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SPOTLIGHTING FEDERAL GRANTS #5

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

"Africans, Americans at Conference Join in Blasting U.S. Policy." So read the headline in the January 18, 1983, Washington Post. The article that followed described a conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, at which "...speaker after speaker lashed out at the United States...." Representatives of the Reagan Administration were allowed to present their positions on issues such as "constructive engagement" with South Africa and linking the independence of Namibia to withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, but the tone of the conference clearly was set by the speakers and participants who voiced adamant opposition to Reagan Administration policies. "Cynical, shameful and inhumane" was how South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) leader Sam Nujoma characterized the Administration's diplomatic efforts in Africa.

Such rhetoric would be not at all unusual at a conference organized by a group of anti-American "non-aligned" nations. The Harare gathering, however, was sponsored and orchestrated by an organization that receives more than 80 percent of its income from the U.S. government. This organization, the African-American Institute (AAI), has received over \$135 million from the American taxpayer in the past twenty-five years. How this money has been, and is being, spent ought to be a matter of concern to the taxpayer and to Congress. Has AAI, for instance, used U.S. government funds on projects--such as the Harare conference--inimical to U.S. policy and interests? Do the Institute's biases affect its ability to execute U.S. government contracts? Does AAI return U.S. taxpayer largesse with appropriate fiscal and managerial responsibility?

These questions should be answered for the hard-pressed American taxpayer. Even a preliminary look at AAI activities reveals that all too often, AAI repays U.S. generosity with disservice to U.S. interests.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The African-American Institute was organized in 1953 to provide African nations with Western technological, political and philosophical training, and to improve understanding and communication between Africa and the U.S. Education is the main tool used by the Institute to fulfill its goals. Since 1961, more than twenty separate AAI educational programs have trained over 12,000 Africans in vocational, secondary and postsecondary institutions throughout Africa and America. In addition to its training programs, funded primarily by the State Department's Agency for International Development (AID),¹ AAI runs a number of programs under the category "Strengthening African Relations." Most of the money for these programs is provided by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), until recently called the U.S. International Communication Agency (USICA), for an international visitors program. Private funds also are raised for programs in this category, particularly for potentially controversial events, such as the conference in Harare.² Even for such events, however, the U.S. taxpayer is often found footing the bill for administrative overhead.

In the early days of AAI, U.S. aid to Africa was designed to support and coincide with U.S. foreign policy interests. African students trained through AAI programs and African visitors brought to the U.S. through AAI visitor programs were to be exposed to U.S. social, political and economic values. Only then, reasoned State Department officials and old AAI officers, could the U.S. rely on these students and leaders to promote African development along non-tyrannical lines.

Beginning in the late 1960s, policy changed drastically. Said AAI president Waldemar Nielsen in 1967: "American and European organizations concerned with training and assuring the utilization of refugees must work within a framework established by Africans--by the independent governments and the liberation movements themselves."³ AAI henceforth began directing U.S. aid to Africa only through a framework established by those Africans that the AAI--not necessarily the U.S. government--deemed ideologically acceptable.

¹ Government funding of AAI in the fiscal year ending September 30, 1981, was broken down as follows: AID funding of AAI--\$7,161,465; USIA funding of AAI--\$2,060,750; in addition, approximately \$200,000 from general State Department funds was contributed to several AAI programs.

² Private funds are also applied to controversial AAI training programs. One such program is described in AAI's 1978 Annual Report: "The Institute has used AAI general funds to cover the costs of one-year training programs for two high-level women secretaries in the [Marxist] Mozambique Ministry of Foreign Affairs. AAI seeks private contributions to continue and expand this initiative, rendered more important by the absence of U.S. government aid funds for Mozambique" (p. 23).

³ "Refugee Students from Southern Africa," a report on a 1967 AAI conference cosponsored with Syracuse University.

AAI's current president, Donald B. Easum, wrote in the Institute's 1981 Annual Report: "Development...means working within the framework of African planning and African priorities." What this means often in practice is that AAI officers are accepting a perspective and setting priorities that would be regarded as anathema by many in the West. Easum explains:

Africans are puzzled by U.S. unease over "external" influence on their decision-making process....They ask us not to forget so soon the historical basis for ties that some of them maintain with countries that were their principal source of support in their struggle, sometimes violent, for independence (p. 1).

Easum leaves no doubt as to who those "external" forces are. He goes on to say, "Africans argue with the view that Soviet and Cuban activities are the cause, not the consequence, of economic and political instability in Africa." When questioned specifically about the presence of Cuban troops in Angola, in a late 1982 interview at the African-American Institute in New York, Easum told The Heritage Foundation that they are in Angola not to prop up an undemocratic regime but, rather, to keep South African troops out of Angola.

The views of Donald Easum actually represent the moderate wing of AAI. Many AAI employees bitterly resented his 1979 appointment as president, preferring the more outspoken former AAI executive vice president Walter Carrington.⁴ Donald Easum's distinguished diplomatic career--which includes tours as U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs--has prepared him well for accommodating different political viewpoints. Yet AAI's top officer may have only limited impact on shaping AAI policy--at least so far. AAI programs, by and large, lack balance and are skewed to present only one perspective to Africans and Americans. This bias is particularly distressing because it touches AAI's U.S. government funded scholarship programs designed to train the future leaders of Africa.

PROGRAM BIAS

AAI's training programs fall into two main categories: "Assisting African Development" and "Refugee Training and Assistance." One of the most sensitive operational aspects of these programs, particularly those involving southern African refugees, is finding students who deserve U.S. financed scholarships. AAI scholarships add tremendously to the resources of the group or

⁴ According to one former AAI employee, "Easum's appointment caused such a fuss among AAI employees that Carrington was awarded the Ambassadorship to Senegal by the Carter Administration as a consolation. The White House worked closely with AAI on this."

party that the scholarship recipient represents.⁵ Student eligibility depends largely on whose recommendation AAI officers take seriously. In nonrefugee programs, committees representing various factions within the applicants' country are formed, to decide which students should receive scholarships. However, refugee training programs must seek assistance from nongovernment groups outside a particular refugee's country.

In a letter dated October 17, 1980, from Donald Easum to the director of the State Department's Office of Refugee Programs, Frank E. Loy, a proposed four-year \$19.5 million refugee educational program administered by AAI is discussed in detail. Easum assures Loy that AAI is well qualified to administer the proposed program, particularly because of the Institute's ability to seek out "worthy applicants." To find such applicants, AAI seeks advice from, among others, "nationalist movements associated with the OAU [Organization of African Unity] and the U.N.," thus assuring, "the legitimacy of the exiles' situation and their suitability for the desired training." These organizations include the African National Congress (ANC) and the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). Both groups have records of terrorism and are committed to establishing--by force if necessary--Marxist governments in southern Africa. The ANC, in fact, is regarded by many to be almost completely controlled by the South African Communist Party. It also is widely believed that the recent murder of one-time ANC member Bartholomew Hlapane was ordered by ANC because he had testified about ANC-South African Communist Party links before the U.S. Senate.⁶ Nevertheless, AAI continues to provide U.S. financed scholarships to students named by these Marxist organizations. ANC Education Committee chairman Fred Dube was contacted by telephone in New York in December 1982 and confirmed the longstanding relationship between the AAI and the ANC, saying:

The only problem we have in dealing with AAI is that they decide what degrees our students are allowed to pursue. We want more students trained in the sciences. They insist that our students focus on the liberal arts, and that our students study in more African than

⁵ The importance of AAI scholarships to revolutionary groups is alluded to in the 1967 AAI report on refugees mentioned earlier: "While compassionate regard for the refugee as an individual is essential, refugee students at U.S. institutions should be helped to maintain contact with their liberation movements....If we begin by giving weight to the individual, we will be lost when freedom comes; refugee students are not 'free' individuals but are committed to serve society."

⁶ See "Soviet, East German and Cuban Involvement in Fomenting Terrorism in South Africa," the Report of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 97th Congress second session, November 1982. Also, "Death of Bartholomew Hlapane," Congressional Record, December 21, 1982, p. S 15902.

American schools. However, many AAI officers, particularly [AAI vice-president] Frank Ferrari, are very forthcoming.

While AAI has been dealing with various Marxist organizations, several equally anti-apartheid black organizations, who do not share the Marxist commitments of ANC or SWAPO, have been virtually excluded from this scholarship selection process. One such organization is INKATHA, led by Chief M. Gatha Buthelezi. With a paid membership of over 700,000 black South Africans, INKATHA has long fought apartheid in South Africa by peaceful and non-Marxist means. Nevertheless, according to sources close to INKATHA, the AAI usually ignores INKATHA representatives and does not ask them for names of "worthy" scholarship applicants. This was confirmed by several U.S. government officials. AAI vice-president Frank Ferrari believes INKATHA members may be among those on committees within South Africa to appoint nonrefugee students, but he was not sure.⁷

AAI's recognized political preferences can also affect Africans participating in AAI programs. A case in point is Angola, where AAI's preference for the Soviet backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has been demonstrated by several meetings and dinners in their honor and by AAI's refusal to allow non-MPLA members to attend conferences even when a multi-party coalition was ruling that country.⁸ In 1976, fifteen UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) students were brought to the U.S. on AAI scholarships. At that time Angola was ruled by a coalition government consisting of MPLA, UNITA, and the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola). Fifteen students from each faction were offered AAI administered scholarships by the U.S. government. Only UNITA students used their scholarships for schools in the U.S. One year into the program, the MPLA, with the assistance of Cuban troops, seized control of Angola. The UNITA students feared for their lives if they returned to Angola and sought resident status in the U.S. After considerable delay, the State Department declared them refugees. During all this, was AAI providing the neutral assistance that it had pledged? Apparently not.

The UNITA students complain bitterly about AAI's role during their struggle to adjust to their changing circumstances. "We all knew the African-American Institute favored the MPLA, so we felt we were on our own," one student explains. Adds another student: "One AAI program officer tried to convince us that it was our duty to go back home and work for the MPLA." At one point the students began receiving phone calls from MPLA leaders visiting the U.S. "MPLA Minister of Transportation Faustino

⁷ Based on a March 2, 1983, telephone conversation.

⁸ No UNITA or FNLA members attended AAI's 1974 conference in Lusaka, Zambia. Only MPLA officials represented Angola.

Mouteka called me up and tried to convince me that UNITA was dead and that I should return to Angola," recalls one student. What surprised the students most about Mouteka's calls was how he got the telephone numbers; most of the students had unlisted numbers. Only one answer is plausible to some of the students. "I know he got my number from someone at AAI; there was no one else at that time who had access to it," says one student confidently. Another commented, "We all had unlisted numbers for safety's sake; AAI was the only group outside the UNITA office who had our numbers."⁹ Only one of the four students contacted doubts AAI's role in the Mouteka incident.

The African-American Institute maintains that it keeps all of the students' personal files absolutely confidential. "We are extremely sensitive to the nature of African politics," explained AAI program officer Yolande Zahler in a December 1982 telephone interview, "and would never release information such as students' phone numbers." Concerning the UNITA students' charge that AAI was less than helpful during their struggle to get residency status, AAI insists it has nothing to regret. Said Easum: "We were very much involved in giving assistance to those Angolans stranded here after the MPLA took over." Yolande Zahler echoed her boss: "We provided the UNITA students with all the help we could." Even assuming the UNITA students exaggerate, the point remains that AAI's bias in this conflict was recognized by, and affected the attitude of, the UNITA students. The students felt they could not trust AAI and were quick to blame their misfortunes on AAI officers.

A number of other AAI operations are directly affected by ideological bias. Among them:

Conferences

While most AAI conferences are not directly funded by U.S. government funds, a large amount of time is spent by AAI officers arranging these meetings and events. And since a 55 percent administrative overhead is tacked on to all U.S. government contracts by AAI--most of which goes toward its officers' salaries--there may be considerable indirect taxpayer funding of these conferences. The major complaint about AAI conferences is that the guest lists consistently lean to Marxist or pro-Marxist governments and organizations and either exclude or severely limit participation by Africans and Americans who favor the U.S. Administration's policy prescriptions for African development. (This was true in the Carter Administration as well as in the Reagan Administration.) The conference in Harare typified this. The guest list included five members of SWAPO and several members of the ANC and the Pan African Congress; yet Chief Buthelezi,

⁹ This researcher was carefully screened before his name was passed to the UNITA students.

representing 750,000 black South Africans was not invited. Nor were members of the nonviolent Black Consciousness Movement invited to this "pluralistic" gathering. A summer 1982 conference on African Development and its Implications for the State of California included radicals Jane Fonda and her husband Tom Hayden, not previously known for their expertise in African affairs. Excluded entirely were representatives of organizations which promote free-market research. And despite several AAI meetings and dinners for representatives of the Marxist MPLA in Angola, Easum's organization specifically has excluded the anti-Marxist UNITA from its gatherings. If, as Donald Easum claims, in the interest of plurality, AAI must provide a forum for groups like ANC and SWAPO, why exclude individuals and groups who are just as representative of Africans and who might better represent U.S. interests?

International Visitors Program

Observes a congressional staffer who has worked closely with AAI: "I had an African aide come to me after an AAI visitors tour. He told me, 'We have never met any Republicans. Could you introduce us to some?'" Until Ronald Reagan's election, added the staffer, AAI rarely introduced visiting Africans to groups of individuals whose views differed substantively from those of the officers at AAI. African leaders in the past year have been introduced to several conservative organizations including The Heritage Foundation. This amounts, however, to mere tokenism. Leftist organizations--like Randall Robinson's TransAfrica and other groups strongly critical of both the Carter and Reagan policies--still dominate the agenda of visitors guided by AAI personnel.

AAI Publications

About AAI's official bi-monthly periodical Africa Report (AR) Donald Easum says: "AR may be published by AAI, but any views which emanate from it come from editor Tony Hughes." Nevertheless, according to a former AR editor: "The AAI Board and AAI officers went through about 5 or 6 editors before they settled on Hughes. If they were unhappy with his views they would have replaced him long ago, as they have done with editors in the past." One area in which those views are recognized as biased is in AR's coverage of the conflict between the Moroccan government and the Libyan-supported Polisario Front in the Western Sahara. While interviews and position papers are presented from both sides of the conflict, journalistic coverage of the event is usually reserved for AR reporter Tony Hodges. Hodges is well known among pro-Polisario organizations, and they recommend his works highly.¹⁰ And in an interview with AR editor Anthony

¹⁰ In a pro-Polisario propaganda newsletter (published by the Saharawi People's Support Committee), an entire article is spent lauding Hodge's work and suggests the reader subscribe to AAI's Africa Report just to read his articles.

