Dramatic Campus Protests Mark National Weeks of Anti-Apartheid Action

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American Committee On Africa

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DRAMATIC CAMPUS PROTESTS MARK
NATIONAL WEEKS OF ANTI-APARTHEID ACTION
New York, N.Y. April 7....Protests against U.S. support for apartheid swept across
the nation during Weeks of Anti-Apartheid Action from March 21, anniversary of
the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, through April 6, anniversary of
the execution of African National Congress freedom fighter Solomon Mahlangu.
On fifteen campuses the dramatic construction of shantytowns-symbolizing the
living conditions of South African Blacks--provided a major focal point for action
as did the April 4 National Divestment Protest Day commemorating Martin
Luther King who strongly supported economic sanctions against South Africa.
Another major emphasis was linked opposition to U.S. funding for UNITA in
Angola and for the Contras in Nicaragua. In all antiapartheid activities occurred in
over 35 states and more than 200 protesters from seven schools were arrested
during the Weeks of Action.

According to Joshua Nessen, national student coordinator of the American
Committee on Africa which initiated the Weeks of Action: "Intensified student
pressure for divestment during the Weeks of Action has shown the power of the
campus movement and has also been the occasion for the linking of anti-apartheid
work to struggles against domestic racism and U.S. intervention in Central
America. University repression and public relations gimmicks such as scholarship
programs for Black South Africans have not defused student protest against
continued ties to South Africa."

On March 31 at UC/Berkeley protests began for divestment of the University of
California's $2.4 billion in South Africa-linked holdings with the construction of
15 shanties in front of California Hall, the main administration building. The
initial protest ended April 1 when the police arrested 61 protesters in the course of
raziing the shanties. Five hundred people returned the next day and reconstructed
20 shanties before a police assault began at 2:30am on April 3. For several hours
hundreds of protesters battled baton-wielding policemen and constructed
barricades throughout the campus, delaying the departure of police vans filled
with arrested activAtts.

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(2)
120 people were arrested and 29 reported hurt--eight requiring hospital treatment
including a press photographer with head injuries. The campus administration has
also banned 109 protesters from campus, and on April 7 a student strike was called to protest the university's investment policy and response to campus demonstrations.

On the April 4 National Divestment Protest Day in Portland (Oregon) twelve students were arrested after a four-hour sit-in at the local office of IBM, a supplier of computers to the South African government. The sit-in followed a march downtown involving students from Portland State, Lewis and Clark, and Reed College--site of an earlier building occupation. Leading into the Weeks of Action on March 19 fourteen students from Brown University and the University of Rhode Island in Providence were also arrested at offices of IBM.

Another site of militant protest was Purdue University in Indiana. On April 4 five hundred students marched into the administration building to present the President with 4600 signatures for divestment. Students then constructed their second shanty which was demolished at 6:30am the next day by local police. 22 students were arrested while trying to prevent the demolition. In Madison students from the University of Wisconsin marched to the Capitol green and constructed a shanty on April 4 which was then razed by police that evening. In response 200 students reconstructed three shanties on April 5 before 70 policeman arrived and began tearing them down at 11:30pm with protesters still inside. The demolition took several hours and 15 protesters were arrested and one man injured by a police car. On April 6 activists returned to the Capitol Green and reconstructed a shanty. The Governor has reportedly placed the National Guard on call.

At Boston University 21 students began fasting during the Weeks of Action and the University is attempting to evict one faster for hanging an anti-apartheid banner outside his dorm window. BU President John Silber had this to say about the faster: "Abramowitz should wake up and grow up. If he pursues this tack of being a headline hunter he had better face the consequences--that he will die." On April 4 three hundred students rallied at Boston University in support of divestment and the fasters. BU students then joined a rally of 500 students from 35 schools on the Boston Common organized by New England Students Against Apartheid. Among the participants were Wellesley activists who had occupied their Administration building for 24 hours beginning on April 3 at 2am. That occupation had ended with a march of over 100 students whose faces were painted black with white tears. MIT students were also active and during the action weeks eight students were arrested defending a shanty they had constructed.

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Newly formed groups also became active during the Weeks of action. At the University of Wyoming in Laramie students held a rally April 4 demanding total divestment. On March 21 the Hawaii Committee for Africa rallied in Honolulu against the Reagan Administration's funding of UNITA in Angola and on April 2 an anti-apartheid program was held at the University of Hawaii. In New York City 350 people rallied and marched in the pouring rain on April 4 against CITIBANK, Shell Oil and Mobil Oil for their South African investments. During the march down 42nd Street the police used squad cars to
force the demonstrators onto the sidewalk. Participating in the march were students from the City University of New York and Columbia University where three shanties were set up from April 2-4 to protest the university's institutional racism and non-implementation of a total divestment policy. The April 4th march followed a March 21 protest of 1000 people against U.S. funding for UNITA and the Nicaraguan Contras at the Federal Building in NYC.

At the University of Texas in Austin organizers also kicked off the Action Weeks with a program focused on U.S. funding for UNITA, and concluded with a divestment rally on April 4 in which black armbands were distributed and a minute of silence observed to commemorate Martin Luther King and victims of racism in South Africa. That same day students at Texas A.M. marched from the center of College Station to the campus demanding divestment. In Houston the Free South Africa Movement and the AFL-CIO began the Weeks of action with a protest against Shell Oil on March 22. Daily pickets of Shell headquarters continued throughout the Weeks of Action, and on April 4 a rally of 200 people occurred at the University of Houston.

At the University of North Carolina (as at University of Texas/Austin) in Chapel Hill shanties have been in place for over two weeks. On April 4 200 protesters entered a campus Trustee meeting, and organizers plan to defy an order to take down their shanty on April 7. Shanties have been up the longest at Penn State University where 65 faculty members fasted for a week till April 4 when a campus rally of 200 was held calling for divestment. In Pittsburgh several hundred students from Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh held a joint march that day following separate campus efforts on March 21. On March 21 150 students at the University of Pennsylvania held a mock funeral procession commemorating Sharpeville and on April 4 did a protest tour of Administration offices as a build up to a UPENN trustee meeting on April 11.

At Hamilton College in upstate New York 200 students rallied and then marched to the campus Business Office where they remained for several hours despite Administration threats to take legal and disciplinary action. At nearby Cornell University twenty students occupied the Presidents office on March 21 and one student was arrested for announcing the occupation at the Trustees meeting. The campus anti-racist coalition then held a march for divestment and against institutional racism on April 4 and there are plans for escalated activity this week.

In Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan a shanty was constructed on the center of campus March 20, and will be reconstructed following a fire attack by a right-wing fraternity on April 5. As part of the Weeks of Action students held a Freedom March Against Racism and Apartheid on April 4 with 500 people that began on campus and concluded in the Black community of Ann Arbor. Western Michigan University students also marched from their campus into the Kalamazoo community on March 21 in opposition to the Reagan Administration's southern African, Central American, and domestic policies. In Chicago on March 20 1500 people also targeted Reagan's regional policies, particularly funding for
UNITA in Angola and the Nicaraguan Contras, and on April 4 there were divestment protests at University of Chicago, Northwestern, and the University of Illinois/Circle.
On April 4 at Yale University 75 students erected shanties on the main campus green. The Administration threatened to take legal and disciplinary action unless the structures were removed by noon on April 5 but with several hundred students at the shanties by then the Administration made no move. According to Yale organizer Robert Anderson: "People feel that they won a victory; that the Administration gave an ultimatum and backed down." Further protest is planned for an April 12th Trustee meeting in New Haven. At neighboring Wesleyan University students held a funeral march and burial for victims of racist violence in South Africa and the United States on April 4, and are also targeting an upcoming Trustee meeting on April 12.
In Washington DC the DC Student Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism kicked off the Weeks of Action on March 21 by erecting a shanty outside the State Department to protest U.S. funding for UNITA. At Georgetown University students staged a reverse apartheid simulation on April 3 in which white students were "arrested" for pass law violations by Black student "policemen". This was a prelude to an April 4 rally of 300 people calling for divestment. Other Washington DC-area protests occurred at American, George Washington, and Maryland Universities as well as an April 4 protest at the South African Embassy.

In Atlanta demonstrators first laid a wreath on the grave of Martin Luther King on April 4 and then marched to Coca-Cola for a noon-time protest against the company's South African operations. Students from Georgia State and Atlanta Universities helped organize the protest which is the beginning of an ongoing campaign targeting Coca-Cola throughout the South. At the University of Florida in Gainesville, site of two civil disobedience actions this year, students erected a shanty April 4 and forced the University President to meet with them for the first time. On March 25 students at Florida State University in Tallahassee hosted a South African and Salvadoran student as part of a Southern speaking tour organized by the American Committee on Africa and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) that also made stops in Durham, Chapel Hill, Tuscaloosa, Houston, Charlottesville, Birmingham and Montgomery. At Alabama A.M. in Huntsville students also held an April 4 divestment protest, and the University of Virginia at Richmond was the site of a shanty constructed on March 21.

Arizonaans Against Apartheid helped organize an April 4 rally at the University of Arizona in Tucson and a state divestment protest was held April 5 in Phoenix. That same day the Colorado Coalition Against Apartheid held a divestment rally on the steps of the State Capitol Building in Denver that featured South African Nmonde Ngubo of the United Mine Workers Union. On April 5 the Northeast Ohio Anti-Apartheid Committee held a divestment protest beginning at Cleveland State University and ending with a march to downtown Cleveland featuring Bill Lucy, secretary-treasurer of AFSCME. Elsewhere in Ohio rallies...
were held April 4 at the University of Toledo and Bowling Green. At the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis an antiapartheid rally was held April 4 and during the Weeks of Action there were protests at schools in Iowa, including Iowa State, Grinnel, and Luther College. Students at Kansas University in Lawrence were also active and at Macalister College in Minnesota a shanty was constructed on campus.

Shanty protests also occurred at schools in New Hampshire. At the University of New Hampshire students were arrested defending a shanty, and at Keene State College activists staged a "die-in" on the road outside a Trustee meeting before marching into the meeting. On March 21 Dartmouth College students and the United Steel Workers of America cosponsored a rally of 250 people outside of Phelps Dodge headquarters in downtown New York City. The Dartmouth Coalition brought down their shanty (which had been vandalized by right-wing students) and joined the Steel Workers in demanding that Phelps Dodge chairman George Munroe resign from the Dartmouth Trustee Board because of his company's South African operations and hardline anti-unionism in this country.

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(6)
According to Joshua Nessen of the American Committee on Africa:
"Since last April 4 student pressure has led 29 schools to totally divest holdings linked to South Africa, with over $200 million being affected. This Spring's escalated protest is helping to counteract the ban on media coverage of protest in South Africa and will further discourage U.S. investment in South Africa."

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