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September 20, 1971

FROM: CONGRESSMAN CHARLES C. DIGGS, JR. (D-MICHIGAN)  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

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The following are questions and answers at Congressman Diggs' Press Conference September 16, 1971. At the briefing in the Foreign Affairs Committee Room (2255 Rayburn HOB), Mr. Diggs discussed his recent trip to Africa.

Q - There was some upset in the community in Detroit. People were dissatisfied with your comments on the nature of business relations in South Africa.

A - Well, I guess you sound as if you are talking about some garbling of a report which came through which suggested to some people that we may have changed our mind with respect to U.S. business in South Africa and whether they ought to continue there, or not continue there. I have not changed my mind with respect to U.S. business. I came back with the determination to concentrate on an area which has received too little attention in connection with this whole matter, and that is, what American enterprise can do as long as they are there. One must recognize that, under the American free enterprise system, there is no law and no individual that can force American business enterprise to disengage from conduct of business in those countries. There are things that our government can do, and there are things that those in the private sector can do to make it awfully uncomfortable for them. In the final analysis, they cannot be forced to move. They must move out of there on a voluntary basis. Secondly, one must recognize that there is an unevenness with respect to the investments that are there. There are some businesses that obviously can pull out tomorrow without any effect on their investment; namely, some of the banking enterprises, some of the small enterprises. We're talking about some 300 business enterprises, but they vary. You've got the General Motors plant in Port Elizabeth, South Africa that's been there for 45 years and has a great deal of infrastructure and all the rest. The problems of disengaging there would be much different than the problems involving a smaller firm, or a firm that was merely involved in services and not in manufacturing. The question is, what do you do in the meantime? The question is, will we permit American enterprise to hide behind apartheid and continue to exploit these workers in the interim period? This has not been explored. There is no limitation, for example, on wages in South Africa. There are classifications of jobs. There is a job reservation list, and Blacks cannot hold jobs that are on the job reservation list for whites, but there are only sixteen in this category. One gets the impression on the outside that all the jobs are on the job reservation list, or a great number larger than that, and that is not true. We found that plant managers we talked to, even suggesting that they weren't even aware that they could go further than they did. I don't think this matter has been properly

researched, number one, or properly pursued. There are many jobs that can be created outside of the job reservation list that ought to be pursued. There are fringe benefits which American enterprises are not extending to black workers - that ought to be pursued. There are many institutions including the liberation movement itself to which contributions can be made. At the South African Race Relations Institute, there is an American secondary school, a private school, operated by Americans that we visited that has had considerable difficulty in getting contributions from American enterprise. I could go on down the list citing instance after instance where the American enterprise can engage in democratic practices. As I pointed out in the opening statement, I think they ought to go beyond the permissible. I think that American business enterprise has been too cautious and apologetic in this whole situation. I cannot believe that if the General Motors Corporation in Port Elizabeth, for example, wished to dispense with many of these practices, or any of these practices, that the South African Government will close down the Ford plant, or the Chrysler plant if they decided to follow the same guidelines for fair employment practices that they follow here in the United States. I think further that our own government has not been helpful in this matter, because they haven't set the proper kind of example. And probably part of the reason many of these American enterprises feel that the government is not serious is because of the example that is set in our own embassy where they know as a matter of policy, Blacks are not assigned which makes our own government hypocritical. Or when they know that discrimination, in its most blatant form, is practiced at the NASA tracking station. The influence of the American government and American enterprise in both of these sectors would be important and is important in terms of trying to influence other foreign investments. It is one of the reasons that we ended up our journey by visitations to the capitals serving European countries where there is considerable foreign investment. In each instance, we came away with the impression that the U.S. government and the U.S. private enterprise had enough guts to go beyond its empty pronouncements that they are making in various quarters that others would emulate.

Q - Congressman, we've been getting reports from the press here about the South African Blacks themselves who are fearful of anything that will take these plants out of the country for fear of losing what employment they have now. What reading did you get from talking with them?

A - Well, there is a mixed reaction on that. I would say that there is a great deal of concern about anything that might potentially affect their own economic well-being. There are those who believe that to the extent that American enterprise is there, to the extent that there are potential jobs

available, that they would like to see them remain there. But there are others who feel differently from that. To a man, they all believe that American enterprise is in a position to resist the apartheid practices and their main encouragement to us was to try to get the United States, both in the private and public sector, to exercise the influence that they believe they have.

Q - Congressman Diggs, do you see a practical way of cutting off the sugar quota now? It's been approved by both House and Senate and I think it's in conference.

A - I don't know precisely what the legislative situation is. In this connection, I would have to be a little pessimistic, at this point, in view of what has happened. On the other hand, while we were over there, it was announced that because of a strike that was here, they were going to open up 100,000 tons of sugar purchases on a first-come, first-serve basis. We immediately dispatched a cablegram to the White House saying that under no circumstances should they by executive action permit the SAG to participate in this allocation. We've been advised that that extra allocation is not going to be made. As to what happens in the conference committee, this is a question that will have to be determined by other people.

Q - Recently there have been a couple of actions in South Africa that seem to indicate that there might be a chance for possible improvement for Blacks. The British banks, two of them, came out stating they will have equal pay for Black workers. Also, the head of the South African unions called for a better deal for Blacks saying that otherwise, there are chances for revolution. Do you think this is the beginning of anything at all in South Africa toward moving in this direction, or is it sort of salome slicing?

A - There have been stirrings in the past which indicated that some meaningful resistance from the inside was going to produce some results. The last time we had these kinds of ferments was about 1959, or just before Sharpsville. The government moved in an especially repressive fashion in response to the Sharpsville situation and these kinds of encouragements just evaporated. I think we are now in a much different situation. I think 1971 is much different than 1959, 1960. There are more pressures that have built up in Black Africa itself, in certain European capitals --- the whole gamut of ferment which has been operative in the international arena, has given focus to these last remaining vestiges of colonialism and racism in Africa. I think that the situation here in the United States in terms of the potentiality for building up pressure is much different than it was then. There has been an emergence since 1950 to 1967, for example, of a very strong Black identity with African concerns that is taking on a much more concrete form than it has in the past. All of these factors, together, I think are creating a much

different situation, a much stronger resistance, both inside and outside than we have experienced before. I know I came to South Africa with the impression, for example, that Black South Africans lack the will. The outside impressions were that they were cowed; that they had no spirit; that they were afraid to express themselves. I found that this is not true. I found there is a great deal of resistance in South Africa among student groups and among various other aspects of Black society and also among certain supportive elements that are there. I frankly believe the countdown has begun, and there is no question in my mind that the SAG cannot maintain white minority rule in that country and, at the same time, continue the kind of repressive aspects of their policy that they are pursuing.

Q - You had an objection to the American ambassador there holding a segregated reception. Did you have discussions with Mr. Hurd? What was the outcome?

A - Well, I think that the policy governing the American Embassy in South Africa is disgraceful. They are doing a lot of agonizing about whether or not Blacks ought to be assigned to our installation there. I think it's ridiculous. I think that they ought to dispense with all this agonizing and get on with the proposition that that is an American installation, and we ought to assign people there based upon what is considered to be the posture of our government and what is considered to be in the best interest of our government. I see no reason why they need to agonize any further. I see no reason why they should even think in terms of assigning one Black to the American installation there. They could assign several. Who says that they ought to be confined to one? One of the reasons they have been agonizing about it is because they raised certain questions about such questions as: Where is the wife going to shop? Where are the children going to go to school? The SAG is already resolving that matter as it relates to the Ambassador from Malawi. They have made arrangements for the Malawian ambassador's children to receive schooling and other matters pertaining to his personal life are also being resolved. The thing that is being overlooked in this whole proposition is the fact that South Africans happen to be Black, and that there are all manner of contacts of usefulness that a Black Foreign Service Officer, or a member of the embassy staff, could be making without any consideration as it relates to the government. I wouldn't worry about whether or not a Black FSO would have some problems communicating with the SAG. Who cares? Let other people make those contacts if it is necessary. I am more concerned about an area that has not been the subject of concern. That is, how do we begin to relate to the majority of the people in South Africa who happen to be Black? That is one of the reasons I think we ought to have a USIS installation out in Soweto. We have a USIS installation in downtown Johannesburg. A few miles out, you've got a million people with no kind of

U.S. presence at all. I think there are all sorts of things that could come out of that kind of a concept, and to the extent that our Mission in Johannesburg continues to agonize about it, and continues to advise our government that they ought to go slow on this thing, then I think they are subject to criticism. There is no question that there are attitudes within the State Department who are desirous of proceeding to democratize our embassy there. The one thing that is overlooked by a lot of people is the fact that questions pertaining to South Africa are decided in the White House. The South African Government is on the list of sensitive foreign areas like South East Asia. In the final analysis, policy questions relating to South Africa are handled at the White House level. Part of the problem, part of the block, part of the eroding of an original idea to have a ranking Black, at least, in our embassy in South Africa, the responsibility for that lies at the White House level.

Q - By the White House, do you mean Mr. Kissinger?

A - Well, that's the gentleman who is the President's advisor on foreign policy and I would lay it right at his feet.

Q - Sir, could you tell us how you felt about Dr. Banda going to South Africa. They made a big fuss about the fact that you went. He is also Black. Do you think it was good for him to go, or bad for him to go as Head of State?

A - Well, I was there concurrently for about three or four days and my reception on the part of the people was much different. The reputation that Dr. Banda has among Africans is very poor.

Q - Generally?

A - Generally and specifically. They consider Dr. Banda an opportunist and they consider that his efforts in South Africa have selfish motivations. And so there was not a popular kind of response to his presence, press reports notwithstanding. There are 90,000 Malawians working in the mines in South Africa on a contract held by the Malawian government. I would hope that Dr. Banda was able to do something about improving the working conditions and wages, and all the rest, for those 90,000 mine workers. In addition to that, Dr. Banda also is building a new capitol and he was there, admittedly, for the purpose of trying to get some more rand from the SAG to help finance this shining new capitol they are building back in Malawi. So, I don't know what he came away from there with. I hope he came away with something that would make his trip worthwhile at least as far as those 90,000 miners were concerned.

Q - Congressman, you say that you shall urge fair employment practices in South African enterprises to be a condition of eligibility for U.S. firms holding government contracts. Where shall you urge that, and how will it effect such large businesses as General Motors and Ford?

A - Well, most of these large enterprises have government contracts through the Defense Department, in particular, and there is a large complex as you know known as the Contract Compliance Agency within our government. As a matter of fact, it's in almost every department with the specific objective of making sure that there are fair employment practices as it relates to fulfillment of these contracts on the part of these firms. But all of these contract compliance requirements relate to the domestic situation. There has not been an attempt to add to that list a consideration involving companies having foreign contracts or having foreign investments and this is what I mean by that. In other words, I'm exploring all the possibilities of putting pressure on American private enterprise. As I pointed out, under the free enterprise system when you actually get into it, it is not as easy as one thinks and some innovative ways must be pursued if we are going to really create the pressures that are really necessary to get these private enterprises moving, and that's one thing that we have thought about.

Q - Are you planning to resume your hearings?

A - Yes, we will be continuing our hearings this fall. We have yet to hear certain witnesses from the government. We have not had the State Department in, for example. We deliberately left them to the end because so many references were made to the State Department during testimony from various other agencies and private parties, that we wanted to get all of that into the record so that when we have the State Department witnesses, and we're talking about witnesses from the seventh floor, we will have all of these facts ahead of us. In addition to that, we expect to call back before the Committee the Director of NASA who sat here before this Committee and alleged that he didn't know anything about what was going on in the NASA installation and that he had no reporting system to determine whether or not discrimination was being practiced in that plant, had not visited there -- we have now visited there. We sat down and talked with the management of that plant which is a South African. We saw Blacks being excluded from the dining facilities in an American installation, and we saw the segregated facilities in those areas, so we plan on bringing the NASA Director back up before the committee and make him show cause as to why the practices ought not to be dispensed with, or the contract ought to be cancelled.

Q - What about the other businesses?

A - Well, we have communicated with every American business, some 300 of them, that has a substantial investment in South Africa. The original response to this request has been very spotty. They do not want to appear before the committee and see their policies exposed. In addition to that, we sent out an eleven-page questionnaire where we hope to bring out the complicity of American private

enterprise in these various practices. We are beginning to get some response from that. As a matter of fact, it sent quite a cold chill through the business community. We heard about the impact of it while we were over there, because we met with certain business people over there, and we have been contacted by numerous representatives of American business enterprise and we hope that this will be the basis for exerting some pressures through exposure, and otherwise, on American business and its practices in those areas. Of course we would welcome the appearance before the committee, of some of these people who have been so recalcitrant in the past, and we are not talking about public relations representatives, or legal representatives, but we are talking about the people who actually make the decisions in these plants.