLC chapters need much more sharing of what tactics have been most useful, based on previous experience.

Implied in the above is the question of how the BLC (or any southern Africa-focused campaign) relates to other mass struggles and issues in this country; do we approach the latter as another interest group that we are lobbying, or do we position ourselves
actively in the midst of their struggles? It is questionable whether the BLC can play any strong role in initiating mass mobilizations unless it does begin to relate on an ongoing basis to other struggles against exploitation, racism, etc. (e.g. The hiring of Jerry Funk of the AFL-CIO's African-American Labor Center as a National Security Council consultant indicates a particular union strategy being pushed as national policy by the US government and the AFL-CIO leadership--the encouragement of "non-political" unions in South Africa as an element of US strategy. But to develop local union challenges to such 'international union' policies will demand a more sustained involvement by the BLC in local union struggles.)

The BLC's role in southern Africa work nationally:

We need to explore more systematically how the BLC could/does/should relate to other southern Africa work. Although local chapters do this in a variety of ways, the issue is whether the BLC nationally can develop a more than ad hoc strategy for doing so, thus bringing greater coordination and breadth to the movement. As a generally non-sectarian national network with a respectable track record, its experience in doing principled and effective work among the above-mentioned constituencies needs to be shared to strengthen southern Africa work generally. The question I am posing is: Can and should the BLC seek to play a unifying role in southern Africa work nationally? Would this detract from its own work and efforts or strengthen them?

Suggestions on altering agenda for March 3-4 meeting and content of reports

The following are suggested so as to tighten up the agenda and facilitate the speed with which we accomplish our tasks:

* Reports on activities in each city should be structured along comparable lines and include the following: activities in the last 6-7 months, including Dec.1st actions; analysis of which were most/least successful; analysis of which tactics were most/least effective (re expanding constituencies, generating media coverage, eliciting withdrawals or bank policy changes); assessment of progress on priority areas of work decided on in August; assessment of the feasibility of a mass mobilization in your region or locality; summary of March 21 plans and any plans beyond then.

* The discussion of goals and objectives should be as concrete as possible and we should seek to make them as measurable/specific as we can, however they are defined. Let's end this meeting with a more defined, joint 'plan of attack.'

* A separate time should be set aside to discuss how to broaden our racial and class constituencies, going beyond the usual reiteration of good intention ('yes, we need to') to the concrete hows -- in our work process, local tactics, overall strategy.

* A separate time (1/2 hour) for a discussion of withdrawal as a tactic (perhaps in the work shop section; it seems a separate issue from "Tactics for Local Work.")