Memorandum on Some Current Public Relations Efforts by South Africa in the U.S.

For many years the Republic of South Africa has been spending sizeable amounts of money to try to improve its image in Western Europe and in the United States. These efforts have become more critical on the heels of recent developments, particularly the Soweto uprising. This memorandum is not an attempt to make a full analysis of these activities, but rather to comment on two current projects which have come to our attention here in the United States.

First there is a significant campaign being developed through the initiation of a contract with the public relations firm of Sydney S. Baron Company. Since the Baron organization had to register with the Department of Justice as a foreign agent, it was possible to procure a copy of the agreement between South Africa and this public relations organization. The agreement was signed on March 17, 1976 in Pretoria. The main signator for the South African government was its Secretary of Information, Dr. E.M. Rhodie. (Sydney S. Baron signed for the U.S. firm) The agreement establishes a one year contract for the sum of $365,000. The agreement detailed the work of the Sydney S. Baron Co. It is "hereby retained and appointed to assist the Department of Information in carrying out its public relations program in the USA. . . ." The Consultant agrees to "study and analyze the political, social, economic and military situations in the Republic of South Africa and American attitudes towards the Republic of South Africa."

The Consultant will "make every effort to encourage the American business and financial community to become acquainted with the economic opportunity offered by the Republic of South Africa...." Will "promote exchanges of visits between the U.S. and the Republic of South Africa...."

"Assist the Department of Information in the preparation and distribution of press releases, publication, analyses, reports, films and other communication vehicles...."

"Counsel the Department of Information concerning tourism programs...."

"Undertake such public opinion surveys in the United States as the Department of Information deem necessary to determine American attitudes and opinions concerning the Republic of South Africa."

"Furnish the Department of Information with analyses and interpretations of political and sociological developments in the United States affecting the Republic of South Africa when so requested...."

No doubt the Sydney S. Baron Company was fulfilling one part of this contract when, on June 23rd, Andrew Hatcher, Vice President International for the company, appeared on NBC-TV's "Today" show in a debate with George Houser. Although the period for an exchange of views was very limited, the effect of Hatcher's comments were that Soweto violence was simply a passing moment, that things were really improving in South Africa, that the South African government was trying to make significant changes; that South Africa was the best ally of the United States in Africa, and that increased American investment could help to bring change about. On July 2nd, an article by George Goodman, Jr., appeared in the New York Times reporting on the PR efforts which the South African government is trying to make among blacks in the United States. The fact that Hatcher, himself is a black and former associate press secretary for President Kennedy reflects this current South African
drive for black sympathy. Hatcher started working for the Baron organization at about the same time that the contract between the company and the South African government was signed.

This is not the only contract which the South African government has with American firms which will lobby for and promote South African interests, but it is the largest. There is another contract with a D.C. legal firm, Collier, Shannon, Rill and Edwards, and their attorney Donald DeKieffer has been credited with some major victories for his South African bosses.

The second current case has to do with a cosmetic firm based in Mississippi, the E.F. Young Company, which has signed a contract to sell such items as skin lightener and hair straightener to a firm in South Africa.

The South Africans are making very serious attempts to win allies for themselves in the South, not among the old white conservatives their long time friends, but in the ranks of black Americans. They have used a two pronged strategy, wooing academic leaders and building academic exchanges between Southern universities and segregated black universities in South Africa on the one hand, and encouraging business relationships on the other.

A clear example of the new South African campaign is seen in the recent trade agreement signed between black owned Mississippi firm, the E.F. Young Co., and a white-owned South African company - Andrew Harding Pty Ltd. That agreement has an interesting history.

In 1974 Dr. Carlton Turner, Associate Director of the University of Mississippi Research Institute for Pharmaceutical Sciences went to a conference on Alcohol and Drug dependence in South Africa.

While there he met a white businessman, Andrew Harding who runs a chain of pharmacies in South Africa. Out of their discussions came the introduction of Harding to Charles Young, president of E.F. Young Co., an invitation from the Mississippi University Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences to Harding and some fellow businessmen to visit the U.S., and a five year contract signed between Young and Harding.

Under this contract E.F. Young which is headquartered in Meridian, Mississippi will supply a wide range of its special "black" cosmetics skin lighteners and hair straighteners to the Harding Co., which will market them in South Africa. The contract, obviously seen as a triumph by the South Africans was signed in front of Governor Finch of Mississippi, in a partying atmosphere which included the presentation of South African gifts to the Governor.

Not everybody in Mississippi is so happy about the deal, or about other indications of South Africa's successful propaganda campaign.

In a hard-hitting statement Henry J. Kirksey, an independent black politician running for the Senate against incumbent John Stennis, attacked the contract and said "The native people of South Africa and Rhodesia don't need any cosmetics. They need help to get the European apartheid thieves off their backs."

Unfortunately South Africa's constant re-iteration of the argument that it is changing and that economic development will help that change has confused many people who are fundamentally opposed to the racist system but do not understand
its basic intransigence. Thus Mayor Charles Evers responded to the Kirksey statement by defending Charles Young and the principle of American blacks doing business in South Africa. "Just let us get into South Africa and that monster of servication will come tumbling down," he said. U.S. investment in South Africa has grown from almost nothing to over $1.5 billion in the last twenty-five years, while apartheid has intensified, the Bantustans have been established and thousands of political protestors have been jailed or shot. It seems a little unlikely then that a contract to supply cosmetics will bring that system crumbling down.

Meanwhile the South Africans continue to press for more contacts in the South. Last year Dr. Ronald Farrar, Chairman of the Department of Journalism at the University of Mississippi, visited South Africa (apparently at South Africa's government expense). He was so impressed that he produced a number of sympathetic articles for U.S. publications and even a series which the South African government Department of Information printed in one of its official propaganda journals.

Following his visit has come an attempt to establish some kind of exchange relationship between the University of Mississippi Department of Journalism and the segregated University of the Western Cape in South Africa. This type of scheme has government approval on both sides of the Atlantic.

Early in 1976 the State Department sponsored a trip to the U.S. and to Mississippi for Mr. Dennis Adonis, Director of Development for the University of the Western Cape.

The South African government has learned to hide its iron fist in a velvet glove — thus it now allows blacks to travel out of South Africa, and even to be quite strongly critical of apartheid so long as they accept "the possibility of change within the system" and do not identify themselves with liberation movement politics. For the men and women who do adopt such an uncompromising stance there are no overseas tours or velvet gloves, only the guns of Soweto or prison bars of Robben Island.

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