

TO: Past, Present, and Prospective members of the NSCF Southern Africa
Committee (and friends)

FROM: Bill Minter, staff

DA TE: Nov. 10, 1965

The meeting of the committee on Friday, Nov. 5, 1965 raised a number of issues that must be dealt with soon if we are to act together this year. Since the active members of the committee are by-and-large new, we have to decide again where we are going and why, and how we start moving in that direction. It is in an attempt to clarify these issues that this 'proposal' is written.

I ask past members and friends of the committee to consider the proposal, and relay to me what criticisms or additions you may have. I ask the rest to put three questions to themselves: (1) Am I concerned enough with the Southern Africa situation that I am willing to commit time to action for change? (2) If so, is this proposal an effective framework for our action as a group and am I willing to participate in this action? (3) If this proposal is not good, is there any other way in which this group of people called the "Southern Africa Committee" can do anything useful together that could not be done separately or through other organizations? These questions must be taken seriously by each one of us, and must be answered honestly. Otherwise, we might as well admit we are playing around and not pretend to be really concerned.

After that long preface, now the proposal. First I will give a summary of the situation as I understand it, for if we are not explicit about this we will be talking past each other more often than not. Then I will talk about specific responsibilities and plans, both long- and short-range.

SITUATION:

(1) In Southern Africa - there exist the most prominent and extreme examples of remaining colonialism and control by a racial minority. That minority is unwilling to relinquish its place voluntarily and to move towards a system of justice for all. Instead, apartheid in South Africa becomes more rigid rather than less. The concessions due to the growth of the economy and the consequent lack of white labor are minute, and the relative position of the non-whites does not improve, but declines. The restrictions on opposition become more complete, and as a result the non-violent methods tried for years have been abandoned by all responsible African organizations. The regime by its military power may be able to put off the change for a long time, but by its rigidity has already ensured that when that change does come it will be violent. In the Portuguese territories guerilla warfare has already begun, and is being suppressed ruthlessly. Rhodesia threatens a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, and violence is in the offing if it does. Southwest Africa has been incorporated into South Africa, and faces a common destiny unless the World Court decision should be against South Africa and South Africa should abide by it. The High Commission territories remain vulnerable in their economic dependence on South Africa. Summary: present injustice supported by military and economic power; future potential for greatly increased violence, affecting inevitably the rest of Africa and the world.

(2) U.S. policy - has been overtly anti-colonialist and anti-apartheid. However, U.S. economic involvement in South Africa is very heavy and increasing, lends tacit support to apartheid, and is encouraged by the U.S. government. Moreover, the U.S. has taken only token steps against apartheid, and has often given the impression that these were taken entirely hypocritically with a view only to improving the U.S. image with the Afro-Asian world. The U.S. retains NATO relations with Portugal, while Portugal is engaged in a vicious colonial war. Only in the case of Rhodesia, and that recently, have there been indications that U.S. opposition to minority rule might express itself in action. Whether this action will be commensurate with the scope of the problem remains to be seen.

(3) U.S. groups attempting to change U.S. policy - Many groups have in recent years passed resolutions on the subject; few have done much. Last year the American Committee on Africa spearheaded the formation of a Consultative Council on South Africa, composed of 30-40 concerned groups. A conference was held in Washington, resolutions were passed, and joint action discussed, but not implemented. Last year National Student Association, National Federation of Catholic College Students, National Newman, and NSCF co-sponsored an "Emphasis Week" which was held on some 28 campuses. Other groups, such as South Africa Freedom Action Committee in Los Angeles, also held educational programs and/or demonstrations. SDS focused its attention on South Africa in the Chase Manhattan (and other) demonstrations, and in the preparation and follow-up for them. NSCF held a seminar in March at the Church Center for the UN involving about 100 people from around the country.

This year there seems to be much more awareness and concern, both as a result of last year's activities and due to the current prominence of the Rhodesian situation. This concern is not, and cannot be, all coordinated from a central point. But national groups may help in supplying resources, coordinating activities, stimulating concern, and focusing concern on the pressure points where it may have the most effect. Many of the same groups are involved, with the exception for the most part of SDS, which is understandably more one-issue (Vietnam)-centered this year than last. Therefore, such groups are considering common strategy, such as a March emphasis week with a Washington conference following which would be directed toward lobbying for changes in policy, perhaps by means of congressional hearings on the subject. Such joint action is focused on the South African situation in particular, because of its prominence and because of the magnitude of U.S. involvement.

(4) NSCF Southern Africa Committee - was formed last year as a result of the Commission on World Mission's feeling, after hearing Ken Carstens, of the urgency of the matter. It was composed of members drawn from the Commission and from others in the NY area who were concerned, particularly at Columbia and at Union Seminary. It spent a great deal of time in study and formulation of a stand, helped to plan the seminar at the CCUN co-sponsored with UCCF, and participated in the CCSA Washington Conference. It was spurred to action by the initiative of SIS, and became involved in the Chase demonstrations as well as in conversations that followed. It co-sponsored the March emphasis week, for which NSA took major responsibility. As a result of the Chase involvement, it began to press the National Council of Churches to act, and was involved in this process for much of the spring.

It held seminars at the NSCF General Assembly in Chicago in September, and at the beginning of the year met to set priorities and general strategy. It suggested to NSA et al. the sponsorship again of a March emphasis week, and also an extension of this beyond the student level to the CCSA. It was involved in pushing its concerns at the World Order Study Conference of the NCC, and in the International Affairs Commission of the NCC. It sent out an initial mailing to a constituency consisting of contacts primarily from the Seminar of last year and the NSCF General Assembly. It thus committed itself to involvement in a number of different areas.

Yet the membership of the committee is changing. Many of the old members are now involved elsewhere, and many new people are coming in. Thus we, as a collection of people, have a wide variety of degrees of knowledge concerning Southern Africa and action of U.S. groups, and a wide variety of opinions concerning what direction a group attempting to be responsive in this context might take.

Therefore I propose this plan involving two elements: (1) the long-range involvements to which we have become committed and the importance of which I am convince of; and (2) the short-range action (a) necessary that we may become conversant with the situation in Southern Africa, may learn the context of action here in the U.S., and may learn to work together as a group; and (b) important for its own sake as well, and particularly crucial at this time.

I. Long - range

A. Geographical concentration - South Africa

B. Focus of action for our committee - national, i.e. (1) playing a catalytic and critical role with respect to plans of national organizations, working together and separately.; (2) providing resources and stimulation to local contacts (primarily by mail).

C. Means of Action - the March Emphasis Week together with the national conference following, which we proposed to other student organizations this year, and then with them to the Consultative Council on South Africa.

D. Preparation

(1) with NSA, et al. - we need to be working on concrete plans for the week, and for the supplying of information and ideas to local groups prior to the week.

(2) with CCSA - we need to be involved in the continued formulation of plans for the week and conference. In particular, we need to press for more co-ordinated action of preparation and follow-up and well as on the conference itself.

(3) with our constituency - we are receiving more and more requests for information, etc. We need to answer these. We need to be in contact with people in specific areas such as Chicago - for pressure on Congressman Barrett O'Hara for example.

(4) with NSCF Political Commission - a group of interested students is now emerging in Washington. We need to be giving them ideas, and making use of the work they can do there.

E. Involvement not directly connected with the Emphasis Week

(1) with the Churches - We need to be involved here to help play a catalytic role, and to be able to say things that need to be said (in, e.g., a consultation on "Economic Responsibility of the Churches").

(2) with business - e.g., it is possible that the conversations with Chase Manhattan last year might continue.

(3) with government - e.g., delegations or letters to U.S. mission to the U.N. or to Senator Kennedy.

(4) with African student groups - for information as well as for work together on particular projects.

II. Short-range

A. Geographical concentration - Rhodesia. Because of its recent prominence in the news, and the urgency of the situation there, both for Rhodesia itself and for all of Southern Africa.

B. Focus of action for our committee - New York City, particularly Morningside Heights area.

C. Means - (1) educational program at Union Seminary; (2) working with other groups organizing a teach-in at Columbia on Rhodesia.

D. Preparation - (1) Informing ourselves - (a) reading and reporting to each other; (b) having speakers in; (c) preparing a statement on Rhodesia and U.S. policy.

(2) Working with UTS Soc. Action Committee. (3) Working with such groups as PASOA, Rhodesian students, SDS, SNCC.

E. Extra-local activities - (1) mailing - information; our statement; etc.

(2) communication of our activities to NSCF Political Commission in Washington.

F. Not directly connected with Rhodesia emphasis - selling tickets for Dec. 10 - Human Rights Day Rally.

If we are agreed on a plan, either this one or another, we need to assign responsibilities and get to work right away.

MINUTES NOV. 5, 1965

Minutes were sketchy, the minutes itself disorganized. The main issue was the direction and vitality (or lack thereof) of the committee. There was widespread dissatisfaction, but no clear proposal for remedying the situation. Issues were local vs. national responsibility, the role of relationship to other organizations, the problem of a 'second-generation' committee and loss of charismatic zeal, the role of the staff person.

It was decided that the next meeting would be at 1 PM instead of 12, Friday, Nov. 12, in the 8th floor conference room, Interchurch Center. We will be talking with Susan Ritner, recently returned from Johannesburg, and then discussing the above proposal.