



Will South Africa be  
America's next cause?

*New York, September*

PUBLIC INTEREST AND PUBLIC CONCERN change fast in America. The American mind, like its consumer economy, depends on a relentless train of fads to maintain its equilibrium. One of the most interesting, and typically one of the most diverse, in recent years has been something called The Movement.

In the Eisenhower years the radical consciousness of America was limited to an FBI-infiltrated Socialist-Labour movement, an uncertain coterie of academic liberals, and nascent ban-the-bomb groupings, clearly imitative of the Aldermaston variety. In the Kennedy years radical consciences found a cynosure in the Civil Rights Movement. In the Johnson years, so far, the issues of America's Asian War have pre-empted the passion of Civil Rights. At this juncture with the Vietnam issue clearly The Movement's major cause, and agitation for legalisation of LSD and marijuana coming up fast from the underground, the hope for South Africa becoming the next paramount issue is limited.

Probably every American radical has some awareness that apartheid is an issue which merits his notice. But for the time being there is so much else to fight against. As guarantees of civil rights for all have been legislated and as US bombers unload ever more northward, the Vietnam issue has clearly replaced the Negro issue as number one. SNCC is now known more for Julian Bond's stand on the Asian War than for its voter registration drives. The war protest march has replaced the civil rights march as the favourite radical outdoor activity, with James Meredith's private walk to Jackson, Miss., and its confused aftermath, perhaps the beginning of a swing back of the pendulum.

WITHIN THE CURRENT SCOPE of The Movement, the specific issues and diverse approaches are manifest. They range from the Mexican agricultural workers' strike in Delano, California, to the rising clamour, in certain circles, for the recognition of homosexuals as a repressed political minority group.

Recently Allen Ginsberg, the guru of

many American radicals, told me that censorship, the persecution of LSD and marijuana users and the Vietnam War were all symptoms of the same sickness in America. And of course he was right. He, the shuffling embodiment of the American radical, manages to unify by his very existence the diversity of contentious issues in America, but any unity of American radicalism is not much evident anywhere beyond a few such strong personalities.

For example, the recently successful Fifth Avenue Parade in New York against the Vietnam War was organised by no less than 72 anti-war groups, their biases running from buttoned-down Anglican constitutionalist to super-anarchic. The infighting on the Parade Committee to decide the plans, schedule, speakers and agenda was carried on for months before the happening itself. Two people on the committee told me that it was a "miracle" that they managed to launch the parade at all.

Such organisational chaos has been duplicated in every significant event of the radical cause, from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement to the Selma-Montgomery March and now to the march on Jackson. One of the common tenets of the present breed of American radical is a belief in basic democracy. As in the old town meeting, this ideal is very fine but very inefficient, particularly when trying to spatially co-ordinate thousands of people.

When there is a specific protest for a specific group — such as the various picketings of Chase Manhattan Bank because of its South African interests, and the harassment of Charles Engelhard a few months ago when he was presented with the Brotherhood Award of the National Council of Christians and Jews — the demonstrative riposte is clean and telling. But how few times have American groups directed themselves to any issue directly concerning South Africa. . . .

Ignorance is perhaps what most obscures South Africa from America. Yet there are indications of growing realisation: Robert Kennedy in South Africa may have been just another American innocent abroad, but his trip surely had its educative impact here. Growing awareness has its negative impact here too, and "Black Power", so dramatically revealed in the course of the Jackson March, is an uncomfortable one to most Americans whether it is seen on the roads of Mississippi or imagined in the far distance of South Africa. And following, the all too typical American reaction sets in: *Time* minces insidiously sarcastic about both Kennedy and the locale of his mild examination, and American radicals, with the exception of the Black Nationalists, pull their heads even further back into their feathers.

If the Asian War is ever resolved without absolute abnegation of American idealism, then perhaps the time for South Africa will come among American radicals. But even then there will be something else unless events within South Africa herself make apartheid front page news here. ●

## Two Poems

To the lecturers of Legon

*All praise  
The Academic  
Lumpenproletariat of Legon. . . .*

*All hail  
These minions  
Of the Printed Word. . . .*

*Who stood  
For 15 years  
Against the Might that was Nkrumah  
By grovelling  
On their knees.*

On being taken unawares by the  
coup of February 24th

*Dear God . . .  
When my family was hungry  
I sold my daughters.*

*Dear God . . .  
When my family was starving  
I sold my sons.*

*Dear God . . .  
When my family was dying from  
the famine  
I sold my wives and all my relatives. . . .*

*But, dear God . . .  
I maintained my integrity —  
I never sold myself.*

KOFI O. SAM