Rutgers University students win divestment from apartheid South Africa, 1985

12 April 1985 to: 13 May 1985

Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: New Brunswick, New Jersey
Location Description: Rutgers University

Goals:
Primary: Complete divestiture at the university and state levels of all holdings in firms or doing business with South Africa.
Secondary: Total embargo of South Africa at the national level

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 3rd segment:
• 001. Public speeches
• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
• 162. Sit-in

Methods in 4th segment:

• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 162. Sit-in

Methods in 5th segment:

• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 038. Marches
• 043. Political mourning
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 162. Sit-in

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

• 004. Signed public statements
• 027. New signs and names

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Economic Justice
Human Rights

Group characterization:

• Staff
• University students
Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
The Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment (RCTD)
Partners:
Not known
External allies:
Protesters from Columbia, Cornell, California-Berkeley, and other universities initiated similar movements and declared their support for the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment.

Reverend Jesse Jackson publicly voiced his support for the Coalition and attended a rally held at Rutgers.

The New Brunswick community also helped by providing food and other forms of support to the protesters.

The New Jersey Anti-Apartheid Coalition, lead by Valorie Caffee, provided advice to the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment, and lead the statewide efforts for divestment.

Involvement of social elites:
The New Jersey State Assembly approved a divestment bill and sent it to the state senate for approval.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- New Brunswick community
- New Jersey Anti-Apartheid Coalition
- Protesters from other universities and colleges

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Reverend Jesse Jackson

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- New Jersey State Assembly

Segment Length: Approximately 5 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
The Coalition targeted Rutgers University and New Jersey investments in firms that did business in or with South Africa.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
5 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:
The actions of the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment prompted the New Jersey State Assembly to approve and send a bill to the Senate that would require the State to sell $2 billion worth in stock in companies that deal with South Africa from the public employees pension fund. This event marked the end of the campaign. Following the conclusion of the campaign, that bill went on to be approved by the New Jersey Senate and was signed into law by the Governor on August 20. On October 17, Rutgers authorized a total divestment of $6.4 million from ten companies dealing with South Africa, including Coca Cola, IBM, and Eastman Kodak. Thus, the primary goal of RCTD was eventually met, but the more extreme secondary goal was never met.

The sit-in at the Student Center lasted long enough (28 days) to prompt a response from the New Jersey State Assembly. The Coalition also staged 7 successful rallies.

The Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment was composed of Rutgers students, faculty, and alumni. Support and membership also grew over time. The first rally had about 500 supporters and later rallies exceeded 4,500 supporters. The influence of the RCTD eventually spread throughout the entire state as the New Jersey State Assembly approved a divestment bill.

South Africa’s system of apartheid became law following the elections in 1948. Similar to the Jim Crow laws in the United States, the system of apartheid was a form of legalized racial segregation. Consequently, South African apartheid became a very important political issue in the United States; this was especially true once the Jim Crows laws were outlawed. Americans of different racial and economic backgrounds opposed South African apartheid. Students at American universities were especially outraged with the laws and students at Rutgers University were very active in protesting apartheid.

As a response to student and faculty sentiments, Rutgers University divested from companies that did not adhere to the Sullivan principles in 1978. An African-American preacher that had served on the board of the General Motors Company developed the Sullivan principles. Reverend Leon Sullivan introduced seven requirements for South African corporations that demanded equal treatment of the races both within and outside of the work place. Satisfied with their renewed compliance with the Sullivan Principles, Rutgers University reinvested in several companies. This action by Rutgers aroused a lot of anger within the student body, and two years later students got together and formed the Rutgers Coalition for Divestment. The group would later become the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment (RCTD).

The Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment had a membership composed of Rutgers students, faculty, and alumni. Many faculty members at Rutgers had actually been actively protesting South African apartheid prior to the formation of the RCTD. Qualifications for membership were consistent attendance at meetings and to have signed the petition that the Coalition had been circulating. The Coalition had a leadership committee (the Steering Committee) and several other committees devoted to press,
politics, research, intercollegiate relations, education, and programs sponsored by the Coalition. As stated by the Coalition’s constitution, its purpose was to seek divestiture at the University and State levels of businesses that were associated with South Africa. The Coalition also sought a national embargo of South Africa.

The Coalition began its campaign for divestment with a rally held on April 12. Over 500 supporters attended the rally. Following the rally, the Coalition organized a sit-in of the Rutgers Student Center. According to self reports, the Coalition gathered roughly 200 members for the sit-in. External reports from the press suggested that there were between 80 and 100 protesters participating in the sit-in. Coinciding with the sit-in, eight members of the Coalition also initiated a hunger strike to demonstrate the seriousness of the campaign. The hunger strikers all released public statements explaining their actions. One such striker, only known as Elsa the Anthropology Major, wrote in her statement that she believed that the Rutgers administration “[did] not want to be in a covert collusion with the evilness of apartheid.”

The campaign was immediately recognized with letters of support from similar interest groups or coalitions. The day after the rally, on April 13, the Coalition received letters of support from the Third World Journal (a Kern College media group) and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. With the support of so many, the sit-in persevered. The Coalition began circulating information packets with information about the group’s purpose and news about what was happening in South Africa. The Coalition also distributed posters advertising the sit-in and asking for support. One consistent element on all the posters was the phrase, “Come for an hour, for a day, for as long as it takes.” On April 14, the Coalition received a letter from a similar organization at Columbia University. The letter urged them to stay together, regardless of what consequences would follow. The community of New Brunswick also publicly supported the Coalition; many members of the community provided the protesters with food and other forms of aid.

On April 15, the Coalition sent a letter out to the faculty asking them to join the RCTD and to help out with their alternative education program. The Coalition established an education program about apartheid and South Africa. Members of the Coalition were teaching the program in the dormitories and the Coalition was looking for professors to help lead discussions and answer questions. That same day, the president of Rutgers released a public statement that condoned the Coalition’s ideology, but condemned its methodology. The president had criticized and protested the system of apartheid prior to the RCTD’s campaign. Previously, on January 12, President Dr. Edward J. Bloustein was among 39 people arrested for blocking the entrance to a South African building. The following month, in February, he approved the University’s selective divestment from businesses associated with South Africa. This divestment called for the removing of $3.6 million in investments from seven companies.

As the sit-in continued, the protesters saw little opposition from the Rutgers administration. Carol Carlson, a spokesperson for the administration, released a public statement on the 17th that said the administration would allow the protesters to continue to occupy the Nelson Mandela Center (this was what the Coalition called it) as long as they remained peaceful and non-violent. Another rally would be held the next day and over 1,500 supporters were in attendance.

The growing support for the Coalition attracted the attention of Reverend Jesse Jackson. Reverend Jackson informed the Coalition that he would attend the next rally on the 23rd. The day before the rally, the Coalition called off the hunger strike. Leaders feared for the health and wellbeing of all the hunger strikers, and they were dissatisfied with the lack of attention that the hunger strike received from the president. The rally with Reverend Jackson replenished any momentum that the campaign lost with the failure of the hunger strike. With over 4,500 supporters in attendance, Jackson praised the Coalition for its perseverance and criticized the Reagan Administration’s policy toward South Africa. Reverend Jackson also took the opportunity to lambast the university for its continued investment in South Africa.

In response to a relatively inactive Rutgers administration, the Coalition sent letters to all its members expressing its desire for the Board of Governors and Board of Trustees to have a joint meeting and discuss a policy of total divestment from South Africa. The letter, which was released on April 29, called for the two Boards to meet on May 10. Two days before the desired date, the administration issued a response. Donald M. Dickerson, the vice-chairman of the Board of Governors, echoed the President Bloustein’s statement by saying that it agreed with the Coalition’s views on apartheid, but saw no reason to have a joint meeting at the present time. The Coalition responded by hosting the first national sleep-in for apartheid that culminated
with a rally and funeral march for all of those who were slain in South Africa.

News of the campaign’s continued effort made state and national headlines. The efforts at Rutgers began to be grouped with efforts from many other schools including Columbia, Cornell, California-Berkeley, and others. Democratic elected officials began to pursue the passing of legislation that would require divestment from South Africa at the state level. A divestment bill eventually made its way into the hands of the New Jersey State Assembly where it was approved on a 45-17 vote and sent to the New Jersey Senate for approval. In reaction to the assembly’s approval of the bill, the Coalition ended its sit-in at the Student Center on May 13. This effectively marked the end of the campaign, but not the end of the State’s investment or Rutgers University’s investment in companies associated with South Africa.

The majority of the Coalition’s goals would be realized after its campaign had concluded. On May 31, a New Jersey Senate committee approved a divestment bill that would remove $2 billion worth in investments of pension funds from companies associated with South Africa. That bill was then approved on June 27 with a 24-14 vote by the New Jersey State Senate, which had a Democratic majority, and signed into law by New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean on August 20. Another organization, the New Jersey Anti-Apartheid Coalition (NJAAC), played a large role in gathering statewide support for the bill. The NJAAC held rallies, marches, and lobbied in the capital city of Trenton for support of the bill. After the RCTD ended the sit-in, it continued to play an educational role on campus by distributing literature and hosting information sessions. Eventually, Rutgers University announced a total divestment worth $6.4 million from over ten companies, including Coca Cola and IBM. The decision was announced on October 17, and made Rutgers one of over twenty schools that adopted or that would go on to adopt policies of at least partial divestment from companies that did business with South Africa.

Research Notes

Influences:
The actions of President Dr. Edward J. Bloustein of Rutgers and 38 others inspired the Rutgers Coalition for Total Divestment. President Bloustein and others were arrested for blocking the entrance to the South African consulate on Park Avenue. (1)

This campaign was also one of many University divestment campaigns in the Global Anti-apartheid Movement.

Sources:


Howard, Allen. Personal Interview. 24 September 2010


Additional Notes:
Edited by Max Rennebohm (10/08/2011)
Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Julio Alicea, 19/09/2010

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