REPORT ON NORTHEAST REGIONAL ANTI-APARTEID CONFERENCE

On November 10, 1984 in New Haven, CT 200 student and community organizers representing 45 organizations from 11 states and Canada gathered for a Northeast Regional Anti-Apartheid Conference cosponsored by the Yale Coalition Against Apartheid and the American Committee on Africa.

The event was held just after leaders of the successful general strike were arrested in South Africa and in the midst of a workers' strike at Yale University. Underscoring its support of the striking Yale workers, the conference concluded with a spirited rally on the Yale campus featuring: Andrea Ross of Yale Local 34, Prexy Nesbitt of District 65 of the UAW, Mel King, sponsor of the successful Massachusetts divestment bill, Hinyangerwa Asheeke, UN Deputy Representative of SWAPO, Elombe Brath of the Patrice Lumumba Coalition, Willie Terry of the Black Students Organizing Network, Brooke Baldwin of the Yale Coalition Against Apartheid, and Joshua Nessen of the American Committee on Africa.

The conference was the most representative Northeast meeting in many years including students from over 30 schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, and Washington DC as well as key community groups such as the Connecticut Anti-Apartheid Committee, Capitol District Coalition Against Apartheid, Upper Valley Committee For a Free South Africa, Patrice Lumumba Coalition, Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism, and the Revolution in Africa Action Committee. Representatives of the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, and SWAPO were also in attendance.

The conference was important as a step towards building the March 21-April 6, 1985 National Weeks of Coordinated Action and for providing a forum for grass-roots strategizing.

As a follow-up to the conference the American Committee on Africa has called for a strategy meeting on Saturday January 26 from noon-4PM at ACOA's offices, 198 Broadway (Rm 402) NYC #212-962-1210. This meeting would develop specific plans for coordinated protests, including civil disobedience as part of the Weeks of Action (see letter enc).

Besides helping to lay the groundwork for the Spring, the conference supported important actions and workshops provided much useful information:

1) The Campus Organizing Workshop endorsed the concept of a National South Africa Free Endowment Fund. This fund would build on existing alternative alumni funds and enable alumni nationwide to contribute to a common pool till divestment takes place at their schools.

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2) In the Material Aid Workshop strong support was given to organizing "Runs For Freedom" to raise material aid for the liberation movements. Liberation movement representatives emphasized the importance of supporting refugee projects, and specifically mentioned educational and medical needs. There was also discussion of campaigns for the release of political prisoners. Participants were encouraged to adopt prisoners from both South Africa and Namibia (ACOA provided a suggested list) as well as to continue the petitioning for the release of Nelson Mandela and all political prisoners. One suggested action focus was to pressure school administrations to support political prisoners and rename campus buildings after prisoners.

3) The Legislative Divestment Workshop stressed securing strategic allies in divestment battles such as public employee unions and church groups which have legislative lobbyists and clout among legislators. The importance of tying grass-roots support into securing votes was stressed. In addition, there was agreement on the need to expose the Schlemmer study. This so-called objective study was conducted by a white South African sociologist Lawrence Schlemmer and paid for largely by the U.S. State Department. Its objective was to show that Black workers oppose divestment. The study ignores the fact that to advocate divestment is a crime punishable by 20 years imprisonment to death, and that FOSATU, the largest trade union federation in South Africa representing 150,000 workers, favors divestment and sanctions.

4) The U.S. Foreign Policy Workshop emphasized the need to combat Reagan's policy of constructive engagement with South Africa, and in that context to include an organizing focus on Namibia. It was pointed out that sanctions legislation against South Africa will likely be reintroduced in Congress, including a bill by Representative William Gray. There was also much concern about a right wing sponsored bill that would equate solidarity with the liberation movements to support of terrorism.

5) The Cultural/Sports boycott workshop noted the critical role played by mass protests against artists and athletes who have performed in South Africa. These actions have fed into ongoing divestment campaigns, notably in New York state. Elombe Brath underlined the effectiveness of the boycott in severely limiting the numbers of U.S. performers going to South Africa and also cited the artists who have done benefits and apologized for their South African tours. In discussing the linking of issues, emphasis was put on the connection between U.S. support of apartheid and domestic racism, as well as the need to work with Central America activists.

6) The conference as a whole endorsed a general statement:
   a) Supporting the liberation movements of southern Africa;
   b) Opposing all U.S. collaboration with apartheid;
   c) Specifically calling for the immediate implementation of UN Resolution 435 for Namibian independence;
   d) Supporting the immediate release of Nelson Mandela and all South African and Namibian political prisoners.
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