1982 saw unprecedented victories for the campaign to withdraw public funds from corporations and banks investing in South Africa. It is estimated that state and municipal legislation passed last year will force the divestment of more than $300 million in securities and bank deposits.

The legislative divestment campaign started in 1981 after the American Committee on Africa and other groups such as the Washington Office on Africa, TransAfrica and the American Friends Service Committee, with the assistance of the UN Centre Against Apartheid, held a unique national conference in New York that brought together legislators, grass roots activists, alternative investment specialists and representatives of liberation movements. The legislators went back to introduce legislation in their own states.

1983 may well see even greater successes. Already legislation calling for divestment has been introduced, or will be soon, in 23 states.

Last year Massachusetts, Michigan, Connecticut, and the cities of Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware passed divestment legislation. Their actions reflect the growing conviction that U.S. investment in South Africa strengthens the apartheid regime.

The legislation was the result of a prolonged effort involving concerned legislators, civil rights organizations, churches, labor unions and campus and community groups. Major opposition came from the South African government and corporations with investments in South Africa, especially Ford Motor Company which has $213 million invested in South Africa.

The Massachusetts law, which was enacted only after the legislature overrode a veto by Governor Edward King as the year ended, may have the greatest long range significance. It is the most comprehensive divestment legislation passed by any state and is likely to become the model for bills in other states and cities.

Despite heavy lobbying by South Africa & Ford Motor Co. the Massachusetts House of Representatives voted 134-2 to override the veto and the Senate overrode by a vote of 23-5. The Washington law firm which lobbies on behalf of the South African government, Symington Symington and Herlong, reported to the Massachusetts Secretary of State that they spent $300,000 working against the legislation.
All Massachusetts state pension funds will be required to sell stocks and bonds in companies doing business in South Africa. It is estimated that $100 million worth of securities will be sold.

The Massachusetts law was sponsored by State Representative Mel King and State Senator Jack Backman. It received strong support from Mass Divest, a statewide coalition of civil rights, religious, labor and community groups which has been campaigning for this type of legislation for the past three years.

On June 4 the Philadelphia City Council unanimously decided to make Philadelphia the first major American city to pass a divestment ordinance. Mayor William Green promptly signed the ordinance which the city finance department estimates will result in the sale of $60 to $70 million in securities from the city’s pension funds.

Scarcely a month and a half later, on July 19, Wilmington, Delaware followed Philadelphia's example. An ordinance introduced by Councilman Penrose Hollins stating that none of the city’s pension funds could remain invested in any business entity doing business in South Africa, was passed by the Council by an 11-2 vote and signed into law by Mayor William McLaughlin. The City Treasurer estimates that $400,000 will be divested, mainly from corporate bonds.

Michigan adopted legislation in December requiring public educational institutions in the state to sell all investments in corporations operating in South Africa. The State university system will have to sell approximately $60 million in securities. Michigan law already prohibited depositing state funds in any bank making loans to South Africa.

State Representative Perry Bullard sponsored both bills. State Representative Virgil Smith has announced that he will introduce a bill dealing with public pension funds, similar to the one passed in Massachusetts, in the next session of the Michigan legislature.

In June Connecticut passed a law which is expected to result in the sale of $70 million worth of securities in South Africa related corporations. The state has already announced plans to sell $13.4 million in stock in four companies. The legislation directs state pension funds to sell the securities of all companies providing strategic products or services to the South African government or whose South African affiliates do not recognize the right of black workers to organize and strike.
The Connecticut Anti-Apartheid Committee, which coordinated the campaign for the bill, regarded it as a significant partial victory. They will now press for total divestment, using the Massachusetts law as an example of what can be done.

Strong resolutions urging divestment were passed by Kansas and Nebraska state legislatures and by the Atlanta, Georgia City Council.

These divestment laws are the beginning of a national trend away from investing public funds in South Africa. In 1983 legislation has already been introduced or soon will be introduced in Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, and Wisconsin.

There is every reason to expect important action this year on the municipal level as well. Washington DC Council Member John Ray, the chairman of the Consumer and Regulatory Affairs Committee, has introduced an ordinance to prohibit Washington from investing city funds in firms that do business with South Africa. Ray has stated that Washington DC, a black majority city and the nation's capital, should not directly or indirectly encourage apartheid in South Africa. Hearings on the bill have been scheduled for March 3. At least $180 million in city pension funds would be effected. Divestment legislation is also pending in Atlanta and Denver.

Discussions have begun with New York City political and labor leaders over possible divestment of city pension funds. A preliminary estimate is that over $1 billion in New York public employee pension money is invested in South Africa related banks and corporations. These pension funds are jointly controlled by the municipal unions and the city's Board of Estimate.

The Conference on Public Investment and South Africa which the Special Committee against Apartheid hosted in 1981 contributed directly to the legislative victories in 1982. Virtually all the legislators who played key roles in sponsoring the successful legislation attended the conference along with church and labor leaders, investment experts and grass roots activists. It helped establish a network of concerned legislators and community leaders throughout the country which will help win new victories in 1983.