

COALITION TO DEFEND ALBANY 9

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Dear Friends,

The late summer tour of the Springboks - the national rugby team from South Africa - was a catastrophe for South Africa and its backers in the United States. Of the three originally scheduled matches - in New York City, Chicago, and Albany, N.Y. - only the Albany match was actually played, and at that match anti-apartheid demonstrators outnumbered spectators by over 4 to 1. While two other games were eventually played in the United States, the fact that they were both shrouded in secrecy, and that there were virtually no spectators at either, speaks to the humiliating defeat that South Africa suffered on this tour.

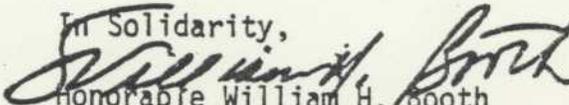
The Albany match was significant for another reason also: in the few days leading up to the match a total of 9 anti-apartheid demonstrators were arrested on various trumped up charges. On the weekend before the match, Bojie Jordan of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania was arrested after being attacked by a local gang supporting the tour. And after the match, 4 youths were thrown out of a car, had their car searched, and were eventually arrested on weapons charges - sticks found in the car's trunk.

But the most serious arrests occurred on the evening and morning before the match. Four people, including Mike Young, a co-convenor of New York SART (Stop the Apartheid Rugby Tour Coalition), were jailed literally hours before the game and were refused bail until three days later. John Spearman, one of the 4, was arrested for possession of a stolen car - which belonged to Mike Young! The arrests of the other 3 - Vera Michaelson, Aaron Estis, and Mike Young - paralleled many of the arrests that took place in the '60's, as a squad of FBI and policemen broke into Vera's apartment at 3:30 in the morning, with shotguns pointed and pistols drawn. The three of them were eventually charged with possession of marijuana and firecrackers (8 of them), while Mike Young and John Spearman had additional weapons charges put on them.

These arrests - and the fact that the 4 people were held without bail for three days, effectively denying them the right to organize against the Springboks - are very serious. They are very political arrests, and the fact that Mike Young was "banned" from Albany by the judge makes them even more so. It is ironic that while Mayor Corning of Albany, the U.S. State Department and all of the other supporters of apartheid were crying so loudly for "free speech" and "1st amendment rights" that people organizing against apartheid were having their rights so systematically stripped away.

It is clear to those of us who were active in organizing against the Springbok tour that these arrests were aimed at all of us opposed to apartheid. That is why we see the defense of this case as part of the offense against apartheid and the renewed U.S.-South African alliance.

These cases will cost a great deal in legal fees and will necessitate broad publicity on what took place in Albany. We are appealing to you to help out with defense in any way that you can.

In Solidarity,

Honorable William H. Booth