

South African support groups: Cause is the same, yet strategies are different

By BECKY YOUNG
Of the Emerald

There is no singular formula for building a political movement. Strategy will vary with the nature of the cause, the crusaders and the people to be convinced.

People for Southern African Freedom (PSAF) and the Southern African Liberation Support Committee (SALSC) have the same long-range goals — the end of apartheid in southern Africa.

Most of the similarity ends, however, when it comes to philosophy of protest — the separate tactics the two groups use in their fight for achievement of these goals.

PSAF has a lower profile, spending a lot of time circulating petitions and sponsoring educational activities. SALSC believes in conspicuous action like leafletting, slogan chanting and demonstrating.

Both groups originated from a campus organization, the South African Support Committee (SASC), which formed last February.

SASC began having internal problems near the end of May, mostly involving procedure and method. When the problems became such that the group could no longer function effectively, about 10 people left SASC and formed People for South African Freedom.

Bruce Bowers, a graduate teaching fellow in educational policy, and Collette Postol, a sociology major, are two of the original members.

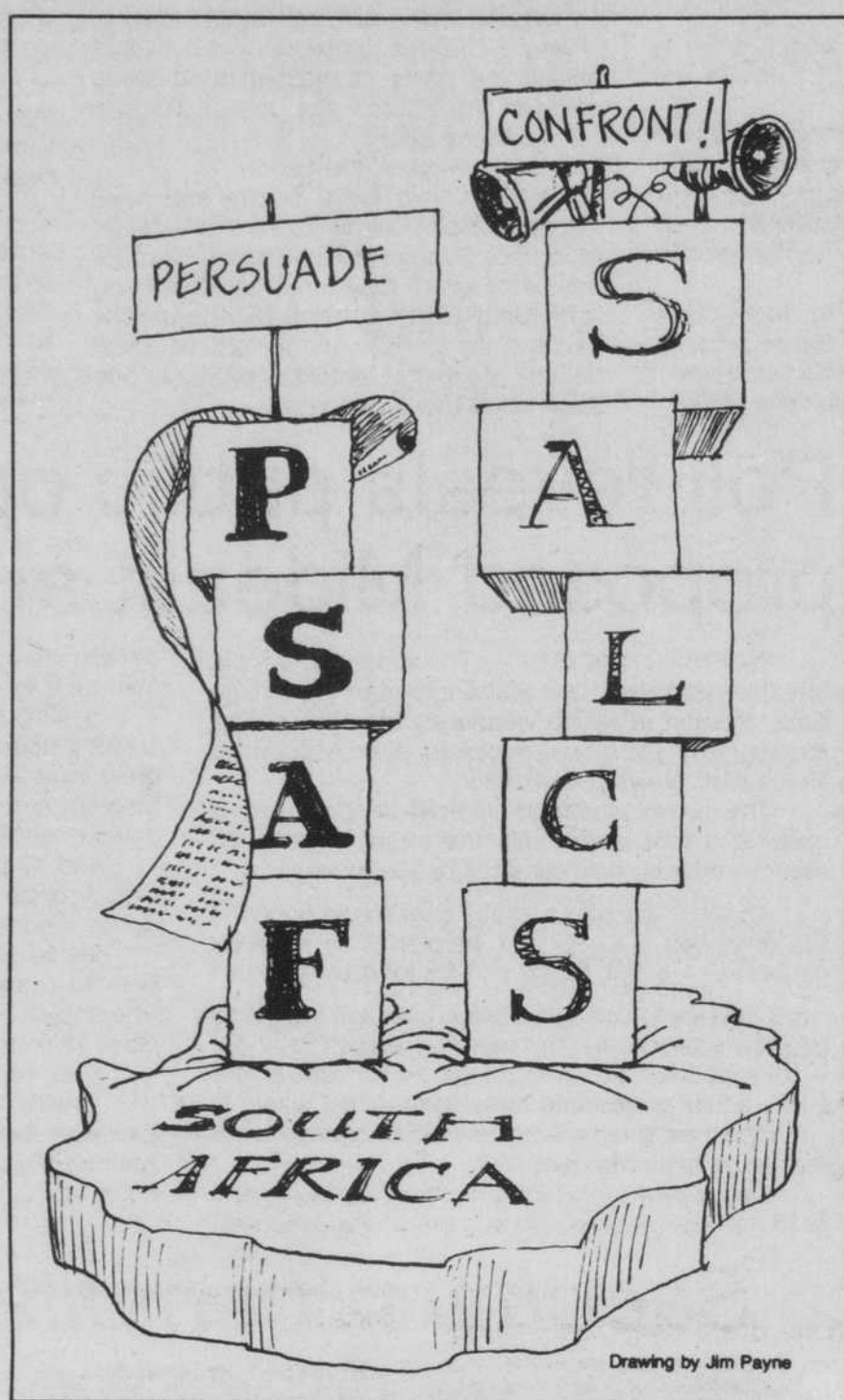
Bowers says rather than drop out of South Africa work and forget the issue when SASC began having problems, PSAF members decided to "Expend the effort," and form a group that would complement the other.

"SASC was exclusively on campus," he says. "We decided to look toward the community."

PSAF has no official membership, but about 20 people regularly come to the weekly Tuesday night meetings. A good portion of those are students, but some are full-time workers.

Most of the members are socialists, Postol says, and the group tends to adopt a socialist perspective because "we believe in equality," but participants can be of any political affiliation.

Bowers says the socialist out-



Drawing by Jim Payne

look is logical because the exploitation of blacks in southern Africa is a direct result of capitalism.

"There is a clear link between profits and exploitation," he says. "If the blacks were paid an equitable wage, profits for U.S. corporations doing business in South Africa would go way down."

The making of a movement, in the view of PSAF, entails education and involvement of people in the community and Bowers stresses the importance of the expansion from the University.

"You can't bring about the kind of political change that is necessary in U.S. foreign policy without involving the broad spectrum of people," he says.

Through institutions, "you have

a forum," Bowers says. So PSAF directs its educational energies to schools and churches through films and lectures.

It's a misconception that churches are non-progressive Bowers says. "A lot of people within churches are taking strong stands on the South Africa issue."

The Kruggerand boycott has been PSAF's major community effort, says Postol, citing the Merrill Lynch demonstration in December, which yielded more than 120 picketers protesting the investment firm's selling of the South African gold coin.

Postol says PSAF is primarily responsible for the Eugene City Council's resolution two weeks ago asking Eugeneans not to buy,

sell or advertise the Kruggerand. The group worked for weeks "behind the scenes" collecting more than 1,300 signatures on petitions, says Postol, arranging for people to testify and write letters to council members.

Bowers says PSAF believes it is important to develop a "broad base of support" before staging confrontations.

"Sometimes a smaller group generates mass support, like in the Southern civil rights struggles," he says, "but the more distant the issue, the less it grips people personally, the more important it is to assure yourself you have a mass base."

"I don't know exactly how many is a mass," he says. "More than a handful I guess."

Awareness of the southern Africa issues is picking up, Postol says.

"If you'd asked most people a year ago what the Kruggerand was, they wouldn't have known," she says. "Now everyone knows."

"We can't act as though what we've done is solely responsible; news coverage of the events in Southern Africa has contributed," she says. "It's all helping to raise people's consciousness."

Divestment of State Board of Higher Education stocks in southern Africa is another issue with which the PSAF has been involved.

"We were responsible for the large majority of people who testified at the State Board meeting in November," Bowers says. Also PSAF member Walt Sheasby got together with attorney Mike Goldstein to file a legal brief to the attorney general on divestment.

Postol says the occupation of the chancellor's office organized by SALSC on Jan. 25 "kept the divestment issue alive" but was misdirected and mistimed.

Bowers says PSAF didn't get involved in that demonstration because it would confuse people.

"We felt it wouldn't be clear why the demonstration focused on the State Board when it had voted to dump the stocks two months ago, and not on the attorney general's office where the decision is being delayed," says Bowers.

Postol says PSAF entirely supports having the trespassing charges dropped, though. "How can you compare trespassing to the injustices and illegalities U.S. corporations are perpetrating in

southern Africa?"

"We're behind the SALSC and what they're about," she says. "We just disagree strategically. They've taken a stand supporting anti-imperialism and we should support them since we, ourselves, support that."

Another tactical point of contention between PSAF and SALSC is methods of persuading those in power.

PSAF believes that to accomplish change, they have to work with the "middle bureaucrats...in whatever way you can," says Postol.

"But they say we're begging members of the ruling class," she says. "We say we're building a movement."

It's too "black and white" to say that all of the State Board and city council members are the ruling class, Postol says.

"There's a difference between members of the ruling class and capitalists," she says. "And it's unrealistic to expect the State Board and the city council to become anti-capitalist."

"You just have to take opportunities and use them whenever you can," she says. "The end result is that the movement is broadened."

PSAF hopes to further broaden the movement by establishing first a regional then a national network with other South Africa support organizations. She says there are many campuses with support groups, but no connection between them.

Future plans for PSAF include more action on the Kruggerand and divestment issues and an attempt to become more visible on campus.

Back in May, after PSAF left SASC, the remaining members changed the group's name to the South African Liberation Support Committee.

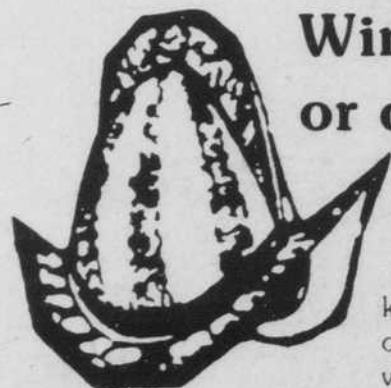
Students Terri Dach, English, and Renee Romanoff, pre-CSPA and history, stuck with the SALSC.

Romanoff says "liberation" was added to the name because back then, some people got confused and thought the group supported the South African government rather than the liberation struggle.

SALSC is commonly confused with the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade (RCYB), formerly the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB).

Romanoff is an RCYB member and she says although nearly all RCYB members are involved with SALSC, the reverse isn't true. The RCYB has only five official mem-

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