



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## British students force end of Barclays Bank's investments in South African Apartheid 1969-1987

- South Africa Apartheid Divestment Movement (1970s-1980s)

*Time period notes:* Started in 1969, exact beginning month is unclear.

1969

to: March

1987

**Country:** United Kingdom

**Location City/State/Province:** London, England

### Goals:

End Barclays Bank's investments in their South African subsidiaries. Encourage British government to advocate for economic and trade sanctions in the UN Security Council.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Used to interrupt shareholders meetings.
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Created counter-messaging pamphlets with information about Barclays' investments in South Africa and tools to help students boycott the bank.
- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 074. Rent withholding › Students refused to pay rent to accounts held by Barclays Bank
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Religious, cultural, and student organizations closed their bank accounts.
- 162. Sit-in › Students sat in bank branches
- 175. Overloading of facilities › Students opened dozens of bank accounts only to close them the next day, slowing business down.

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Used to interrupt shareholders meetings.
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Outside bank branches and inside shareholders meetings.
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Created counter-messaging pamphlets with information about Barclays' investments in South Africa and tools to help students boycott the bank.
- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.

- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 074. Rent withholding › Students refused to pay rent to accounts held by Barclays Bank
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Religious, cultural, and student organizations closed their bank accounts.

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Religious, cultural, and student organizations closed their bank accounts.

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Created counter-messaging pamphlets with information about Barclays' investments in South Africa and tools to help students boycott the bank.
- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Religious, cultural, and student organizations closed their bank accounts.
- 179. Alternative social institutions › Activists formed an alternate "shadow" board of directors to monitor the bank's board of directors.

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Created counter-messaging pamphlets with information about Barclays' investments in South Africa and tools to help students boycott the bank.
- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 179. Alternative social institutions › Activists formed an alternate "shadow" board of directors to monitor the bank's board of directors.

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Created counter-messaging pamphlets with information about Barclays' investments in South Africa and tools to help students boycott the bank.
- 016. Picketing › Around Barclays Bank branches, especially near university campuses.
- 071. Consumers' boycott › Students boycotted Barclays Bank
- 086. Withdrawal of bank deposits › Religious, cultural, and student organizations closed their bank accounts.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

**Group characterization:**

- Students in London universities

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

### Leaders:

David Kenwyn, Mike Terry, David Haslam, Vella Pillay, Howard Clark

### Partners:

Anti-Apartheid Movement (London-based), End Loans to South Africa (ELTSA)

### External allies:

Not known.

### Involvement of social elites:

Michael Dummet, professor of Logic at New College, Oxford; the High Commissioners of Grenada and Zambia; Neil Kinnock, Bishop of Manchester; actress Julie Christie, and exiled former South African newspaper editor Donald Woods all served on the "shadow board of directors."

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

### Groups in 1st Segment:

- Majority Labour group on Lambeth Council withdrew Barclays accounts
- Student Christian Movement

### Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Junior Common Room of Christ Church College of Oxford withdrew Barclays accounts
- Nottingham Teachers' Association

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

### Groups in 4th Segment:

- Labour Party withdrew Barclays accounts
- National Methodist Conference
- Social elites join the shadow board of directors

### Groups in 5th Segment:

- Catholic Institute for International Relations withdrew their Barclays account

### Groups in 6th Segment:

- Balliol
- Corpus Christi Colleges
- Oxford; Oxfam; MIND (National Association for Mental Health); and the charity Shelter withdrew accounts with Barclays

**Segment Length:** 3 years and 1 month (37 months)

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### Opponents:

Barclays Bank

### Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None known

**Campaigner violence:**

No campaigner violence

**Repressive Violence:**

No repressive violence

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

I gave 6 points for achieving specific demands and goals because Barclays did leave South Africa, and the UN commission did agree on trade sanctions.

I gave 1 point for survival because the campaign continued even after Barclays said they had sold their stake in their South African subsidiary until the activists could confirm that Barclays really had left South Africa.

I gave 3 points for growth because the boycott was so successful that Barclays said that in just 5 years of the campaign, they had lost accounts with an annual turnover of over 6,000 million pounds. The campaign started with a relatively small group of students.

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Apartheid was a legal and political system of racial segregation in South Africa in which the National Party used violence to uphold political and economic control by the white minority. Apartheid began under colonial Dutch rule and was officially introduced as an official policy in 1948.

In 1958, activists in the United Kingdom and the United States first boycotted several companies supporting South African apartheid such as Kodiak, General Motors, and Shell Oil. Student Unions at British universities passed resolutions against buying fruit from South Africa and Irish grocery store workers refused to handle products from South Africa. [Activists in England successfully boycotted sports teams.](#) [3]

Barclays Bank was an enormous institution in the UK, with substantial holdings around the British Commonwealth. Activists from Britain and the United States suggested a boycott targeting Barclays Bank and its South African subsidiary Barclays National Bank to a coalition of anti-apartheid activists called the Anti-Apartheid Movement twice before students at London universities took it up in 1969. Members of the South African Liberation Movement asked British activists to show their solidarity and end loans to the South African government used to uphold and enforce apartheid policies.

Student activists launched the Boycott Barclays campaign in 1969. Students first targeted Barclays' efforts to recruit new students to open accounts with the bank by asking students to not open new accounts with Barclays and to close their accounts if they had any. Additionally, to cause slowdowns and coast the bank valuable processing costs, student activists each opened dozens of accounts, depositing a few cents in each, then closed them the next day.

In 1970, students staged sit-ins at bank branches near university campuses and educated Barclays customers through pamphlets about Barclays' apartheid ties. 600 students in Norwich conducted a rent strike and refused to pay rent into accounts that went through Barclays. Student activists also encouraged larger religious, cultural, and student organizations to take their accounts out of Barclays publicly. In 1971 the Student Christian Movement and Majority Labour group on Lambeth Council withdrew their

accounts.

The following year in 1972, students used several tactics to interrupt Annual General Meetings (AGM), or shareholders' meetings, of Barclays Bank asking questions about the bank's involvement in apartheid. In 1972, anti-apartheid activists prolonged the AGM to over four hours, and in 1973, activists again interrupted the AGM. When Barclays officials asked them to stop disrupting, they stood silently with banners and signs at the front of the meeting. When police and security asked them to leave, the activists lay down.

Students continued to pressure organizations to publically take their money out of Barclays Bank. By 1973, the Nottingham Teachers' Association and the Junior Common Room of Christ Church College, Oxford closed their Barclays accounts. Students continued consumer boycotts, consumer education efforts, rent boycotts, and branch pickets.

In December 1976, Barclays National, the South African subsidiary, purchased 6.5 million pounds of South African Defense Bonds, prompting activists to continue to engage with the consumer boycott.

Still more organizations publically withdrew their accounts from Barclays Bank. In 1980, Camden Council withdrew their accounts. In 1981, the National Methodist Conference approved a resolution asking members to withdraw their accounts from Barclays, and in October of that year, the Labour Party urged Labour-controlled local authorities to boycott Barclays. In 1982, Catholic Institute for International Relations closed their accounts.

In 1981, an anti-apartheid organization, End Loans To Southern Africa, set up a "Barclays Shadow Board of Directors" to exert shareholder pressure. The group published an activist-created "shadow report" on Barclays investments in South Africa. Prominent public figures such as Michael Dummet, professor of Logic at New College, Oxford; the High Commissioners of Grenada and Zambia; Robert Hughes, the Anti-Apartheid Movement chair; Neil Kinnock, Bishop of Manchester; and actress Julie Christie served on the board in the first year. Exiled former South African newspaper editor Donald Woods joined the "Shadow Board" in 1982.

Barclays Bank was clearly listening to these "shadow reports" because in 1983 Barclays upper management circulated a confidential briefing to branch managers referencing that year's shadow report.

In 1984 students circulated hundreds of petitions for United Nations-supported trade sanctions for South Africa.

In March of 1985 management in Barclays and Barclays National met with other western companies to strategize about how to best fend off criticism about their involvement in South African apartheid. By 1985 Barclays share of student market had declined from 23% to 13%, which was discovered in a leaked document after Barclays had been insisting that the boycott was not harming their bottom line at all.

In 1985 the shadow report claimed that since 1980, Barclays had lost accounts with an estimated annual turnover rate of more than 6,000 million pounds. The campaign continued to gain traction and still other organizations joined in closing their Barclays accounts including: Balliol, Corpus Christi Colleges, Oxford; Oxfam; National Association for Mental Health; and the charity Shelter.

In 1986 students produced pamphlets just like Barclays' pamphlets for new students, rebranding Barclays as "Boerclay Bank," with statistics such as the number of black South Africans killed in the last five years. The anti-apartheid activists continued to encourage other students to boycott Barclays.

15 local governmental authorities in England closed their accounts with Barclays in 1986. Four Oxford colleges closed their accounts early in the same year and urged the entire university to do the same.

In November 1986, Barclays sold its stake in Barclays National, its South African subsidiary. Activists wanted proof of Barclays' sale of their South African subsidiary and called for the boycott to continue until they could be absolutely sure that Barclays was indeed out of South Africa.

The boycott continued until March 1987, when Barclays management met with campaign leaders and satisfied them that Barclays had indeed sold its subsidiary.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The cultural and sports boycotts of South Africa influenced UK students to push Barclays to disinvest from South Africa. (1)

The successful campaign to pressure Barclays Bank to leave South Africa encouraged US students to ask their colleges and universities to divest their endowments from companies involved in South African apartheid. (2)

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### Additional Notes:

Archive of End Loans to Southern Africa, 1974-95 at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Not accessed.

### Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Ryan Leitner 08/02/2014

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- [1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/south-africa-apartheid-divestment-movement-1970s-1980s>
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- [3] <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/british-citizens-protest-apartheid-south-african-sports-tours-stop-seventy-tour-1969-1970>