

ANTI-APARTHEID ORGANIZING AT MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

8v

Anti-apartheid organizing at Mount Holyoke has focused on divestment in the past year. The campaign had a strong year, and educated a wide range of students and involved a large number of students groups directly in the issue. The fall semester program got under way with a public report by the college's Committee on Social Responsibility (CSR). The CSR had been established ^{by the admin} the previous year as an organization of faculty and students which ^{to} would create an educated campus and transmit "informed opinion" to the Trustees-and Proxy Committee. In the spring of 1979 the CSR dutifully made its recommendation to the trustees who in turn 'dutifully' ignored them. (The CSR had recommended that the college vote its stock in favor of a variety of resolutions to limit corporate evil.) Thus, the stage was set for a student-trustee conflict.

In response to trustee intransigence, students wanted to speak directly to the trustees rather than through an ineffective committee. In December the students asked that the spring trustee meeting include a community forum on South Africa and the college's investment policy. A wide range of student organizations were mobilized to take up the demand for a forum, on the grounds of open and fair communication between trustees and students. Organizations as diverse as the Young Republican Club and the Organization of Pan African Unity called for the forum. ~~In due time (Feb.) the trustees rejected the forum, claiming an overfull schedule.~~ In due time (Feb.) the trustees rejected the forum, but the students went ahead with their plans, timing the forum to take place during the trustees' sherry hour. Meanwhile, the "Action: Southern Africa" group was running slide shows in dorms and collecting signatures on petitions favoring divestment. Speakers and films were brought to campus.

The forum was held in March. It was the best political education the campus had had in years. 450 students ^{came} out of a campus population of 1900. 16 campus organizations briefly addressed the forum (and the 15-20 trustees who were shamed into coming attending). 13 of these, again a variety of groups (though not the Republicans this time), called for partial or total divestment. The other 3 were vague moralizers, condemning South Africa without recommending specific action for the college to take. Each one of these 16 organizations in their own meetings prior to the forum had educated themselves on SA and had discussed what policy should be followed propounded. A tremendous amount of education went on. Because of the trustees' intransigence, the issue had broadened beyond divestment. The students were raising the issue of who has the right to be heard on campus. A wide group of

students then supported the principle of the forum which in turn engaged them in considering the divestment issue.

What has happened since the forum should surprise no one familiar with divestment campaigns on campus. The trustees informally chided the students for not going through "the proper channels" and formally ignored the forum totally. The CSR somehow managed to convince itself to represent students as in favor of stockholder resolutions again, though the CSR did raise some divestment questions in their meeting with the trustees. The trustees decided to vote the college stock in favor of corporate reform.

Much of the student energy was spent on the forum. With the approach of exams, students let the issue drop for the time. ^{However} The Action: Southern Africa ^{the coming} committee remains in place, has a budget for next year and is already planning for the fall.

BBB*
7-21-80

*Barbara Brown
(in 1979-81)
was on the MHC
faculty)