

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

Steering Committee

January 17, 1962

MINUTES

Present: Donald Harrington, Chairman; Nelson Bengston, Hope R. Stevens. Staff: James Robinson, Collin Gonze, Hazel Gray, Debby Kallen.

1. Washington Chapter of the ACOA: Lew Carliner had discussed with Peter Weiss the desire of a Washington group to organize as a chapter of the ACOA under the leadership of Belford Lawson. Although we could be quite sure that such a group, working with Carliner, would not cause difficulties, it was felt that once the chapter idea was started, the Committee would inevitably find itself involved with supporting a national organization, just as SANE, for example, had done. There were many advantages in having an active group in Washington, however. The Committee felt that since the burden of the work would fall to George Houser, they would leave a final decision on this matter for his return and ask him to present it to the Executive Board for final approval if he felt that that would be desirable.

2. Katanga Lobby:

a) ACOA action to date: A statement on the Katanga situation had been included in a mailing to our list (which comprises 15,000 names) last week. In addition, before his departure, George Houser had written to the President expressing the support of the ACOA for the United States position on the issue. A copy of this letter was sent at the end of December to all members of the Senate and House Foreign Relations and Foreign Affairs Committees. A letter had also gone to Senator Humphrey informing him of the trip to the Congo and offering information upon Mr. Houser's return.

b) Future plans: Peter Weiss had asked that the Committee approve Rev. Harrington's and Philip Randolph's signatures for an ad to appear in the New York Times in support of US policy and UN action in the Congo. The Committee felt that it was very important that the names of our Co-Chairmen appear in the ad, most especially in view of the fact that the Committee itself was not being named as the sponsor.

The staff was requested to check with Peter Weiss on Marguerite Higgens' article claiming that a mission had gone to Prague from Elizabethville in search of support. It was felt too that Eichelberger's name should appear in the ad -- that this would automatically mean the support of Mrs. Roosevelt and others. Rev. Harrington would obtain the signatures of a number of churchmen.

Peter Weiss should appear at the open Congressional hearings on Congo policy if we were to be represented.

3. Afro-American Leadership Conference: Rev. Harrington had approved the draft of a letter that would be signed by A. Philip Randolph and himself, calling for

such a conference. The Committee felt that although it was clear that the ever-growing interest in Africa should be encouraged and channeled, before going to Randolph it was really necessary to clarify precisely what we thought this conference ought to accomplish and how it should be organized. We should enlist the aid of Bayard Rustin in drawing up a paper defining what we mean by "Afro-American leadership", the people that would be important to include in the conference, and a statement of the aim of the conference. Mr. Rustin should be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to present his views. The Committee itself was agreed that the conference needed to be an "action" conference. It might well be combined with Africa Freedom Day, i.e. hold Africa Freedom Day on the final day of the conference.

4. Africa Freedom Day: Hazel Gray reported that a letter had gone on January 10th to Kenneth Kaunda inviting him to participate as the principal speaker for Africa Freedom Day. Inquiries had been made about the availability of Hunter College (which would be free on Friday evening, April 13) and Town Hall (which would be free on Sunday, April 15). In view of the fact that we might well be combining the leadership conference with Africa Freedom Day, the Steering Committee decided to take an option on Town Hall for either Sunday afternoon or evening. They also directed Hazel Gray to inquire about the availability of the Carnegie Endowment Building for the proposed conference.