

S.A.G.E.

Recent events have shown clearly that political and economic change in southern Africa is no longer something to be wished for or feared in the distant future. Major changes have taken place or are underway in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa itself. What kind of future these changes will lead to is still unknown, and in some cases, particularly South Africa, it is difficult to be certain of even the nature and direction of the process.

Within this context of change the southern African situation embodies many of the most explosive issues of our time: human rights, land reform and distribution of wealth, access to vital natural resources. For Americans these are not abstractions that can be shrugged off as the problems of distant peoples. They affect the U.S. economy and domestic politics, the increasingly important North-South dialogue, the East-West competition for advance and influence, and the stability and goodwill of a number of independent African states with which we have or need to have good relations.

The varying level of American student involvement in major issues of the day is to some extent a factor of the "temper of the times", to some extent a response to relatively clearcut moral or intellectual challenges, and to some extent unfathomable. When student interest does respond to a moral or intellectual issue, its intensity and effectiveness seem to vary with the immediate relevance of the issue to the students' lives and/or with the availability of means for expressing a position with impact.

Recognizing the importance of the issue we must then analyze our own involvement as students. For many the entire southern African region is seen only in terms of the disinvestment issue. In South Africa there are many people, both blacks and whites, on either side of the disinvestment issue, but there is virtually no one, white Afrikaner Nationalist or Black Soweto revolutionary who will take seriously an American student whose knowledge and interest in the issues begin and end with strong opinions on disinvestment. Protest gestures on American campuses may or may not be appreciated in southern Africa, but what is really wanted are students' minds--minds that can grasp and express several dimensions of issues that range across a spectrum of political and economic concerns. This reflects both blacks' and Afrikaners' respect for education. Just as both groups look at their own students for the knowledge and tenacity to advance their respective causes, so do they look at American students as potentially crucial in influencing American public opinion and policy.

A key premise of the Southern African Group for Education (S.A.G.E.) is that American students interested in southern Africa should take

seriously the criticisms and expectations directed at us by the people with whom we are concerned. The criticisms are that we are superficially and inadequately informed and that our efforts, however wellmeant, are dissipated by confusing our own needs with those of the southern Africans. The hope and the expectation are that we will take the time and make an effort to understand what is going on and then act in accordance with our own principles and enlightened self-interest. There is a general confidence that informed American students will help, not hinder, a process of positive change. American students are not expected to risk their lives or to champion or revile any particular leader or movement in southern Africa. Rather they are expected and invited to educate themselves to help bring about rapid and constructive change. It is suggested that this is the way to establish the "availability of means for expressing a position with impact".

The Southern Africa Group for Education (SAGE) will try to expose Brown students to the myriad political, economic, and social problems of southern Africa. It is the aim of the group to sensitize the Brown community to the current situations in Africa, as southern Africa is a far to important part of the world for students to remain ignorant.

SAGE will sponsor a lecture series where people representing the spectrum of southern African opinion will come to Brown and share their viewpoints. Speaking formats will include monologue, forum, and debate. An essential element of the group is that all points of view will be represented. SAGE hopes to create a "forum of ideas", where people will be able to make up their own minds, after hearing from all sides. As John Stuart Mill said, "The steady habit of correcting and competing (one) opinion by collating it with others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it; for, being cognisant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers--knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties, instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter--he has a right to think his judgement better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process".

SAGE will also have a collection of books and periodicals for students if they want to pursue a specific topic, or if they just want to keep abreast with current African affairs. The SAGE Resource Center will offer the student of southern Africa assistance in obtaining and locating materials which are relevant to their area of study. SAGE will develop study projects for interested students. One of the most exciting aspects of the group is that it has access to various intern programs which would allow a limited number of students to work and study in southern Africa during the summer or during the year. Spending time in Africa would allow an individual to gain first hand knowledge of life in the area, and would certainly be a wonderfully educative experience.

If you are interested in SAGE please print your name, phone number, and P.O. Box number and drop this sheet off in the SAGE mailbox at STUDENT ACTIVITIES IN FAUNCE HOUSE. We will contact you.

NAME _____

PHONE NO. _____

P.O. BOX NO. _____

(tear along this line)