American Committee On Africa
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February 1983 Newsletter

1)ACOA CALLS FOR "DAYS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA SOLIDARITY"

During the last two months significant victories have been achieved with the passage of divestment bills in Massachusetts and Michigan. In order to continue the momentum of these victories and to mobilize support for six African National Congress activists condemned to death in South Africa, the American Committee on Africa has called for DAYS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA SOLIDARITY this spring. The specific dates are March 21 (anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre), April 4 (anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr's death) and April 6 (the date when Solomon Mahlangu, a young ANC freedom fighter, was hanged in 1979).

On these dates we are calling on student and community activists to hold commemorations and rallies calling for: 1) An end to all U.S. collaboration with apartheid 2) Support for the liberation movements 3) Victory to SWAPO in Namibia! Free the ANC Six! 4) Continued mobilization against racism in this country.

In order to maximize support to save the lives of the six condemned ANC activists, we have designated April 6 (the Solomon Mahlangu anniversary) as a National Armband Day. During that day we encourage students and community groups to distribute armbands in their localities and to engage in petitioning efforts focused around the ANC Six. (See Enclosed Info sheet)

In conjunction with the DAYS OF SOLIDARITY we are also initiating a call to student groups nationwide to demand a University policy against contracting with any artist who has travelled to South Africa. The specific demand should be to have written into every school contract a clause barring artists who have performed in South Africa. The call for such a boycott was initiated by activists in South Africa and has gained widespread momentum in the USA. A list of these performers is enclosed in this mailing.

A positive example of culture, the South African play FOR BETTER NOT FOR WORSE, will be on tour during the time of the DAYS OF SOLIDARITY and we encourage those of you who have not done so to contact us about scheduling the play in your locality. The play is an excellent vehicle for consciousness-raising and the playwright, Selaelo Maredi, is also available to give theatre workshops and to discuss the cultural boycott. Please Call Immediately For Booking: Joshua Nessen #212-962-1210

We hope that you will participate in these DAYS OF SOLIDARITY and will inform us of your plans so that maximum publicity can be generated. Last spring's TWO WEEKS OF NATIONAL ACTION were highly successful and at this hopeful and dangerous time your continued solidarity is needed.

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2) THE STUDENT ROLE IN RECENT DIVESTMENT VICTORIES

In both Massachusetts and Michigan, students played an important role in direct lobbying and in the creation of a political climate favorable to divestment legislation.

The Massachusetts bill which was passed over the Governor's veto (the vote was 128-2 to override in the House) divests all state pension fund money in banks and corporations doing business with or in South Africa. Massachusetts was the first state where student mobilization forced total divestment—at the University of Massachusetts and Hampshire College in 1977—and student groups have also been consistently active at: Harvard ($50.9 million divestment of CITICORP notes), Amherst College ($1.3 million divestment), Williams ($700,000 plus 6 banks), Brandeis ($350,000), Smith ($687,728), Mount Holyoke ($469,000 including MOBIL OIL), Tufts ($100,000) and Boston University ($6.6 million stock divestment).

During the three-year legislative effort students throughout the state participated in lobbying for the bill with MASS DIVEST, the broad coalition that made the pension divestment bill possible.

In Michigan a bill was passed that will force divestment by all public educational institutions of their stocks linked to South Africa. The state has a long history of student mobilization for divestment:

Student activism was responsible for the total divestment of $7.2 million by Michigan State University in 1979 as well as the $2.5 million sale of Manufacturer's Hanover Trust stock at Eastern Michigan University. Western Michigan University has been the site of militant divestment action since a 1979 sit-in, and this Fall students lobbied heavily for the divestment legislation. The bill also received strong support from students at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University whose State Representatives, Virgil Smith and Perry Bullard, spearheaded the successful legislative effort.

These victories on the legislative front will add considerable impetus to similar legislative initiatives and the efforts of student organizers as well. It is important that the student movement capitalize on these gains which parallel the growing strength of the liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia. For, in the face of these gains, the South African regime with the backing of the Reagan Administration has increased its campaign of regional destabilization and particularly targeted the African National Congress.

These developments will make your participation in the DAYS OF SOLIDARITY especially crucial and appreciated. I look forward to hearing soon of your planned actions.

In Solidarity and Friendship,

Joshua Nessen
Joshua Nessen, Student Coordinator