

Report on Southern Africa Meeting  
November 14, 1979

Participants: Dumisani Kumalo (Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa), George Houser and Paul Irish (American Committee on Africa), Ted Lockwood (Washington Office on Africa), Dumisani Kumalo (Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa and Clergy and Laity Concerned), Beth Perry (Friends Peace Committee), Wilfred Grey and Ken Carsens (International Defense and Aid Fund), Jerry Herman, Bill Sutherland, Ginny Hill, David Sogge, Jim Bristol, Mary Wade, Ron Young (American Friends Service Committee).

Overview of Current Situation

Bill Sutherland, AFSC's Southern Africa Representative just returned from a swing around the frontline states, made the following points in reviewing the situation:

- there is a sense of intensification of the war, including in Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, Botswana, with increased destruction and economic hardships;
- it is important to look at what western countries are doing, while they talk about negotiations, including continuing to provide arms in spite of U.N. sanctions and continuing to train South African personnel who play a role in the military confrontation;
- there is some improvement in the defenses in Mozambique, but South Africa continues to control the air;
- there has been a change of tactics since 1974 when South Africa seemed to be attempting to woo neighboring countries, while tightening repression internally to a situation, now, where South Africa has stepped up its military attacks on neighboring states, while making certain minor changes at home;
- what happens is influenced to a large extent by what some observers view as a white Rhodesian, South African Western reactionary axis;
- the rise to power of conservative governments in Australia, Canada and Great Britain directly influences these developments.

Ken Carstens emphasized that changes in South Africa are much more illusory than Western media suggests, for example, the changes in relationship to unions actually attempt more control over unions, at a time when unions could become more powerful; neighboring countries are being hammered hard to accept South African dominance in the region; there is a possibility that the South African government will be able to persuade certain Bantustan leaders to accept "independence;" this would make the situation much more difficult.

George Houser expressed the view that our work is increasingly difficult; South Africa has been making progress in its propaganda war; there is a rise in the general public attitude here and in Great Britain that there is a real change taking place in South Africa and,

therefore, anti-apartheid activities of the kind we have been engaged in seem less appropriate; there is likely to be a continuing increase in the cold war emphasis and a continuing shift to the right in the U.S. Congress; this situation could be changed by unpredictable developments such as another Sharpeville or Soweto type series of events, a further breakdown in Namibia negotiations, which South Africa currently is dealing with very cleverly, and, of course, much depends on what happens in relationship to negotiations on Rhodesia, Zimbabwe.

Mary Wade of the Quaker United Nations Office reported on a recent U.S. press briefing at the U.N. in which U.S. Mission staff lifted up recent changes in South Africa as very encouraging and argued that this made the question of sanctions against South Africa less relevant; while representatives of a few nongovernmental organizations challenged this interpretation, representatives of most NGO's went along with U.S. government representatives.

Dumisani Kumalo, coordinator of the Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans, emphasized the importance of understanding more about developments inside South Africa; changes being touted by the South African government are primarily designed to forestall and dilute intensification of outside pressures; very few people inside South Africa give much significance to these changes; Dumisani believes that the South African government is going to place increasing emphasis on promoting the homelands to indicate that change is occurring; we must be able to analyze current changes factually, not just emotionally, in order to refute increasing propaganda efforts by the South African government.

Paul Irish reported briefly on a recent conference he attended in London and indicated that there will be a series of conferences by nongovernmental organizations on the issues of sanctions, leading up to a United Nations/Organization of African Unity Conference in September 1980.

Wilfred Grey emphasized the importance of focusing attention on political prisoners in South Africa, reminding the group that June 1980 is the 25th anniversary of the Freedom Charter. He emphasized that the issue of political prisoners can be made a strong emotional as well as a factual issue.

Mary Wade reported, at this point, that the U.S. has recently withdrawn from the United Nations Decade for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination because of a series of resolutions calling for stronger action against apartheid.

George Houser reported on a planning meeting in Geneva to discuss a conference on economic sanctions; he believes there needs to be much greater emphasis on sanctions in the coming year.

The group then focused its attention on the following question:

What issues/strategies in 1980 are likely to be the most productive?

Ted Lockwood started off this part of the meeting by saying that he believed South Africa is winning the propaganda war; that Americans are preoccupied with the situation in Iran; and that there is a resurgence of support for U.S. policies of hegemony and intervention. He said that it is tempting in the current situation to concentrate our efforts on what are essentially defensive campaigns, such as maintaining sanctions in relationship to Rhodesia and working for renewal of the U.N. arms embargo on South Africa, but he believes that we need to find ways to develop more assertive strategies for the coming year. Ted suggested that we begin now to circulate a statement calling for no further investment or loans to South Africa until apartheid is eliminated. There has been discussion of this proposal within the Washington Office on Africa and other groups and it is seen as a strategy to have some impact on the planned White House Conference on Africa in March 1980 and also as a major part of a strategy for the election year. Ted believes that such a statement could gain support from significant leaders of the religious community, labor and black organizations and might be announced at a press conference in January, in part to set the stage for possible introduction of the bill by Congressman Solars, modelled on the Swedish governments position which prohibits new loans and investments to South Africa.

Dumisani Kumalo thinks that the South Africa is vulnerable on economic issues and that this should continue to be the major focus of anti-apartheid work.

Beth Perry pointed out some of the positive developments she sees in the current situation, including the increasing work on bank loans and divestment, the prospective White House conference in March 1980, and the new more active role being taken up by Black leadership in the United States.

Bill Sutherland raised a question about whether we should be putting more emphasis on the nuclear developments in South Africa and what more can groups like ours do?

Ted Lockwood responded by asking whether this isn't a situation of "locking the barn door after the horse is out?" and asked what policy changes would affect this development?

David Goodman of NARMIC staff reported that there is a bilateral agreement between the United States and South Africa on nuclear cooperation which has been extended to the year 2000 and that this could be a focus for work; David pointed out that part of the difficulty in getting more efforts focused on this is that anti-nuclear power groups in the United States, by and large, tend not to have much of an internationalist perspective.

Paul Irish responded by saying that from his study he would say that South Africa is still critically dependent on outside help in the nuclear field and, therefore, this is worth a greater emphasis.

George Houser commented that he felt we still needed to continue a multi-emphasis strategy; that while the White House conference in March 1980 may be a good short term focus for some work, he thought that economic issues must continue to be the central part of anti-apartheid strategy, including increased support for the bank loan campaign, critical educational work on the Sullivan Principles and more of a focus on the question of oil to South Africa; he also encouraged continuing work around sports events.

After lunch the group focused its attention once again on strategy for 1980 and returned to the suggestion that Ted Lockwood had raised in the morning.

Ted Lockwood reiterated the ideas that he and Randall Robinson and others in Washington have been discussing for a statement to be issued January by leaders of major institutions with clear focus on demanding U.S. policy which would prohibit new bank loans and new investments to South Africa as long as apartheid exists. Such a statement would then be used as a basis for public campaign to gather support from a wide variety of individuals and organizations and as a basis for challenging candidates in the 1980 election. This effort could be tied very effectively into work of the Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans, by providing a focus on national governmental policy change to supplement work on effecting the policies and practices of specific banks and corporations.

Discussion of this idea followed:

Ginny Hill asked whether an additional point in relationship to ending US/South Africa nuclear cooperation could be incorporated into the effort and Ted agreed to explore the idea.

Dumisani Kumalo thought the campaign was an excellent idea and thought it could complement very effectively work of the Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans. There is a conference of the bank loan campaign planned for January 1980 and this idea could be proposed as a major strategy. European representatives are likely to be present at the conference and this would offer an opportunity for discussion of making this focus, based on the Swedish government policy, international. Dumisani thought there might be some scepticism by local groups in terms of a focus on national policy issue rather than continuing to concentrate only on local banks.

Ted Lockwood suggested that a part of the campaign could be to get resolutions or memorials among a wide range of local organizations and local and state governments supporting a call for U.S. policy to prohibit new bank loans and investments.

George Houser expressed the view that this kind of a national campaign and local campaigns can augment each other very effectively and while this focus is certainly not a new idea, maybe the time has come to raise it in a clearer and stronger way.

In general, people at the meeting felt quite positive about the campaign idea that Ted presented and there was interest in further discussion about how the idea might be implemented in a good way.

(There was discussion of the situation in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and the issue of continuing economic sanctions. The developments since the time of the meeting make this discussion dated. You might refer to the reports from Lyle Tatum who represented AFSC in a Quaker observer team at the London negotiations.)

Refugees: There was discussion of the need to intensify public pressures on Congress to end restrictions on assistance to refugees in Southern Africa and to increase greatly the amounts of assistance being provided by the United States to refugees throughout the region. It was agreed that this issue will continue to be very important throughout 1980.

South African War Resisters: There was discussion of South African war resisters and what can be done in the United States.

David Sogge reported that the Mennonite Central Committee is releasing Robert Mossman to spend three months doing investigations in Europe, Canada and the United States on the situation of South African war resisters and what we can do to help. David believes that this investigation will result in increased emphasis on providing a variety of kinds of support for South African resisters who come to the United States, including a focus on changing U.S. policy to more readily grant political asylum to such refugees.

Jerry Herman reported on a recent meeting of South African war resisters with Vietnam veterans in Chicago and expressed the hope that AFSC might begin to do more on this issue.

Resource Materials: Several persons indicated what resources seemed to be getting widest distribution at this point. They include Winning Hearts and Minds, Voices for Withdrawal, Too Little Too Late, and a South African Fact Sheet.

Dumisani Kumala reported that the Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans is now producing a newsletter four times a year and so far this is getting a good response.

Mary Wade suggested that we really need a piece on religious organizations including what they have been doing and perhaps linked to what churches are doing in South Africa.

Wilfred Grey reported that International Defense and Aid is producing a book on the Bantustans and also shared with all of us the publications list from his organization. He expressed the view that a piece is needed on the life of average working people in South Africa.

Ted Lockwood raised the question about the possible usefulness of updating several of the current slideshow on South Africa, for example, the slideshow, "Banking on South Africa."

Bill Sutherland suggested that a piece is needed on the historical development of the struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa.

Jerry Herman asked whether people might make more use of videotape cassettes than is currently the situation. Generally people responded that there is a problem for most local groups in not being able to obtain equipment to use video cassettes.

Dumisani Kumalo pointed out that the South African government is producing a film on the theme of the significance of the changes being made currently in South Africa and this pointed up to everyone the need of more and better resources on South Africa.

Information Sharing: There was discussion about how effectively we are sharing information among various groups working on Southern Africa with some people feeling they get plenty of information, even too much at times, and others feeling that there have been significant occasions of communications breakdowns that have caused one group or another not to know about a significant action or conference taking place. In general, people agreed that bringing this matter up in a meeting like this helped to remind us all to pay some more attention to adequate flow of information. Furthermore, it was agreed that all of the organizations present would exchange their "file topics" with each other, so that at least all the organizations would know what topics each organization is following.

Idea of AFSC Visit to South Africa: People attending the meeting were asked to share their thoughts about a possible AFSC visit to South Africa, recognizing that AFSC has been discussing this question for some time and has found it very difficult to reach clarity about the appropriateness or usefulness of a visit.

George Houser emphasized the importance of discussing this question with representatives of liberation movements. George thought it was important to try to get a searching response from them. He indicated his own belief that they will tend to discourage a casual visit to South Africa, but may not discourage a visit if the purposes are quite clear, specific and carefully thought out.

Ted Lockwood raised the question about how free persons in an AFSC group visiting South Africa would be to go off from the group on their own to explore and meet individual contacts that it may not be possible to meet as a group.

Bill Sutherland raised the concern that has come up in AFSC that AFSC not go without being clear with South African authorities about our own attitudes toward apartheid and that if we are clear in presenting our attitudes that this may then make it impossible to obtain visas.

George Houser said he wasn't sure that this was necessarily true although it might well be.

Bill Sutherland raised a second question about what effects AFSC's sending a group to South Africa might have on our relationships with other organizations and individuals involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. George Houser responded by saying that in the short run it might have some negative effects but in the long run probably these effects could be overcome.

Dumisani Kumalo raised the point that any group in South Africa, including the Society of Friends, who serves as a host for an AFSC group visiting South Africa is an interested party in the situation there and this must be thoroughly understood by the persons going. Therefore, a question of the objectivity of any such visit is automatically raised.

AFSC persons present at the meeting expressed appreciation for peoples responses and questions, even though there was not enough time to have a very searching discussion about this question.

Western Sahara: George Houser asked for some time to discuss the situation in the Western Sahara, which George believes should be more of a focus for our attention than it is. He acknowledged that he, like most of us working on Southern Africa, had had little experience with the situation in Western Sahara, even though the American Committee on Africa did take a position a couple of years ago. George has since that time visited the region and is very concerned about issues in relationship to U.S. policy toward the region.

George believes there are two basic approaches to the issues in the region: (1) the whole question of a decolonization process and (2) the question of liberation struggles in the region.

In relationship to the first approach the United States' commitment to Morocco, including provision for supplying counter-insurgency weapons, threatens the decolonization process which is underway. In relationship to the second approach, George believes that Polisario is a very effective liberation movement similar in character to the PAIGC. U.S. policy is supposed to be one of neutrality, but in actuality, U.S. officials have orders not to talk with representatives from Polisario. There is a demand being offered through the United Nations and the Organization for African Unity for a referendum, but Morocco opposes this. Polisario now has a government which is recognized by 35 governments, 25 of them in Africa; once they get recognition from 36 African governments this will mean automatic entry into the Organization of African Unity. The American Committee on Africa has materials related

to the situation in the Western Sahara which George recommends to our groups.

In the next couple of months there will be an issue before the Congress related to a new U.S. commitment of arms to Morocco that will be proposed. Participants at the meeting agreed that this was an important action focus for our groups which we could take up within current policy frameworks without diverting major energies from our work focused on Southern Africa.