Bob Smith, U.S. Representative from Burns, Oregon has just returned from a tour of Southern Africa sponsored by the South Africa Foundation.

The South Africa Foundation is a semi-independent group of businessmen who work closely with the South African Department of Information to promote South Africa as a stable and profitable field for investment. Although there are no formal ties between the foundation and the government, there are many informal ties between it and the Departments of Information and Finance. The foundation and the Department of Information are known to cooperate at every level.

The foundation was established in 1960, soon after the Sharpeville Massacre, to restore overseas confidence in South Africa. One of the foundation's main activities is sponsoring visitors to South Africa. It frequently provides expense-paid trips to influential and hopefully susceptible visitors, guiding them with much skill and exposing them to just enough opposition opinion for the pro-government pitch to seem honest and candid.

Public Debate on U.S. Investments

Recent demonstrations by the Free South Africa Movement and numerous anti-apartheid groups around the country, along with pending legislation at the national and state levels, have put the question of U.S. investments in the forefront of public debate on South Africa.

This increased attention to South Africa has also brought an increase in activity on the part of the South African government and its lobbies. The government and its closely affiliated private lobbying foundations spend millions of dollars annually to counter divestment and other efforts aimed at bringing pressure on the South African government. Rep. Bob Smith's all expenses paid South Africa Foundation tour is an example of such lobbying.

American Friends Service Committee Findings

The AFSC has been engaged in issues of Southern Africa for over three decades. It sent a multi-racial fact-finding delegation to South Africa and front-line states in 1980. That group met with a broad range of community, church, government and business people—some working to change the system and others working to maintain the status quo. Since then, individuals have traveled to South Africa, facilitating a constant exchange of information. These exchanges have resulted in the following findings:
1.) When the argument is made that Blacks in South Africa will suffer first and most from economic sanctions or corporate withdrawal, one must first of all listen to who is making the argument. For example, one of the black South Africans frequently quoted as a critic of apartheid but in favor of continued investments is Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. As chief of the KwaZulu "homeland" and employee of the South African government, he can hardly be considered an objective observer. Numerous other black South Africans who are not beholden to the government, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Tutu and Dr. Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, have spoken out in favor of economic pressure on the government.

2.) Less then 1% of all black South African are employed by U.S. companies. The great majority of black South Africans are so far outside the mainstream economy that they would be marginally affected by corporate withdrawal. As one black South African woman put it, "When you are already lying on the floor, you don't have far to fall."

3.) The purpose of divestment actions is not to create "economic chaos" in South Africa. It is widely recognized that it would take considerable amount of corporate withdrawal and time for the economy to be disrupted in any real way. The purpose of economic sanctions of any kind is to send a strong, clear message to the South African government that it must begin now to negotiate with the legitimate black leaders (Nelson Mandela and others who have been imprisoned for years) of the disenfranchised majority, both on the grievances which have prompted school boycotts and outbreaks of violence, as well as the ongoing denial of power-sharing to the black majority.

Schlemmer Report

A widely discussed survey conducted among black South African factory workers published in September 1984 needs to be closely examined. According to the survey, conducted by Professor Lawrence Schlemmer of the University of Natal (also president of the South African Institute of Race Relations) 75% of the 551 workers questioned said they disagreed with a strategy of disinvestment and 41% said that such a policy would harm blacks. It is important to note:

. The survey was funded by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, Herman Nickel.

. The Institute of Race Relations, a group that opposes the policies of apartheid, has now disassociated itself from the report.

. Any person, black or white, expressing approval of disinvestment faces the minimum of 5 years in prison under South African law.

. All those surveyed were industrial workers and stood to lose their jobs. In addition, the survey was not conducted through anonymous questionnaires, but by face-to-face interviews which meant full identification.