

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

Executive Board

September 21, 1964

MINUTES

Present: Donald Harrington, Peter Weiss, Mason Sears, Sophia Yarnall Jacobs, Elizabeth S. Landis, Adelaide Schulkind, Nelson Bengston, Fritz Schwartz, Farrell Jones, Winifred Courtney, Hugh Smythe, Joseph Jablow, Forrest Johnson, Andrew Norman, Robert Browne.

Staff: G. Houser, J. Robinson, C. Gonze, C. Raymond, M.L. Hooper.

1. The Minutes of the last meeting were approved as circulated.

2. Staff Items:

a. George Houser announced that after three years of work with the Committee, Debby Kallan had left the staff to move to California. She has given exceptionally fine service as assistant to the director for those three years. Many fine words of appreciation were expressed by members of the Board for what she had contributed. Donald Harrington offered on behalf of the organization to write a letter of appreciation to Debby. A collection for a gift was taken from those present as a concrete expression of appreciation.

b. It was also announced that Mrs. Mary Louise Hooper had come from California to join the staff here in New York. She has been working as the West Coast representative of the ACOA and the African Defense and Aid Fund for the last several years. She will be concentrating her efforts on our program in opposition to the apartheid policies of South Africa. Her presence here was welcomed by the Board.

3. Finance Report: Nelson Bengston, as Treasurer, and James Robinson presented the finance report. It was pointed out that the Committee was in a relatively better position than has been the case for many years this time of year. Most of the large deficit that we began 1964 with has been liquidated. The finance report for eight months indicated that the Committee had enough cash on hand to be at least briefly in a position to pay all bills if called upon to do so. It was pointed out that this would not mean that we might not face difficulties in the last three months of the year since we could not estimate what the effect of the political campaign would be on our fund-raising efforts. Our relatively better than usual position was due to the fact there had been one or two large contributions, our tour of Africa had worked successfully realizing about a \$4,000 profit, and we were behind what our budget called for on the expense side. Nelson Bengston commended James Robinson for the hard work he has done.

Mrs. Sophia Yarnall Jacobs referred to the special fund-raising affair held at her home when Dr. Gilchrist was here and remarked that the Board members had not given the support to it that it should have had. Although the event did realize some income for the Committee, she said that she had been disappointed that so few Board members had been present. She expressed the hope that in the future the fund-raising aspects of these affairs could be handled a little more carefully in order to get maximum contributions from those present.

4. The Director's report on his Africa trip: George Houser gave a summary of his written report to the Board with his observations on the state of affairs in Africa. He pointed out that a third stage had been reached in the struggle for freedom in Southern Africa and that we were probably entering a period of a "slow down" on development. This is bound to be a period of some frustration both for Africans and for organizations outside of Africa such as our Committee. Mason Sears pointed to two relatively new factors that should be born in mind in watching future developments in Africa. One was the fact of the split between the Russians and the Chinese. The other was the role of the Organization of African Unity. He felt, and the Board agreed, that all possible support should be given to the efforts of the O.A.U.

Peter Weiss pointed out that to meet the challenge of this third stage the Committee ought to try to develop some new approaches. The implementation of this discussion was referred to the Steering Committee. X

5. Board Changes: Under Article 4, Paragraph G of the By-Laws of the ACOA attorney Percy Sutton and the Reverend George Lawrence were dropped from membership having failed to attend three consecutive regular meetings. Peter Weiss will write an appropriate note to Mr. Sutton and Reverend Lawrence.

Mrs. Elizabeth Landis was welcomed back to the Board following her leave of absence for the last several years in Paris.

6. The American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa: This second conference (the first having been held at Arden House in November, 1962) will be held in Washington from September 24-27. The ACOA, as one of the sponsoring organizations, may have five delegates. Those named were Hope Stevens, Hugh Smythe, Robert Browne, George Houser, and Mary Louise Hooper. It was agreed that inasmuch as the \$250 contribution towards the expenses of the conference requested of all sponsoring groups had been paid for by a special donation, that the Committee should offer to help some of our delegates with their expenses.

7. The Congo: A draft statement which had been presented to the Board was discussed at some length. It was observed that perhaps the ACOA should be mindful of the fact that this was an election year and that a public statement might be misused by the Republican candidate for partisan purposes. On the whole the Board felt that we should not hesitate to issue a statement, but that it ought to be worked over very carefully. The statement before the Board, it was felt, was not the one which should be released without considerably more work. It was agreed that whether or not we subsequently issued a statement for publicity, we should have a statement on hand in the office to send to any persons who write to us for our position on the Congo crisis.

It was agreed that the present statement before the Board should be modified by the Director in consultation with Hugh Smythe and the Steering Committee.

8. Conference on the South Africa Crisis and United States Policy: An outline plan for this conference was presented to the Board. The proposal is that the sponsoring groups ought to primarily be organizations affiliated with the Consultative Council on South Africa. It has been agreed in the past Board meetings that the ACOA should give major attention to the success of this conference which probably will be held in February or March in Washington, D.C.

9. The Sponono Cast: The Executive Director announced that the twelve members of the cast of the South African musical Sponono had not left with the rest of the group of twenty-three when the plane left on September 9. They are now here illegally inasmuch as their visas ran out on August 28. A meeting had been held in the office of the ACOA with several lawyers present (Rowland Watts, John Somers, and Richard Kasdan). The Board accepted the recommendations of the Steering Committee that the ACOA should support the right of these South Africans not to return to their country where they would have to accept the indignities of the apartheid regime. It was agreed that we could not take full responsibility for their welfare here, but that we would give as much assistance as we could in seeing that the case was presented effectively to the Immigration Department if we should be called upon to do so.
10. Africa Tour 1965: James Robinson reported on the 1964 tour to Africa with twenty-seven participants. The recommendation of the staff was approved by the Board that we ought to look into the possibility of another tour for 1965. The possibility of a tour will be announced in a mailing to the membership of the ACOA in a mailing to be sent out soon. A final decision on the tour will be made as we see the results from this mailing.
11. Ruadna Refugees: Peter Weiss reported that during the summer he had been in close touch with Mr. Jules Wolfe, a Belgian lawyer who has been deeply concerned with the plight of the refugees from Ruanda. Thousands of the Tutsi have been killed and many thousands of others have fled the country to bordering African states. Mr. Weiss was able to put Mr. Wolfe in touch with a number of individuals and organizations here to offer assistance in meeting this problem. It was agreed that ACOA involvement probably should not and could not extend beyond this point.
12. "A Touch of Gold": This film was produced by a public relations organization on behalf of the South African Government. It represents a soft sell of South Africa to the world. The Committee, largely through the efforts of Peter Weiss, has been successful in having it removed from the chains of theaters running it in the New York area several months ago. This campaign had been undertaken not as a matter of censorship, but because nothing in the film indicated that it was paid for propoganda on behalf of the South African Government.
- Mr. Weiss announced that the picture had shown up again in a neighborhood theater in Riverdale. It took only a few moments to have it removed again. It was agreed that the Committee ought to make an approach to Warner Brothers which is the distributing agent for the film asking that it be withdrawn from further showing in theaters in the United States. If Warner Brothers does not agree to this, a program of further action should be outlined in cooperation with civil rights organizations.
13. Next Meeting: The next regular meeting of the Executive Board is scheduled for Monday, December 14.