

Document No.

NS-15

International Seminar
on
The Role of Transnational
Corporations in Namibia

Sheraton Washington Hotel
Washington, DC
November 29 - December 2, 1982

////////////////////////////////////
A Report from the Lutheran Coalition
on Southern Africa

by: Kim Zalent
Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa
USA

////////////////////////////////////
Organized by the
American Committee on Africa
198 Broadway
New York, NY 10038
(212) 962-1210
with the support of the
United Nations Council for Namibia

Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa

A CONTINUING NETWORK OF LUTHERANS CONCERNED WITH SOUTHERN AFRICA ISSUES --
ESPECIALLY WITH STATUS CONFESSIOINIS, DISINVESTMENT, AND BANK WITHDRAWAL.

A REPORT FROM THE LUTHERAN COALITION ON SOUTHERN AFRICA

- I. The Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa, a grassroots coalition of congregations and organizations, was formed in 1979 to change the policies of the Lutheran churches regarding Southern Africa. At that time both the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church had policies of voting shareholder resolutions in order to work for change in Southern Africa. Divestment was to be used only in extreme cases, when a particular corporation refused to improve worker's conditions, for instance. (The funds in question were predominantly pension funds of the churches.)

The Coalition hoped to get both the Lutheran Church in American (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to divest from all corporations involved in South Africa - recognizing that corporate investment far outweighs any minimal good these corporations do regarding working conditions (etc.) for Blacks. Divestment by the Lutheran churches would be a concrete sign that U.S. Lutherans totally reject the apartheid system and refuse to be connected in any way to apartheid.

- II. Lutherans, in the U.S. and around the world, have taken a special interest in Southern Africa because over 1 million Lutherans reside there. In fact, the Lutheran World Federation's Sixth Assembly in 1977 resolved that resistance to apartheid was a matter (or sign) of the Christian faith. (status confessioinis) The resolution especially called upon white churches in Southern Africa to oppose apartheid, but quickly Black Southern Africans began raising the question of what Lutherans in the U.S. and other First World countries could do to publicly and unequivocally oppose apartheid. Similar theological statements have been made by other churches in South Africa, and around the world.
- III. Despite the natural Lutheran "connection", the Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa soon learned that divestment was a very controversial issue within the ALC and the LCA. In the Spring of 1980 many districts and synods (regional units of the two churches) debated divestment. Those resolution were then sent on to the national conventions, where the final decisions on church policies would be made.

The arguments used against divestment are familiar ones to people in the divestment movement: The "prudent man rule", it would hurt Blacks, shareholder resolutions are a more effective strategy.

At the 1980 ALC and LCA national conventions South Africa was a major agenda item. After an hour debate, the LCA delegates defeated divestment by only 16 votes. But the ALC convention, a few months later, did vote for divestment after extensive hearings and vigorous floor debate. At both convenitons, the Coalition helped to educate and organize delegates.
- IV. Most recently, the Coalition tried again to get the LCA to adopt a policy of divestment. Eleven synods sent resolutions to the 1982 LCA convention asking divestment to be reconsidered. After 3 hours of debate the convention finally did adopt a policy of divestment (and the LCA treasurer, a Mobil V.P., resigned.). And the 1982 ALC convention reaffirmed their policy of divestment. The Board of Trustees reported that 13 out of 27 corporations had been divested from the

pension portfolio .

- V. Now that the LCSA has brought about policy changes in the Lutheran churches, the Coalition continues to monitor actions taken by the ALC and the LCA, and to offer encouragement when necessary.

We are pleased by the increased coverage of Southern Africa issues in Lutheran magazines and press. The LCA has produced a film, "A Cry for Freedom", which concerns the struggle for freedom in Namibia. Recently, the Lutheran World Ministries explicitly condemned the Reagan Administration's policy of "constructive engagement" and asked that withdrawal of Cuban troops not be a condition of a Namibian settlement. It is interesting to note that the South African government had taken notice of the ALC stand on divestment and sent a member of the South Africa Consulate in Chicago to visit with ALC officials.

It will take much political pressure to modify (dare I say 'change') the Reagan Administration's policies toward Namibia and South Africa. Hopefully, the U.S. Lutheran churches will become even more involved in supporting the struggle for freedom in Namibia and South Africa.

For more information, contact:

Kim Zalent
National Coordinator
Lutheran Coalition on Southern Africa
3800 Bridge Ave.
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

216-281-2600 or 281-6466