Preaching Freedom, Investing in Oppression

US Policy in Southern Africa

George Houser

Late in the 1976 Presidential campaign, candidate Jimmy Carter gave an interview to South Africa's leading business publication, The Financial Mail, sounding the key themes of what was to become his southern Africa policy. In that interview, Carter called for an end to Kissinger-style one-man diplomacy, for majority rule "with the protection of minority rights," and for greater US coordination of its efforts with those of other countries with interests in the region.

Of all his comments, however, the most interesting to US observers of the African scene were those regarding the role of US business as an element of foreign policy.

Asked whether he would actively encourage private lending and corporate activity in South Africa, Carter answered, "Yes, indeed. . . . Economic development, investment commitment and the use of economic leverage against what is, after all, a government system of repression within South Africa, seems to me the only way to achieve racial justice there" (my emphasis).

Carter thus found himself in accord with former administrations which, while taking an officially neutral stance on investment in white-ruled states, had in reality encouraged business ties through such actions as the establishment of commercial consulates and support of Export-Import Bank financing.

In the months since he has taken office, Carter has without doubt made important changes in US policy toward southern Africa, according to many observers. Carter’s administration has given more attention to the region than it has received in any similar period of other administrations with the possible exception of the latter phase of the Ford-Kissinger era. There have been clear statements of opposition to apartheid, strong moves to assert US leadership on various issues including Namibia, a move away from a narrow cold war view of the region. These changes have been applauded by African leaders and by Americans both sympathetic to African aspirations and eager to see negotiated solutions to the area’s problems.

On the crucial issue of US business involvement in southern Africa, however—crucial because it is the chief basis of US interest in the region and the major channel of US involvement—Carter and his Administration have not only continued to express established attitudes of sympathy but in fact have gone beyond prior administrations in perceiving US business interests as an actual agent of change.

Given this situation, it is no surprise that in the eyes of those supporting and participating in the liberation movements the Carter Administration is perceived as basically no different from its predecessors: in its public pronouncements a self-proclaimed champion of human rights, but in practice a defender of limited change that will not jeopardize its business interests.

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Andrew Young told a UN conference in Maputo, Mozambique last May that new US policies “represent something of a revolution in the consciousness of the American people. . . . A revolution that has taken place throughout the United States of America.” Secretary Vance said in a speech to an NAACP conference in July that “Africa matters very much to the United States.”

Stronger Stance on Apartheid

South Africa. The United States through various administrations has spoken about apartheid many times at the UN and elsewhere. However, toward the end of his tenure Kissinger was very careful not to deal with the internal policy of apartheid in discussions with Prime Minister Vorster or other South African officials. Kissinger approached South Africa as perhaps the most important agent for change in Rhodesia and Namibia. The question was always raised, however, as to what secret deals the US might be making with South Africa in exchange for this pressure.
In contrast Mondale made clear in his talks with Vorster in Vienna that the US would not bargain with South Africa regarding the apartheid issue. He said in his press conference following the discussions, "We hope South Africans will not rely on any illusions that the United States will in the end intervene to save South Africa from the policies it is pursuing, for we will not do so."

Mondale said, "We think apartheid is discriminatory, and a full political participation by all of its citizens on an equal basis is essential to the transformation that would be a prerequisite to a stable South Africa." Indicating that Vorster had rejected the concept of full participation, he added, "If South Africa persists in its ideology our paths will diverge and our policies come into conflict."

Secretary Vance made much the same points in his July speech to the NAACP:

Some have argued that apartheid in South Africa should be ignored for the time being in order to concentrate on achieving progress in Rhodesia and Namibia. Such a policy would be wrong and would not work. It would be blind to the reality that the beginning of progress must be made soon within South Africa if there is to be a possibility of peaceful solutions in the longer run. It would mislead the South Africans about our real concerns. It would prejudice our relations with our African friends. It would do a disservice to our own beliefs. And it would discourage those of all races who are working for peaceful progress within South Africa.

**Zimbabwe.** For the most part the Carter Administration has continued along the lines of a Kissinger policy calling for close cooperation with the British in seeking a negotiated settlement. This position has been maintained even though the Patriotic Front, made up of the two leading liberation forces, has rejected the idea of any big-power-orchestrated settlement. However, there have been some departures from past attitudes. The most notable of which involved repeal of the Byrd amendment permitting US importation of Rhodesian chrome in violation of UN-voted sanctions.

The Nixon-Ford administrations both took a theoretical position favoring the amendment's repeal. However, as has been well documented, under neither of those Presidents did the White House use any muscle to try to end US sanctions-breaking activities. The Carter Administration not only announced that it would work to repeal the amendment but it actually used its influence to achieve this goal, including testimony by Secretary Vance before Congress.

It also supported the idea of altering the Zimbabwe Development Fund worked out by Kissinger in consultation with the British, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith and South Africa's Vorster. The original intent of the fund was to provide an incentive for Europeans to stay in an independent Zimbabwe or perhaps to aid them in leaving. Vice President Mondale has suggested weighting the plan more toward a development fund, a proposal that found favor with Congress. (Final action has yet to be taken on the measure. The issue of which other southern Africa countries ought to be included in aid provisions of the fund has prompted considerable debate.) In essence, of course, the attitude implicit in both plans is the same: Stability is of paramount importance, and by US definition that implies a continuation of present economic arrangements.

**More Pressure for Namibia**

- **Namibia.** The US took the initiative in organizing a "contact group" consisting of five Western members of the UN Security Council, for meetings with officials of South Africa—which continues to hold power illegally in Namibia—and with the top leadership of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)—recognized by the UN and the Organization of African States as the only legitimate representative of the Namibian people. Before meeting with the group of five, South Africa had insisted it would proceed with the plans for independence set forth in the Turnhalle talks, a constitutional convention orchestrated by South Africa with the aim of maintaining effective white control through the setting up of a government constituted according to ethnic groupings.

According to US participants, South Africa agreed as a result of the talks to some sort of UN involvement, including the presence of a special representative. South Africa reportedly conceded that all persons and parties, including SWAPO, would be free to participate in elections prior to independence. Agreement on these and other issues, nevertheless, seems far from realized at this point.

- **United Nations.** The participation of the US in the UN Conference on Solidarity with the People of Zimbabwe and Namibia in Maputo represented a clear break with prior US attitudes. For many years the US has not participated in the Decolonization Committee or other UN committees dealing with southern African liberation issues, finding it too embarrassing always to be the subject of attack at such gatherings.

By coincidence Andrew Young assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council in March, only weeks after his appointment as US Ambassador to the UN, when the issue to be debated was South Africa's apartheid policy. Instead of assuming the usual passive US role, he took the initiative in developing a Western approach to this perennial debate by campaigning for a consensus resolution of a statement of principles summarizing the US attitude toward South Africa. This was aimed at bypassing resolutions demanding economic and military sanctions, which most of the non-Western states were expected to promote. The strategy was successful in circumventing the African resolutions (on the grounds of "Let's give Andy a chance"), but it did not get the US statement of principles adopted.
*The Cold War.* The Administration has at least dulled cold war rhetoric on issues involving southern Africa. In his NAACP speech Secretary Vance disputed those who argue that the US must support white governments in southern Africa regardless of their internal policies because they are anti-communist. "In fact," Vance said, "the continued denial of racial justice in southern Africa encourages the possibilities for outside intervention."

Vice President Mondale had said much the same thing in Vienna: "The message to the South African Government is clear... They know that we believe that perpetuating an unjust system is the surest incentive to increase Soviet influence and even racial war."

Perhaps the prime example of this new policy at work occurred during the Zaire-Katanga conflict in Shaba province. The administration announced that the US would not send lethal material to Zaire, indicating that it did not have evidence of Cuban, Russian or Angolan participation in the conflict.

Secretary Vance commented on that situation:

> When such crises as the recent invasion of Zaire arise, we see no advantage in unilateral responses and emphasizing their East-West implications. We prefer to work with African nations—and with our European allies—in positive efforts to resolve such disputes. [T]he history of the past 15 years suggests that efforts by outside powers to dominate African nations will fail.

**Liberation Movements.** More initiatives have been taken under the Carter Administration than ever before, particularly by Andrew Young, to meet with representatives of liberation movements. It is also significant that the Administration recently invited President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania to Washington. For many years President Nyerere had been shunned by US administrations because of his espousal of socialist policies and active support of liberation movements in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

**South Africa is the Key**

The altered policies of the Administration offer opportunities to question a number of specific US responses: whether the US is still relying too heavily on Britain's peacemaking efforts in Zimbabwe, whether the US is being sufficiently aggressive in its efforts to achieve majority rule in Namibia, whether there is still too much of a cold-war mentality evident in the US attitude toward Mozambique and Angola.

But any assessment of US policy in southern Africa must of necessity focus on the Republic of South Africa for several reasons. First, South Africa is the key to southern Africa, because of its location in the region and because its economic and military power give it great influence over the course of events in neighboring states. Second, because of its power and wealth South Africa offers the most probable occasion for dangerous big power intervention in the region.

Third, South Africa is the principal US trading partner in Africa. Last year the US was South Africa's number one source of imports, while it continued to buy large amounts of South Africa's vital mineral resources. US investment of at least $1.58 billion in the Republic represents about 17 percent of all foreign investment there, and about 400 US companies currently do business there.

Beyond these economic ties two other items significantly affect the US perception of South Africa: (1) the role of South Africa in US defense strategy; and (2) the fact that because race has been the fundamental problem of both South Africa and American society, black and white Americans share a deep personal concern about the outcome of events there.

Given the importance of South Africa in the world context and the extent of the US-South Africa relationship, one must then look for the point at which the US enjoys the greatest opportunity to influence events in South Africa and observe what use is being made of the opportunity.

That point is clearly economic. President Carter spelled this out in his *Financial Mail* interview when in response to a query as to how great he believed US influence to be, he answered, "Very great. Our economic presence in South Africa gives us a greater influence on that government than its government has over Rhodesia, for example."

Past performance, however, suggests that America's business-based positive influence for change—if indeed there is one—has been minimal in alleviating conditions of injustice.

Between 1970 and 1975, for example, as US corporate investment in South Africa doubled, the gap between average white and black monthly household income increased from $362 to $546. On an individual company basis, an article in *The Wall Street Journal* last March 16 quoted the managing director of US-owned Caltex Oil S.A. Ltd. as saying on the subject of discrimination, "My company doesn't want me to break the law and go to jail." The article said the company was not opposed to change, however; among other things, it planned "to take down toilet segregation signs someday."

In this context, many responsible South Africans have in the past urged a withdrawal of foreign enterprise. Among them is Fatima Meer, president of the Black Women's Federation and one of about 1.000 people who were detained in the months following last year's disturbances. She has said, "The apartheid government grows stronger by the day because of its solvency, which it gets from foreign investors. If the Government had an economic shock, things might begin to change."

Many church groups in South Africa have taken a similar position. The Christian Institute said in a statement last year that "investment in South Africa is investment in apartheid, and this is immoral, unjust and exploitive. . . . The argument that economic
growth can produce fundamental change has proven false.”

Mammon as Redeemer

In spite of such statements, however, the Administration has continued to push the idea that business, including US business, can be the chief force for change in South Africa and elsewhere in the region. The most consistent proponent of this view has been Andrew Young. In some of his off-the-cuff remarks Young may be speaking strictly his own mind, but it is clear that on the matter of US policy toward Africa he is deeply involved in the policy-making process and is intended as one of its chief spokesmen.

Young’s key role has been stressed by high State Department officials in private conversations. It has also been publicly acknowledged by Secretary Vance as “contributing so well to the design and effectiveness of our policies abroad.”

Throughout a visit to Africa in May, Young continually sounded economic themes. In a speech to businessmen in Johannesburg, he said, “Out of my experiences I’ve come to think of the business community as in many respects being the key to the hope... for South Africans to live together as brothers and with the rest of the world as brothers.” He went on to state his belief that the most social change in the world is going on in “free market countries.” Young also held out the hope that with changes in its attitudes South Africa could capitalize on markets throughout black Africa.

Young made repeated references to his civil rights experiences as applicable to southern Africa. After a lunch that he and Dr. Martin Luther King had had in Birmingham with two corporate presidents, he recalled that policies were changed, a committee of 100 businessmen was formed, and those men negotiated “the end of apartheid in Birmingham, Alabama in spite of the fact that on the books of law it was still illegal to desegregate anything.” He added, “When blacks became a part of the free market system in the South, not only did that system not explode, but blacks had very much at stake in it.”

The effect of the policies advocated by Young is to preserve more or less as it is the US economic and strategic stake in South Africa. It allows business interests to remain undisturbed. feeling that they can continue to make profits and still be a force for change. Further, the implication of these policies is that if only the business community would take the lead in the process of change, the transformation to majority rule can come peacefully.

The trouble with this view is that it does not come to grips with the dynamics involved in the southern Africa struggle. The civil rights struggle in the US was not essentially revolutionary. It was aimed against discrimination and segregation. The ownership of property and the control of industry were not basically at stake. Considered in this light, the civil rights struggle in the US was much more akin to past eras in

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