

The following is a selection from a April 26^h, 2015 interview with Ansell Horn, a white South African and a founding member of the South African Liberation Committee, conducted via email by Mario Goetz:

How did you personally become involved in the anti-apartheid movement at UofM? What experiences and decisions brought you to Ann Arbor and motivated you to become an activist?

I was involved in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, as a student at Wits. And was aware of apartheid and what it did to Black and white south Africans way before that, as well as the warped mentality of white South Africans regarding the history of SA and day to day life in SA.

Came to A2 to go to school, knowing it had a strong history of political engagement, anti-war movement etc. Started off doing a masters in Pol science. Was already motivated to be involved at this time.

Where did activists on campus get information about events in South Africa during this time? How did it become a major issue among University of Michigan community?

The American media was not a good source of information. Generally distorted and ignorant, supporting SA and anti-ANC and Mandela (seeing them as communists). Got information from foreign press, the liberation movements and many fine historians, mostly exiles from SA. We brought out representatives to u-m, from all the liberation movements and learned a lot from this too. We learned by trying to do something, which uncovered a lot of links to South Africa and US support for the government of SA

The anti-apartheid movement became a major issue at U-M because we made it one. We pushed U-M to divest from SA, which it refused to do, led by Fleming the president, who also got financial support from many companies involved in SA. We had a debate with Fleming in the Michigan Union. While the debate was going on one of the students discovered there was a policeman in a cupboard of the hall, taking photos of the 300 odd students who were present, particularly the activists. See the Michigan Daily article on this debate and letters to the editor at this time. Most of all we learned by doing it.

How did race affect the forming of coalitions between groups in Ann Arbor promoting divestment from South Africa and black liberation in southern Africa?

Black and white worked together. Like the ANC we were non-racial. The issue was political and moral principle, not race. We were and still are against injustice everywhere. We were not promoting racial liberation, we were supporting the liberation of all South Africans, black white, pink, brown, and all people everywhere, including whites. Many

whites joined the movement and made sacrifices for this cause. This was not about Black liberation. When one person is persecuted, whether an individual or identifiable group, all are affected and complicit.

How was divestment identified as the best strategy to combat apartheid and how did anti-apartheid organizations forward this message?

Divestment was a strategy chosen on a much larger level, chosen by the liberation movements and people of South Africa, not by us, to put pressure on the government, coordinated in the US by the Southern Africa committee in NY. It was part of a comprehensive strategy - military (we were not about to start killing anyone in Ann Arbor), sports boycott (also very effective) and economic and military boycotts. We worked to get universities, city and state governments to divest - and educate the American people and ourselves, about South Africa and what was going on, the links to the USA businesses involved in making money off the backs of impoverished people in SA and elsewhere. This was a one of many strategies and certainly effective for us, in the USA.

What kind of opposition did anti-apartheid activists confront, whether from the administration or from the rest of the community?

U-M administration and President refused to divest, thereby providing further education for the students at U-M and wider community about the financial links to SA and its stake in the enormous wealth of SA. The FBI was monitoring the movement, the people involved and sharing this information with the South African government. The media in the USA, unlike much of the media in Scandinavia and Netherlands, were also supportive of the SA government and its fight against so-called communism.

What do you perceive as the major accomplishments or legacies from the movement at UofM?

The main legacy of the movement - we learned a hell of a lot by being involved and it affects our lives, work and viewpoints to this day. The fight for justice and equality is not over, not in SA, nor in the USA. Now we need to look at what is happening in the USA, issues like gross economic inequality, fighting foolish wars far from home (e.g. Iraq and the weapons of mass destruction) disregard by law enforcement agencies for the lives of Black Americans, failure to provide equal pay for equal work for women, efforts to make it more difficult for people in many parts of the US to vote, gerrymandering electoral districts, the power given to moneyed interests in our electoral process, the enormous increase of homeless people in every state of the union (including NY where I live), diverting tax money to the wealthy while cutting services to everyone else and failure to

invest in infrastructure, the failure to provide basic healthcare to all Americans, etc etc etc. Pick your issue, get involved, they are all connected. This is what we learned by being involved the anti-apartheid movement (sic).

From our research, we got the impression that activism on college campuses in general seemed to intensify following horrific events like Soweto in 1976. From your impressions, was this true at Michigan? How was the movement at Michigan similar or different before and after Soweto? To your knowledge, how did the massacre in Sharpeville in 1960 affect the global movement, as well as college campuses in the U.S.?

We did hold an event on Campus after the Soweto Uprising (sic), and the murder of Steve Biko. These events were brought to the attention of the campus community by groups like SALC - through a memorial service on the Diag, printed material etc. It did not happen spontaneously but was the result of efforts by people working on the issue. We set up tables through this period to distribute literature on what was going as well as staging events and bringing out liberation group reps from the UN and NY

Sharpeville was a dramatic turning point for the liberation movement – it led to the armed struggle for one – but made little impact on Americans in general or the U-M in particular (that I am aware of). It made the movement aware that an armed struggle was necessary as well as other forms of pressure on SA. It did not influence the US government or business interests and the campus anti-Vietnam war movement soon became the dominant issue for American progressives (rightly so). Along with Chile, Allende and other international situations. No-one gave a damn about SA until they saw the possibility of losing their wealth there

How did you perceive the role of the SALC in the larger Ann Arbor movement? What were some of the major initiatives the group undertook?

SALC staged events, showed movies, brought out speakers from SWAPO, FRELIMO, ZANU, MPLA, ANC, and arranged TV and radio interviews for them. Pushed the Senate to debate the issue to divest and protested and exposed the U-M ties to companies that supported SA, etc. We also formed a useful arena for groups of all stripes (church, labor, socialist, Trotsyists, etc) to join on a common issue that all could agree on and further dialogue on campus. And as important as anything else, educated ourselves.

In 1978 Brian and I started pulling back from the public events – it was time for Americans to take over the movement we had initiated. Events were drawing 50 to 300 people (the debate with Fleming) and it was a popular movement which did not need us.

Of course, the process toward divestment was the result of many factors over many years. However, if you could identify one or two major factors that convinced the regents first to adopt the Sullivan Principles (the 1978 resolution), and eventually to vote for divestment (1983 resolution), what would they be? Finally, we know that despite voting for divestment in 1983, it took a while for the University to actually divest! Why did it take so long and how was divestment finally acted upon later?

Adopting the Sullivan principles was a no-brainer and did not involve actually doing anything. It was useful for education purposes. As for divesting in 1983 – at this point everyone was trying to jump aboard. The climate was changing; the Portuguese were out of Angola and Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Swaziland had changed dramatically, and apartheid barriers were breaking down – and business, in SA and USA realized they either needed to support the ANC's divestment movement to force change or allow for a much more radicalized ANC would eventually take over the government, in which case they would lose everything. So business decided to change now, keep its money/wealth and move towards granting political rights. Businesses were not altruistic and nor was the USA. By 1989 when the ANC leaders started coming out of prison the whole world was very interested and thousands of journalists were pouring in to record these events. Now everyone wanted to show they were on the right side of history and had been ardent anti-apartheid supporters all along.

Through our research found a lot of information about SALC at Michigan State University. Was this organization related to SALC at UofM and if so, how? We seemed to get the impression from our research that some impetus for the movement was transferred early-on from MSU to UofM. Would this be an accurate characterization?

We were linked through a network of groups with the main groups in Washington and NY as I mentioned earlier. There was a couple at MSU, I believe the Wileys, that we were also linked loosely to and friends with. We were all working together and doing the same thing. I suspect we were the most engaged at the time in Michigan, having 2 South Africans in our group, so your impression is probably accurate. One of the Wileys taught at MSU, perhaps both. I don't remember what their group was called.