

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

CAMPAIGNING PRIORITIES IN THE 1979-1980 ACADEMIC YEAR

8th NUS/AAM SOUTHERN AFRICA CONFERENCE

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Introduction

As we enter the 1980's it is becoming increasingly clear that it will be during this decade that the battle for Southern Africa will be finally decided. The past 5 years have witnessed a tremendous acceleration of the liberation struggle following victories in Mozambique and Angola. Western policy, which was thrown into deep crisis following the collapse of Portuguese colonialism, now shows every sign of re-aligning with the racist regimes of Southern Africa. The South Africans themselves have committed themselves to ensuring that their schemes for 'internal settlements' succeed in Zimbabwe and Namibia as part of a grander scheme to create a cordon sanitaire around itself. The apartheid regime has developed nuclear capability and further accelerated its military build-up to give it the ability to contain the liberation struggle within white-ruled Southern Africa and to threaten and attack the front-line states.

Britain as one of the principal allies of South Africa - the major investor, one of the major trading partners and a close 'friend' in the cultural, political and diplomatic field, will be expected to play a special role in the apartheid regimes increasing desperate efforts to survive. The new British government can be counted on to play such a role. The Cabinet, from the Prime Minister downwards, includes within its ranks many who openly admire the racist regimes of Southern Africa and who will stop at nothing to hold back the liberation struggle in Southern Africa.

These developments place a very heavy responsibility on all opponents of apartheid in Britain. In the campaigns which will have to be waged in the forthcoming months and years the student movement itself will have a vital role to play to ensure their success. This will mean a greater commitment by the AAM and NUS nationally and it will require greater organisation at a local level. Not only should student unions themselves strengthen their work on Southern Africa but stronger and better organised Anti-Apartheid Societies need to be established so that an effective network of Southern Africa student activists stretches across the whole country. But for this to be successful a great deal more work needs to be done to ensure that the student movement as a whole both understands more about the situation in Southern Africa but also appreciates the importance of work in Britain on Southern Africa.

If work in the student movement is going to develop to the level which is required serious consideration has to be given to the priorities which need to be adopted in 1979-80. Priorities which should guide the organisation or work at a national level by the AAM and NUS and also the work at a local level but which should not be interpreted in an inflexible way so that it proves impossible to respond to immediate issues.

What then should be our priorities? They need to be determined so that they correspond with the needs of the liberation struggle and yet at the same time provide a basis to build up solidarity work.

There is one issue above all others which requires an immediate and effective response and that is British government policy on Zimbabwe. It is abundantly clear that the Government is determined to sell-out the people of Zimbabwe unless the combined efforts of the Patriotic Front, the Front-line states and other international supporters and the solidarity movement in Britain can prevent a sell-out.

The Zimbabwe Campaign

At the beginning of the new academic year the student movement needs to be prepared for a massive campaign on Zimbabwe. A special Zimbabwe Emergency Campaign Committee has been established to co-ordinate campaigning by a range of different organisations over the next few months. These campaigns are aimed to culminate in a national demonstration on 11 November. Local AA groups in colleges and universities need to start discussing now how to ensure that they can make the Zimbabwe campaign a major issue from the beginning of term. Preparations need to be made for:

- * resolutions for UGMs or Union Councils supporting ZECC and the 11 November demo
- * meetings with speakers from ZECC and the Patriotic Front should be organised (consideration should be given to a PF tour of colleges)
- * college-wide leafleting should be organised (should it be on one day throughout the country and if so when)
- * student groups should liaise with local AA groups where they exist to lobby MPs - both sympathetic and hostile - and plans should be made for demonstrations against visiting Government ministers if and when appropriate.
- * special efforts should be made to involve African and Commonwealth students whose governments are united against any sell-out.
- * plans should be prepared to ensure a really massive attendance on 11 November.

During all this campaigning it is important to be aware of the impact that much of the press and media has had on the outlook of students. This means that all sorts of ways need to be found to get over the facts. Student newspapers need to produce material - interviews with Zimbabwe students - try getting publicity on local radio etc. Also imaginative use of campaigning ideas amongst the student body to get them to think about the issue. eg. in Universities examine which University Council members have interests in companies which stand to benefit if sanctions are lifted.

Economic Collaboration

The second major priority is chosen because it helps explain the key factor underlining British policy towards Southern Africa and that is economic collaboration. The student movement has developed considerable experience with these campaigns and their impact has been felt at the highest level.

Without doubt the most successful campaign has been the Boycott Barclays Campaign. From relatively small beginnings this campaign has led to action as far away as Nigeria and the Caribbean. There are now reports that a number of University branches are actually running at a loss. Preparations need to be made for a concentrated campaign at the beginning of the new session. Parallel with the Barclays campaign other ways of exposing economic collaboration include 'Disinvestment campaigns, the consumer boycott etc. Background material on these and related campaigns are available from NUS and AAM. One campaign which students have yet to respond to seriously in this area is the CANUC campaign against RTZ. This also provides a means by which campaigning on Namibia can be organised locally.

Material Aid Campaigns

The third major priority must be the provision of material aid for the liberation movements since this enables activists to explain the prime role which the liberation movements are playing in bringing freedom for the people of Southern Africa. Successful material aid campaigns not only provide badly needed assistance but also provide an opportunity of countering the distorted reporting about the liberation movements themselves in much of the press and media. A background paper on material aid describes ways in which students can organise such campaigns.

Other Priorities

Finally we need to consider the other issues which need to be tackled during the year. These include:

- * academic collaboration
- * sports boycott
- * studying rights for South African political prisoners
- * campaigns for the release of SWAPO detainees
- * support for the Front-line states

These activities need to be considered in the context of educational campaigns aimed at building up understanding and support amongst the student body as a whole. In many respects this emphasises the point that in reality the most important priority is the creation of effective AA Societies which have the capacity to sustain a really

high level of campaigning. This will be the determining factor if we are to translate discussion into action. The next year will provide a real challenge not only to the student movement but to the AAM as a whole. It will require every effort if we are to stop a total sell-out of the people of Southern Africa by the British government.