REPORT TO STRATEGY SESSION, UNITED NATIONS. FEBRUARY 1987

Sanctions and Divestment

While the U.S. Administration continued with its failed policy of constructive engagement, 1986 witnessed dramatic results from the Committee’s decade-long public education campaign against U.S. investment in apartheid. Congress made history by passing the Anti-Apartheid Act over President Reagan’s veto. California embarked on the largest divestment yet when it decided to begin to withdraw $12.5 billion in pension funds from corporations investing in South Africa.

The Anti-Apartheid Act reflected the American people’s rejection of U.S. support for apartheid, and was a significant first step in disconnecting U.S. dollars from apartheid. But it did not impose the complete break in economic relations demanded by Black South Africans and thus imposes major responsibility on the U.S. anti-apartheid movement to achieve this goal in the 100th Congress which has just begun. The 1986 experience has taught us important lessons in how to proceed. The bill would not have passed without the intensive educational work of the anti-apartheid movement. Last April Congressional leaders told us that nothing substantive would pass in 1986. After those meetings we began an intensive campaign, working closely with our allies. By constantly alerting our network of community leaders and activists throughout the country, putting speakers on the road and literature in many hands, we helped generate the grass roots pressure that made it possible to pass the bill. Activists could use the knowledge and experience gained in local divestment campaigns to counter the arguments made against sanctions. In the end we managed to generate a mood in which a vote against sanctions was identified as a vote for apartheid. We won support from major new forces including leadership support from the nation’s largest civil rights, religious and labor organizations. This year the fight for comprehensive sanctions has already begun, with the introduction into Congress of new legislation sponsored by Representative Ron Dellums and Senator Alan Cranston.

At the same time as we were pushing for full sanctions from Congress, we continued to build the nationwide divestment campaign, recognizing its important double role: it applies immediate direct pressure on corporations to divest, and it builds an informed constituency which will work for sanctions. By year’s end, a record 19 states, 70 cities and 10 counties had acted to stop their funds from being used to subsidize apartheid. We worked closely with local coalitions supporting these actions, arranging speakers,
providing needed publications and producing briefing material for legislators. At the annual conference of the National Conference of State Legislators Projects Director Rob Jones helped ensure passage of a strong resolution endorsing divestment and sanctions. Among the year's most significant achievements were:

* California's $12.5 billion action which more than doubled the amount affected by city and state divestment measures.

* City and state selective purchasing measures which began to hurt corporations still doing business in South Africa.

* Major corporations began to pull out of South Africa as a result of this concerted pressure. At the same time, we had to confront many partial, or "dummy" corporate pull outs, which left U.S. technology and connections still in place. In order to ensure that the divestment campaign continued to target such corporations, we co-ordinated a new policy statement issued by the national anti-apartheid groups which have been spearheading work in this arena, and worked extensively to achieve broad press and media coverage of this position.

Students

The Committee's full time student co-ordinator was closely involved with the surge of campus anti-apartheid activity as students built shanties, on campuses from Maine to California, symbolizing the poverty of black people in South Africa. Student actions have convinced 116 schools to adopt divestment.

Detentions

By the end of 1986 the Committee had begun to step up its efforts on behalf of the over 25,000 detained under the South African State of Emergency. South Africa's draconian press censorship has succeeded in wiping the powerful images of resistance and repression off American screens and front pages. We face an urgent need to fill the gap... and have sought to use the horror of detention as one way of breaking the silence.

"ABC News Nightline" used a memorandum we prepared for them on the detention and torture of South African clergymen as the basis for a "Prisoner of Conscience" segment on Rev. Simon Farisani and The New Yorker used our information for a "Talk of the Town" piece on the detentions. Such examples indicate one useful area for intensified work with the media, whose own sources of information are now blocked. We are now planning a short term campaign to generate extremely visible public protests over the continuing detentions. Such a campaign can smash through any myths of reform or good intentions, and generate a new desire for strong anti-apartheid action in the U.S. The campaign will culminate with public presentation of thousands of keys around the theme "Unlock Apartheid's Jails."

Front Line States

South Africa has never tolerated the presence of truly independent black
ruled states on its borders. Unfortunately, in the U.S. there has been little public opposition to this campaign of aggression and destabilization against these front line states by South Africa, using both its own and surrogate forces such as UNITA in Angola and the MNR in Mozambique. The U.S. right wing has made a major effort to portray the situation in Southern Africa in cold war terms, obscuring the real regional issue - the destructive presence of apartheid.

We are intensifying our efforts to build understanding of the region, support for the front line states, and the liberation movements. To sensitize Americans to South Africa's onslaught against Mozambique, we have adapted a film made for Swedish television on the MNR's campaign of rape, murder and pillage against the Mozambican people. The film has a new introduction which will it more accessible to the American people.

Material Aid.

In order to build better understanding of the nature of the liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia, we have developed campaigns seeking to raise material aid for projects such as the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College run by the ANC at Mazimbu. Artists, students, church groups, trade unions have all become involved in such efforts, which have often had important outreach effects as well as generating significant funds.

Thus for instance we focussed on ways to use the very popular Sun City album and video in the classroom. We produced a teaching guide, placed ads in over a dozen publications and sent thousands of brochures on a "Sun City" curriculum package to teachers.

Recommendations.

1. It would be helpful if anti-apartheid groups in the Western countries now economically linked to South Africa, could begin to co-ordinate strategies on divestment and sanctions, both in terms of target selection, in some cases, and particularly in terms of implementation and enforcement. In this connection, a central monitoring point, possibly through the Center Against Apartheid, could play a key role.

2. Groups need to overcome the effects of press censorship by deliberately seeking ways of improving communication and access to the media. Information exchange and sharing with one another could be strengthened... rather than five groups all seeking details on detentions from South Africa.

3. Groups need to recognize the new environment that has been created by broader support from quite conservative quarters for sanctions. This can in some ways appear to take away our relevance and initiative, and must be confronted, so that we continue to push forward, adopting clear strong positions rather than seeking not to upset new allies.

4. Recognizing the difficulties imposed by the operation of a police state, we would urge a strengthening of communication between anti-apartheid groups internationally and the forces bearing the brunt of the struggle for liberation in South Africa and Namibia.