

The following is a selection from a April 17th, 2015 interview with Tom Hayden, a former University of Michigan student and founder of the Students for Democratic Society, conducted over email by Mario Goetz:

Please describe your role in the South Africa divestment movement at the University of California. How and why did you become involved? What kind of work did you do to advance it?

Jane Fonda and I met Bishop Tutu by phone when we were held for two days in the Johannesburg airport with our two young children in 1982. I had been invited to speak at a Robert Kennedy human rights occasion, but that was blocked. The student who invited us was banned as a result and escaped to the US where he lived in our house for a few weeks. He then went to law school in London and returned to SA after liberation.

Not long after, we invited Tutu to be our guest in LA. We organized a big Hollywood event at our home for him, and I set up a meeting with the UC president David Gardner as well as a big rally in Davis. Somehow the meeting convinced the UC leader to divest. Speaker Willie Brown was a forceful advocate since he also was a Regent.

What were the goals of the anti-apartheid movement at UC? What were the strategies employed by anti-apartheid activists at UC to attain their goals, and how and why did they choose to pursue those means?

You must talk to them or look in the archives. Obviously the US complicity in apartheid was a huge issue on campuses and in black communities at the time. SDS had a sit-in in NYC at the Chase Manhattan Bank in 1965, for example.

What was the response of the university administration to the demands of anti-apartheid activists? Were they supportive, or in opposition to the movement's goals?

It always begins with opposition by the pension and university bureaucracy. They had to be confronted publicly with their embarrassing support for apartheid and also confronted with reasoned and prolonged dialogue. The Maxine Waters' divestment bill was a tool for organizing for seven years, as I recall, before it finally passed after the UC president was turned around.

How do you see the anti-apartheid movement within the context of the legacies of the protest movements of earlier periods, such as the civil rights movement and the anti-vietnam war movement? Should anti-apartheid be characterized as a continuation of the strategies and ideals of these efforts, or did it represent an entirely different strain of activism?

Certainly it grew out of the civil rights movement, both in the Bay Area and globally. Neither the UC nor the US could face its race issues while propping up apartheid. Mandela and the ANC were right to appeal to global opinion and to students with an inclusive and positive message. In the end, the UC divested not because it was economically sound but because complicity with apartheid was affecting its reputation internally and externally. There was also an issue that parallels the fossil fuel divestment campaign today too, that is, the investments in SA were becoming "stranded assets" that would crash with the fall of apartheid.