

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA

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MEMORANDUM FROM GEORGE M. HOUSER

PRELIMINARY THINKING ABOUT PROGRAM PLANS FOR 1961

As I have been doing some preliminary thinking prior to the Executive Board meeting where a budget and a program for 1961 must be adopted, I have come to the conclusion that the Board must do some hard rethinking before adopting a plan for next year. I have come to the conclusion that the ACCA must concentrate its program efforts in fewer areas than it has done before, if it is to make a successful impact on the whole field of African-American relations. This may be difficult to do, but perhaps an analytical discussion through which we must go will lead us jointly to this conclusion.

There are two factors that make this conviction grow on me. First, Africa has now become pretty big business. When the American Committee on Africa was first started there was very little competition in the field. Africa was not upon the consciousness of the American people at that time. But now Africa is headline news. Everybody is getting into the act. Some big programs are already being instituted, or are in the offing on student programs, on technical assistance, on political approaches to Africa, on producing literature, etc. If the American Committee on Africa is to make some impact, it must concentrate on a particular kind of program that it will develop in something of a distinctive way, and put its limited finances and staff time into the development of this program. I shall not try, in this brief memorandum to develop this thesis at any greater length, because I believe the point is patently obvious.

Second, the situation in Africa itself is increasingly complicated. I believe that a new era has pretty definitely been ushered in. We have known that this new era would arrive, and in discussions which we have had in the past, we have to some extent tried to prepare ourselves for it. But now I believe it is upon us.

Three developments I believe are signs of this new era in Africa:

1) The Congo crisis. With the development of the Congo crisis, the cold war has come to Africa in a big way. The whole world has its attention drawn to the Congo and to Africa because of the maneuverings of the big powers, not only in the Congo itself, but also in the Security Council. Politics of the most important international order are involved in the Congo crisis. In spite of the fact that this crisis developed during the summer months, which was an exceedingly awkward time for effective organization action, the fact is that our Committee is not structured in such a way as to deal effectively with politically important events of this magnitude. We are not a precise ideologically oriented group. Our ideology, if we have had one, has not gone beyond our support for the freedom, independence and equality of Africa. But when we are faced with a Congo crisis, no simple application of our general purpose will suffice. As an organization, we cannot be in the position of backing either the United Nations, the United States, or the African states unequivocally, should the Committee have a

definite role in crises such as this that are likely to develop in different ways in the days ahead.

2) By the end of 1960, there will be twenty-five African independent states admitted as members of the United Nations. This will be the largest bloc of countries within the U. N. These states are becoming a power in world politics. No longer are the African states looked upon as just neophytes on the world political stage, and no longer are they just weak vessels that need the good will and support of small private organizations such as ours. This does not mean that a relationship cannot be established between the Committee and the African states. But it does mean that it will be much more difficult to establish as close a relationship as we have had in the past. The only chance we have of establishing a really close relationship is to have something really significant to offer.

3) Rivalries and conflicts among the independent states will increase in the days ahead. Although on some of the issues affecting Africa directly, such as South Africa, there will be common agreement among the African states, points of difference will appear. The unity which to some extent has appeared among the African states as they face the Congo issue has been a strained one. The neutralism which most of the African states claim to have will be subjected to tremendous pressure. Already it is obvious that differing tendencies among the African states exist, with probably the majority of the states maintaining a pro-Western orientation. But quite apart from the international outlook of the African states, serious rivalries are developing in the continent itself. The Ethiopian-Somali border dispute, the tension that has developed between Ghana and Togo, the coming struggle for Pan-African leadership between Ghana and Guinea or Nigeria, the tension between independent West Africa and not yet independent East and Central Africa--all of these are signs of internal conflicts.

It will be very difficult for a private organization to try to maintain friendly and understanding relationships with African countries and movements, and for an organization such as ours that is politically oriented to accomplish this purpose. The only way it could possibly be done would be, obviously, to limit the area of our political activity.

The old era of African affairs has of course not ended, by any means. The era of colonialism and of apartheid still persists in some parts of East Africa, and in Central and Southern Africa. The Algerian war is still in progress. We have had a distinctive role in relation to this kind of problem. If we wish to concentrate in this area, however, we must recognize that our program will not continue for many more years.

What do these factors mean as far as a program for 1961 is concerned? I believe that there are four general approaches and program methods which are open to the American Committee on Africa for consideration. They are not all mutually exclusive, and yet if we are deciding upon a real concentrated program that will make its impact, these four approaches cannot remain together for too long.

1) Pressure activity. This type of approach would be to continue what we have been doing. We would continue our activity at the U.N. with petitioners, and work with the African states on certain issues, and continue to try to make an impact on the American position. It would mean that we would carry on

with our South Africa campaign, and intensify it. But if we wish to really get some place with this approach, I am convinced that we would have to open an office in Washington, where we could work closely with Congress and be in direct contact with the State Department and other agencies in Washington. If we decide to concentrate on this approach, let us completely scrap the idea of tax exemption.

2) Education and information. Under this type of emphasis, we would continue with our publications program, our African speakers program, and holding occasional conferences and meetings for the public. But if we concentrate in this area, we must make our publications program first-rate, and we must put on a real promotional campaign. If we bring speakers over from Africa, we shouldn't try to bring just two or three, but to bring at least ten or a dozen. If we are to hold conferences and larger meetings, dinners, etc., we should try to put on perhaps only one a year, and make it as big and as important as we can.

3) Direct assistance. Under this program, we would continue with our Defense and Aid Fund. Also, we would intensify the work which we have just barely started in exploring the possibility of providing personnel for needed positions in various African countries. To some extent, the Defense and Aid Fund would fit into the first category of pressure activity, but in other ways it is separate from this. But if we are to make an impact in this area, we must make it much bigger. The only way this can be done is by procuring tax exemption, and to do this under some already existing organization, or immediately set something up. The only practical way to make an impact with this program is to open at least one office in Africa.

4) Other services. Under this program would be included work with students, meeting and entertaining visitors coming through from Africa, meeting numerous speaking engagements which come to the staff, developing library and research facilities of the Committee, etc.

To some extent, the Committee has worked in all of the four fields of emphasis listed above. What I am suggesting is that if the Committee is to remain an effective instrument in the field, it can no longer do this. We should not make a pretense of trying to operate in all of these areas at once. If we do, we will definitely limit our effectiveness.

I hope that this memorandum will stimulate the thinking of those who must make the decision for the organization and that we can approach this new era that has emerged in Africa, which is such a challenge to us, with a distinctive and hard-hitting program.

G. M. H.