

## Why we said 'No' to A.I.D.\*

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In 1977, Congress authorized the expenditure of one million dollars for "the preparation of a comprehensive analysis of development needs of southern Africa to enable the Congress to determine what contribution United States foreign assistance can make." AID was instructed to present specific proposals on how to spend this one million dollars. AID seems to have approached several groups of scholars heretofore critical of U.S. policy in southern Africa on the possibility of serving as "consultants" to draft this analysis. AID in late November approached the four of us as scholars in contact with persons knowledgeable about the region (and not ostensibly because of our links to the Association of Concerned African Scholars)\*\* to meet with them to discuss what kind of work ought to be done, could be done, and might be done by us. We agreed to meet with them in December in Washington.

The project was presented to us as one on "Constraints to development of greater self reliance within and among the economies of the independent states in the southern Africa region." AID said it wished to identify and analyze these constraints in such a way as "to permit derivation of action policies and projects." AID said it wished a genuinely new approach which utilized African and Africanist scholars to articulate African aspirations. In this connection, they said they were discussing a proposal to develop a consortium of universities and scholars in the majority-ruled states of southern Africa as the major locus of such research.

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We discovered in talking with some of them that there were, however, some constraints imposed on how one could discuss constraints. One could not "politicize the analysis" (although one could "recognize the political context"). One could not discuss policymaking or policy goals of the U.S. or other governments towards the evolution of southern Africa. One was supposed to assume a majority rule government in Zimbabwe and Namibia, *however that were achieved*, and of whatever political groups that might be composed. One was *not* supposed to talk about the role of trans-national corporations, but only about the flow of factors of production.

In the course of the presentation by AID, we learned that it is likely that during an anticipated interim government, but prior to elections, a large World Bank mission will be sent to Rhodesia to prepare a

plan to be implemented by the “transition government” and presumably afterwards by the government of a majority-ruled Zimbabwe. We were told that our task would be to present an analysis of “development needs” for the entire region that was so persuasive that whoever was in power (in southern Africa or in the U.S.) would wish to adopt an action program based on this analysis, and that this would be a major contribution to an ongoing dialogue and debate within the U.S. government.

We rejected the proposal categorically on the following grounds:

1. We could see no way of discussing “development needs” in the absence of discussing the political arrangements that are probable and preferable.
2. As far as we could tell, present U.S. government policy in the National Security Council and the State Department was moving in a direction contrary to the aspirations of the liberation movements, and we could not work within such policy assumptions.
3. We felt we were far more likely to affect U.S. policy along lines we favored by laying bare its premises and mobilizing opinion than by “working from within”, *a fortiori* since we doubted that any AID analysis would affect policy decisions at the level of the National Security Council; and that “working from within” would hamper our credibility as fundamental critics of present U.S. policy.
4. We rejected any effort to *conceal* the nature of the debate by pretending to “de-politicize” it.
5. We rejected the assumption that development aid was necessarily *per se* a good thing, and that more aid is always better than less aid.
6. We rejected the assumption that the United States should be planning strategies of development for southern Africa, even if the parties concerned were

not making such plans, since it might be for good reason (but of course we believed the leaders of the Patriotic Front and SWAPO were indeed making plans in the light of their own political perspectives).

Let us elaborate briefly on each of these points:

1. We asserted our view that the political economy is an integrated whole and that it was absurd to discuss development strategies, especially for the entire region, in the absence of political premises and choices. We cited an elementary example. The present Rhodesian government has an open border with South Africa and a closed one with Mozambique. How can anyone analyze what a Zimbabwe government could or could not do unless we had some idea if the borders were to remain as is, or if both borders are to be open, or if the situation will be inverted (open with Mozambique and closed with South Africa)? In short, it is not plausible to make an analysis (not to speak of its not being desirable) without knowing if we are talking of a Patriotic Front government, or a government arrived at by “internal settlement” (and presumably still coping with the offensives of the liberation movements).

We further said that we could not possibly leave out the role of the trans-national corporations (TNC's) from an analysis of the “causes” of underdevelopment (as was suggested) when we believed that the TNC'S were one of the prime causes. We said that inviting the World Bank to make proposals was itself a political decision of the greatest importance, since the World Bank represented a particular (and highly contested) view of political economy. And how could one discuss solutions to southern African economic dilemmas, including Mozambique and Angola, in the face of present Congressional strictures on U.S. aid to these two countries? In short, we felt it was not true that there were technological analyses that were ideologically “neutral”. We were not neutral, nor could AID be, nor did we think it had ever been.

2. We emphatically did not believe the U.S. government was presently being neutral. We were in fact appalled by the recent developments in U.S. policy towards southern Africa. We saw the U.S. government as breaking away from its prior commitments to the front line states to support the Patriotic Front. We saw the U.S. government as acquiescing in, if not taking a lead in, the creation of the so-called "internal settlement." We saw the U.S. as preoccupied by the creation of "moderate" regimes, the criterion of moderation being primarily how little such a regime proposed to tamper with the status quo. We saw the U.S. as having failed to take any serious measures against U.S. corporations (like Mobil and Union Carbide) that have systematically violated the Rhodesian embargo. We noted that the U.S. was taking no serious measures against the enrollment of U.S. citizens as mercenaries for Ian Smith. We were deeply concerned with the recently-confirmed transfer of Cessnas to Rhodesia from France, as well as their continued sale to South Africa. This was the type of U.S.-origin, dual-use, strategic material President Carter precisely promised would no longer be delivered, directly or via third parties. In short, the political context which we saw for this study was one of a U.S. effort not to promote the well-being of southern Africa as represented in the aspirations of the liberation movements of southern Africa. We remembered all too well the creeping involvement of the U.S. in Vietnam and we chose not to be party to repeating a similar kind of involvement in southern Africa.

3. We were told, in response, that we could best affect policy by doing such a report. It was implied we were letting down those who agreed with us within the Executive Branch or in Congress. We felt, however, that we could not in any way lend support to present policy objectives, and it seemed quite clear that consulting with AID in such a context would in fact do this. We could see no way in which our report would affect real policy: instead it might simply provide window dressing for continuation of current directions. We were not impressed by the receptivity of the Administration

to critical views. Earlier in 1977, a petition concerning U.S. southern African policy signed by 600 African scholars had been presented to officials of the State Department and the National Security Council. Thus far, there has not even been the courtesy of a substantive response. Nor has there been a significant change in policy: if anything, U.S. policy has deteriorated since.

4. The proposed emphasis of the consultative study was to be on the regional plans for development of southern Africa, and on economic and social constraints within each nation, without reference to either the nature or the constitution of these governments or the goals they set or will set for development. We were warned that if we insisted on "politicizing" the discussion on southern African aid, there were others equally eager to "politicize" it, but in ways we would not like. It was implied that groups like those opposed to ratifying the Panama Canal Treaty were sympathetic to Rhodesian white settlers as people who had "built up" their country. We said that we were very aware of such views and that the very best thing for all of us was to move the discussion out into the open, with the options clearly drawn. At the present, the discussion is often clouded in Aesopian language. A "depoliticized" discussion of development is inevitably Aesopian. Hence if we wrote a report in this form, it would only assist those within government who wished to push U.S. policy in the direction of maximally maintaining the status quo to get away with it.

5. We were told that it was the friends of Africa who had sought, and with some difficulty, to increase the size of aid to southern Africa, and that if ways to spend this money were not forthcoming, it might be reduced. Here we took the position that spending money on aid is not a virtue in itself, and that badly-spent money is far worse than unspent money.

6. Finally, we said, if there is to be planning for the future of southern Africa, obviously southern Africans should do it. It was one thing for the U.S.

to respond to the requests of independent majority-rule governments like Mozambique and Angola (and we noted the U.S. is precisely failing to do this), and quite another for the U.S. to make plans for not-yet-created majority-rule governments in Zimbabwe and Namibia. It was our view that the liberation movements would probably reject the whole idea of pre-planning by outsiders, not only on the grounds that it was a diversion, but even more strongly on the grounds that it was a negative political act. (At this point, we were astonished to be told that this was more or less what one of the AID planners had recently heard from Tanzanian officials about this very same project.) We also discovered that the plan to involve southern African scholars through a consortium of African universities was no longer being actively pursued. We said that nonetheless, if appropriate groups of African scholars associated with the liberation movements and the front line states were to engage in such a study, and thought our help might be in any way useful, we would be ready to do what we could. But to presume that this analysis should be done *for them*, for their own good, was part of the dangerous atmosphere that had infected U.S. policy since the second World War. We did not think it was morally or intellectually tenable.

We concluded by saying that we were very concerned with the well-being of southern Africa and with the lack of fit between U.S. foreign policy and the aspirations of the liberation movements. We would continue to do research on southern Africa, and continue to speak publicly in criticism of present U.S. policy, and in support of the liberation movements. That, it seemed to us, was the most relevant immediate contribution we could make.

—12/17/77

\*\* There was a fifth person approached who was unable to attend the meetings.

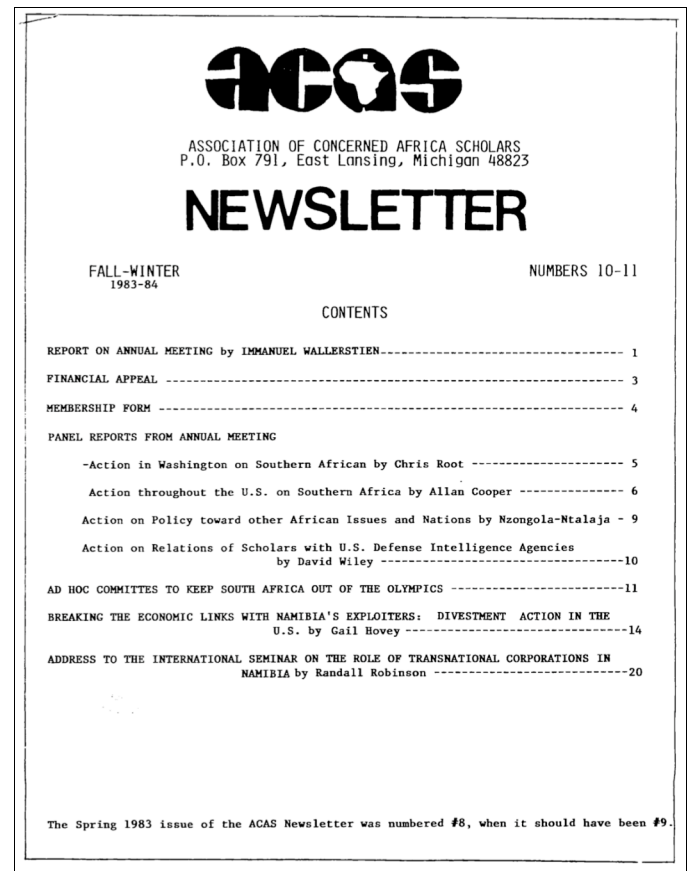


IMAGE: Cover, ACAS Newsletter 10-11 (1983-4)