

REPORT - APRIL 16, 1970

To: The Executive Board of the American Committee on Africa

From: Rozell W. "Prexy" Nesbitt
Chicago Field Representative

The primary task of the Chicago Representative of the American Committee on Africa might be considered the dissemination and distribution of literature and materials about the "Deep South" of Africa where today freedom fighters from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and further northwest, Guine, have committed themselves to freedom by whatever means necessary, but specifically through the path of armed struggle.

A secondary task might be the mobilization of those, white and black, in the Chicago area to play a supportive role in this country for the revolutionary liberation forces in the Southern African theatre. This second function has an important first step, which in the context of the veldt of the mid-United States, is crucial. This is the step of informing people about the existence of 1) an oppressive situation in Southern Africa and 2) a guerrilla effort now being waged on five, possibly six fronts to correct that situation.

Work in Chicago is work in a media wasteland. The major media in Chicago, both black and white, with but one exception, conveys news of Africa only when such news has achieved nearly-complete national or international coverage. (Thus news was given of the BIAFRAN WAR but to date no coverage of the fighting in Tchad.) One can read through the Chicago Sun Times (one of the more "liberal" oriented newspapers) for several weeks and at the end of that period not have seen more than one full-length column of news on Africa - let alone the specific Southern African region.

Yet, at the same time, of the top 42 American companies named as key to the South African economy, 30 of them have major offices in or near to Chicago.

There is no news of Africa, yet black people make up over 40% of the city's population and account for 1/5 of the newspaper subscriptions in the inner-city.

Recently, I've given this problem some serious thought. My analysis indicates Chicago to be representative of a growing phenomenon in the country wherein all news on the liberation struggles is being steadily deleted. (This is at a time when the propaganda network of the South African regime and the other member countries of the "Unholy Alliance" is steadily expanding itself and its related agencies and services.)* In this regard it is worth mentioning that Vernal McKay and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, in a study they did on the "Nature and Techniques of South African Propaganda" (London, June 1968) said of newspaper bias:

This is one of many fields in which white South Africa may be receiving massive covert support throughout the world, but on which evidence is almost entirely lacking. Briefly, because newspapers depend for most of their income on advertising revenue, a consistently heavy advertiser - if sufficiently unscrupulous - can to some extent dictate editorial policy and news coverage itself. All newspapers insist that this does not occur, but newspapers are, in the final analysis, a business with profits to make, and if a newspaper resists such pressure to any great extent it might not only suffer a drop in profits - it might go bankrupt. In the case of South African propaganda advertisements, probably insufficient advertising is placed in any one overseas newspaper to give the country any leverage. But it is obviously in the interest of South Africa's industrialist friends in Britain and the U.S.A. to keep in well with South Africa, and there is definitely motive and opportunity here for a subtle shift in emphasis on the subject of apartheid in some of the national press of Britain and the U.S.A.

Thus, the creation of an informed black constituency in Chicago, as representative of other large American cities, which demands that the Southern African War and other news of Africa be covered in all media is an area in which the ACOA and its representatives can make a lasting contribution and represent the beginnings of truly creating a powerful lobby in this country.

*Our work at this time must now counter things like the growing ties in this country between the American ultra-right wing and the Southern African fascist regimes. Noteworthy of developments we must watch is the relationship between Southern journalists in this country and the Rhodesian government. It is very significant that Ian Smith initially announced the declaration of the Rhodesian Republic not to his own Rhodesian journalists but to a group of 41 visiting white American journalists all from the "deep south". (NYT - 3/3/70)

Sharpeville - One of the signal successes which the Chicago office can speak about is the Sharpeville program which was held at the Afro-Arts Theatre on Friday, March 20. As a first major public undertaking, it was well attended (500-530 people) and was fairly smoothly-run and quite informative. Speaking at the program was Miss Freddye Hill, Ph D. Candidate, African Studies; Mr. Isaiah Zhwarara, Chairman, Z.A.P.U. Students in the U.S.A.; James Davis, Advance Guard, The African Nationalist Pioneer Movement; Eugene Perkins, Black Poet; Mrs. Elizabeth Mbata, Denis Brutus, and Basil Clunie, Graduate Student, Political Science and African Studies.

Two other noteworthy events were 1) a hastily arranged meeting at Roosevelt University on March 14th which was to permit Congressman Charles Diggs (D-Michigan) to meet with a large cross-section of primarily the black community in Chicago. Unfortunately, the timing and locale (it was held at Roosevelt in Chicago's Loop) of this program limited the numbers participating but a vigorous and eudcated dialogue was initiated between Rep. Diggs and the 70-80 odd people who did make the early Saturday meeting. From this meeting it is my feeling that any U.S. Congressman interested in Africa, but particularly black Congressmen, should participate in many more such exchanges. It is also my feeling that the ACOA or its representatives should act as catalyst for the creation of such events.

The second event worthy of mention was a week long symposium held at the University of Wisconsin and sponsored by the Afro-American Center there and the Madison Area Committee for Southern Africa (MACSA). This week of events varied from Southern Africa to some talks on the Ethiopian situation. It included a highlight speech by Dennis Brutus on March 19th. The whole symposium was fairly well attended. The real test, however, will be the development of further supportive activities by these groups, upon resumption

of a more regular schedule at the University of Wisconsin, Madison campus. During the past several months I have done a great deal of speaking on the present situation in Southern Africa, America's role in maintaining that situation and on various struggles being waged to overcome that situation. I have spoken at 25 different meetings to groups and people ranging from the Deacons' Club of the Quinn Chapel AME Church to a small but intent group of 17-19 year old couples committed to reaching Tanzania in order to contribute their collective skills to the struggling freedom fighters in Southern Africa. Additionally, this office has attempted to relate to educational institutions like Northwestern University, Illinois Institute of Technology, etc. I bring all this up to say that I am convinced that now is the time for the ACOA to make a systematic and thorough effort to inform the American public, especially the black public, about the steadily escalating situation in Southern Africa.

It is my conviction, one which can be backed up by sound observation, one which is thus far substantiated by ~~my~~ work in Chicago that large numbers of black Americans and young white Americans stand ready to play whatever role they can in the overthrow of the heinous, colonialist and racist regimes now reigning supreme in Southern Africa. People whom I have met all seem to know South Africa and have heard that somewhere in Africa Portugal is doing the wrong thing. It is however, a vague and unreal piece of knowledge much as countries like Vietnam and Laos must have been to the average American in the mid-fifties. What must now be done by organizations like ours is to press more and more widely for heightening this vague awareness into a concrete and committed understanding of the situation, an understanding of the problem, and the solutions being worked upon by the liberation movements, and the task which must be performed in this country by that part of the American people committed to the overthrow of fascism and ~~elimination~~ of racism wherever it might be found. This job of informing and mobilising is an immense one and by no means an easy one, but it must be done if we are "to keep pace with the changing pattern of Southern Africa."

One specific way of working on this task is the development of new modes of producing and distributing literature. In the past, our literature has been geared to a clientele which was already acquainted with the subject, already involved in scanning newspapers for that tiny piece on the Mozambique Liberation Front or the latest "Terrorist Trial" in Pretoria. Now we must face a new audience which is less informed but perhaps more committed. The Chicago Office has tried to develop an approach utilizing as much as possible one page pieces of literature - reprints, some with editorial comment. We've tried, whenever possible, to distribute these pieces free. This is something we hope to continue and to expand, making up the cost of production from those who can most easily afford it. (For example, we would charge no fee renting the film "Venceremos" to a small storefront Church and would try instead to "elicit" more money from the large University which also wants it.) This pattern is something we wish to continue. This summer for example, we hope to be at every major political event involving young white Americans or blacks or Third World Americans with 'free' one page pieces of literature.

Other plans for this summer include an effort to get a regular seminar and a multi-media Southern Africa light show in the public high schools (and, of course, continue work in the colleges and universities, in and around Chicago). Also, we want to make a major effort to reach the black and minority churches in and around Chicago. Thus far minimal success has been enjoyed in this area. This summer should see a break-through.

Respectfully submitted,

Rozell W. Nesbitt