

American Committee on Africa
Executive Board Meeting
December 3, 1970

Present: Josiah Beeman, Robert Browne, Winifred Courtney, Hershel Halbert, Donald Harrington, Jay Jacobson, Elizabeth Landis, Andrew Norman, David Robinson, Victor Reuther, Adelaide Schulkind, Robert Van Lierop, Peter Weiss, Lydia Williams.

Staff: George Houser, Ben Peterson, Prexy Nesbitt, Charles Hightower, Blyden Jackson, Bob Gore, Karen Whitmore, Dick Leonard.

The meeting was chaired by President Peter Weiss.

1. Peter Weiss thanked George Daniels for arranging the facilities for dinner and the meeting at the Church Center for the United Nations.

He then introduced Bob Gore, who will be working part-time in the New York office on community relations and fund-raising.

2. The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

3. The Invasion of Guinea

George Houser gave a brief report on the invasion of Guinea, based on conversation with Ambassador Mwaanga of Zambia, who was on the Visiting Mission of the Security Council to Conakry. He noted the inaccurate and incomplete reporting of the invasion in the press. The Mission found that the invasion had two aims: the overthrow of President Toure and the destruction of the PAIGC headquarters and elimination of the PAIGC leadership. George presented a draft statement to be circulated for Board signatures calling for an end to U.S. military aid to Portugal. Board members present signed the statement.

4. Reports

George referred to his Summary Report for 1970 (enclosed), which covers the high points of the year. He noted especially that the mailing list was decreasing and that a great deal of additional work must be done in this area.

It was reported that the Registrar of the International Court of Justice had returned the supporting brief submitted by ACOA on the question "What are the legal consequences for States of the continued presence of South Africa in Namibia, notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970)?" to which the Court was to give an advisory opinion. It is hoped that the ACOA brief will be accepted because it has pertinent material to present. The technicality raised by the Registrar is whether ACOA material can be used inasmuch as ACOA was not specifically requested to submit a statement.

George Houser also mentioned the ruling by the New York State Supreme Court in favor of South African Airways, allowing them landing privileges at Kennedy Airport. The New York State Division on Human Rights is said to be planning to appeal the decision.

Peter Weiss said that ACOA should file an amicus brief on the SAA question.

5. Polaroid

Charles Hightower reported on his visit to Polaroid at the request of a special committee from Polaroid's "management-worker" group. This group will ultimately report to Edwin Land, Polaroid's President and the Board of Directors, who will decide about Polaroid's future in South Africa. The issue of Polaroid's trade with South Africa, which totals about \$1 million a year and which has included the sale of the special

ID-2 camera used for making passbook photos, is only being considered by the worker-management group because a group of black Polaroid employees organized the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement, who organized a protest, a boycott threat, and four (negotiable) demands. Their demands are:

- 1) That Polaroid announce a policy of complete disengagement from South Africa.
- 2) That the management meet the entire company and announce its position on apartheid in the U.S. and in South Africa simultaneously.
- 3) That the company donate all its profits from South Africa to the recognized South African liberation movement in that country.
- 4) That Polaroid management recognize PRWM and deal directly with their representatives.

Charles presented a position paper to the worker-management group supporting PRWM and insisted that the group deal personally with PRWM representatives, which they had been refusing to do. Finally they agreed to allow a representative into the meeting. Charles also pressed the question of disengagement, noting that only \$1 million a year business should not pose a problem for Polaroid. He also reported that Polaroid was sending four workers to South Africa to assess the situation there and to report back to the Board meeting around the first of the year. One Polaroid official said to Charles that he thought Polaroid would decide to disengage.

Charles also reported on a tour of the Polaroid plants around Boston, all of which are models of space-age automation, except the Inner City plant in Roxbury, which employs mostly black workers at low salaries under a training program arrangement. The work there is heavy and dangerous: materials are prepared for the other Polaroid plants. The workers reported that after the training period there were often no other jobs available.

Charles suggested that concrete action could be taken by the Board members as individuals by writing directly to Dr. Edwin Land, the President of Polaroid (at the Polaroid Corporation, Cambridge, Mass. 02139) to urge complete disengagement from South Africa and by contacting other individuals and groups to do the same thing.

Carolyn Hunter (46 Longwood Avenue, Brookline, Mass. 02146) can be contacted for more information about the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement.

6. Chicago Report (Prexy Nesbitt)

Prexy's report is enclosed. He noted the low volume of sales of ACOA literature, as compared with that of other groups. He said that there should be more of a move to direct action projects now that there is an awareness of African issues in the Chicago community and the media as well.

He raised the problem of bail and legal cases in Chicago, citing his arrest last summer while passing out leaflets at a soccer match between Portuguese and Polish teams. He has ACLU legal counsel for the case, but he also suggested that ACOA should have a bail fund set up to deal with such problems. By general agreement it was decided that a revolving fund should be set up for that purpose.

Donald Harrington said that with the number of issues coming up, such as the Gulf campaign and the Polaroid workers' move against apartheid, ACOA should get out a news sheets to keep its constituency up to date and ready to give support to actions. He added that he thought that the Unitarians would be interested in working on a boycott of Gulf.

Victor Reuther agreed that all Board members should get some kind of "action sheet" on the important issues.

7. Finance Report (Ben Peterson)

Ben reported that ACOA has \$2000 in the bank. \$140,000 had been raised by ACOA up to November, 1970, but expenses for the same period had been \$150,000, making an approximate deficit of \$10,000. There was no payroll on December 2nd because of the shortage of funds. A December fund appeal has been sent out with the aid of a loan from one Board member and it is hoped that the necessity of taking a bank loan to cover bills outstanding can be avoided.

During December it is hoped that \$6000 can be raised from the mail appeal and \$20,000 from George Houser's personal contacts with individuals and groups. Some of this was to have been money for the 1971 budget, but now a portion of it may have to be used to cover 1970 deficits. George added that with expenditures for the November-December period running \$20-25,000, it looks as if ACOA will be going into 1971 with a \$10-15,000 deficit.

Victor Reuther said that the UAW has a very tight financial situation with the strain of the strike, but he hoped that some of the local unions would be able to help in keeping the UAW contribution to ACOA at the same level as 1970.

Adelaide Schulkind mentioned the possibility of increased contributions from both the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.

8. Report of the Subcommittee on Organization and Policy

Lydia Williams summarized the changes recommended by the Subcommittee on Organization and Policy, including: 1) a revitalized Steering Committee, increased in size to 10 members 2) voting privileges for staff members involved in programs and projects on both the new Steering Committee and the Board 3) monthly Steering Committee meetings and weekly meetings of the New York office staff. She also noted the By-Law additions that would be necessary to implement these recommendations.

Dick Leonard questioned the recommendation for a larger, more active Steering Committee, noting that with the usual Board turn out at the quarterly Board meetings being about 15 members, planning for a Steering Committee with 10 members to meet every month might not prove workable.

Bob Browne said that a smaller number on the Steering Committee would be more liable to produce a full turn-out at monthly meetings and real commitment.

Peter Weiss said that the recommended staff vote of seven people would effectively control the Steering Committee and suggested cutting down on the number of staff votes to only 3 or 4. He also said that 17 people was an unwieldy size for monthly Steering Committee meetings.

Blyden Jackson said that Peter Weiss' suggestion would leave the original problem that the staff has had: decisions effectively being made by a small number of staff members.

Jay Jacobson said that monthly Steering Committee meetings would offer a chance for real participation and involvement for interested Board members.

Dave Robinson agreed with Blyden's feelings and said that there is a need for staff cohesiveness and felt that having seven voting staff on the Board and the Steering Committee would be a positive step. He said that a "balance of power" was not the issue, rather it is important that ACOA work effectively.

George Houser said that whatever the intentions were, a 10-member Steering Committee would realistically get only get 5- to 8 members at monthly meetings. He also said that

on the question of staff participation in decision-making, the vote at Board meetings was the important thing and that votes have not been the critical aspect in forming ACOA policies.

Victor Reuther said that it is a question of principle and organization. Having monthly meetings of the full Board would be too much, but having monthly meetings of a small Steering Committee could destroy the policy-making duty of the Board. Board members should not delegate this responsibility to a small group. He suggested that the Steering Committee be formed of 5 Board members and several staff. He said that the right of staff to vote on the Steering Committee or the Board is not the important thing, rather good staff recommendations must be made for the Board to act on in making policy. He also said that there would be problems for the organization if the staff were to have equal voting power with the Board, that many organizations now working with ACOA would start having doubts if the Board were to give away its responsibility to another group, i.e. the staff, since that would mean that the staff would effectively be setting policy.

Bob Van Lierop disagreed. He noted that there are now two staff members who are still technically on the Board (Charles Hightower and Karen Whitmore) and that there should be no concern about staff judgement since they are working with the issues every day. He said that the most important aspect of being a Board member is voting and therefore if certain staff are to vote, they should be made full Board members. This would not radically alter the policies of ACOA and could mean greater morale for the staff.

Lydia Williams added that the Board would continue as the final policy making body of ACOA, and noted that the Subcommittee had functioned well with 3 Board members and up to 5 staff members participating without any problem of the staff members tending to dominate the group.

Blyden Jackson said that he was not afraid to deal with the issue of the vote. He said that voting power for the staff would give differing opinions among the staff a chance to be heard and to vote. He said that there have been a number of instances when ACOA has not been simply a consensus organization. He also said that there has been a lack of Board participation in the organization and that only a few of the Board members, the most dedicated ones, have been involved in making policy. The real problem within ACOA is that there are black staff with projects and programs that they want to develop, and white, radical staff who feel the same way, but that they have to work with a Board which is basically white liberal.

Peter Weiss said that that is a problem and does raise the possibility that there would be situations where voting power would be important. He felt that those who are doing the work should have the power and the responsibility in the organization.

Charles Hightower said that the fact that the Board and staff decided to hire him to work in Washington must assume trust in his abilities. He added that while ACOA's position as the "leading anti-apartheid lobby" is clear, priorities are fact changing and for black people it must be towards greater support for the liberation struggles.

Peter Weiss said that perhaps it is time that ACOA become an all-black or a black-run organization.

Charles Hightower said that he wants to see staff having a vote on the Board, rather than simply a change to a black Executive Director.

Lydia Williams said that she felt that there is a lurking fear among some of a black takeover of ACOA, which is an insult to her political awareness. She also said that the idea of "congratulating" Polaroid should they decide to get out of South Africa was not right, since her concern extends to the black workers in Polaroid's Roxbury plant as well. What is at stake is the welfare of black people, not the issue of running ACOA.

George Houser said that in the last several years there has been an emphasis on having black staff and he has not seen this in terms of a black take-over, but if there is a time when that should happen, it would. He said that in spite of a lot of the talk and disagreements among the staff, there has been agreement and unity on the policies and programs. The recommendations of the Subcommittee are a common sense step for ACOA. The staff works together from day to day, despite the appearance of disagreements -- and if that situation should change, he would be ready to step down. But for now the recommendations seem sensible.

Bob Van Lierop said that what he had said about how ACOA tended to operate on a concensus basis did not mean that we are all a happy family, but rather that there is a need for staff input on the Board. The issue is not having a black Executive Director or having a vote on the Board, per se.

Victor Reuther said that if the issue of the vote was really not so important, then why add fuel to such rumors as those in Washington about a "black take-over"? When the black community pushes for more involvement in U.S.-African affairs, that will be good, but for ACOA at the present time there is a concern about corrupting the democratic relationship of the staff and the Executive Board. He said that no organization that he has worked with has had staff, as staff, insisting on representation on the policy-making Board. So he felt that the staff should not have a vote on the Board.

Prexy Nesbitt said that he was not concerned with dealing with any idea of there being a "new" interest in the black community in Africa, but that he is concerned with the political strategies that ACOA lacks, demonstrated by our continuing neutrality in our analysis of the liberation movements. He said that there are now several people in ACOA with very complete knowledge of southern Africa who refuse to deal with the issue of strategy. He added that what are now the peripheral issues, such as the U.S. in Ethiopia, Israel in the Sudan, or Japan in Africa would ultimately be the sort of things that would determine the future of ACOA.

Betsy Landis said that she had experienced a similar situation in another organization, when a staff member who was on the Board almost took over the organization. But she has also taught at a university where the faculty demand for representation on the Board of Trustees seemed very valid. She does not see a problem with voting staff causing a split on the Board, but the possibility of a problem with the recommended size of the Steering Committee (10 Board members and 7 staff), which seems unwieldy. She suggested trying the recommendation of having 7 voting staff, but on a sliding scale, depending on how many of the Board members come to the Steering Committee meetings.

Peter Weiss said that the issue was still too fuzzy to vote on at this meeting and that the problem with the recommendation by the Subcommittee is that the plan of having staff members voting on the Board, but not be considered as Board members, does not make sense.

George Houser disagreed, saying that we could decide on any arrangement we want to adopt, in this case having certain staff vote on the Board without being members.

Peter Weiss said that the only important attribute of a Board member is the right to vote, so the distinction is meaningless.

George Houser said that the important thing would be that the Board would still be the policy-making body.

Betsy Landis moved that the Board vote to adopt the recommendations of the Subcommittee in principle, but that the Subcommittee meet again to work out the substance of the recommendations to present to the next Board meeting.

This motion was seconded by Adelaide Schulkind.

The motion was accepted with one opposing vote.

Names were solicited for several other Board members to join the Subcommittee and Peter Weiss, Jay Jacobson, and Bob Van Lierop agreed to join.

Peter Weiss said that he was concerned that the center of responsibility was being shifted to the staff. There is a need to have Board members active and involved. Part of this does mean that they should have ways of working on the ACOA projects and programs that the staff is working on and and that this could involve different kinds of specific tasks for various Board members.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

No date has been set for the next Board meeting.