

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte = Revue suisse d'histoire = Rivista storica svizzera
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Geschichte
Band: 53 (2003)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Pretoria's endeavours to improve its apartheid image in Switzerland
Autor: Pfister, Roger
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-81334>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 07.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Pretoria's Endeavours to Improve its Apartheid Image in Switzerland

Roger Pfister*

Introduction

This paper examines the activities of Pretoria's Department of Information in bringing relatively prominent¹ Swiss to South Africa during the period 1966 to the mid-1970s. This was part of its overall strategy focused on improving the country's apartheid image overseas in an attempt to overcome South Africa's international isolation. The study is based on archival material from the South African National Archives in Pretoria² and the Swiss Federal Archive in Bern, with closed access periods of twenty and thirty years respectively³. This is complemented by interviews and/or correspondence with some of the Swiss visitors, as well as consultation of the publications and newspaper reports emanating from such visits.

The South Africa Foundation, established in 1959 as the country's organised business association, also arranged similar visits with a related agenda⁴. Unlike the Department of Information, the available archival sources on this aspect of the Foundation's activities are not comprehensive enough for closer examination and would necessitate research at its Johannesburg headquarters. However, the activities of Pio Eggstein need to be mentioned. He was the Head of the Foundation's Swiss-South African Committee in Johannesburg from 1963 to 1990⁵, and has been described as Switzerland's "secret Ambassador to South Africa"⁶. Due to his influential position his name appears as facilitator in three of Information's invitations⁷.

* Scientific Assistant, Network for International Development and Cooperation NIDECO, ETH Zurich, and Research Fellow, Centre for International and Comparative Politics, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

1 This adjective is certainly appropriate for those twenty-two of the forty-four visitors who are listed in the 1972/73 edition of the *Who's Who in Switzerland*. Geneva: Nagel Publishers, and/or the *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* <http://www.dhs.ch>.

2 The National Archives (NAT.ARC.) houses the documents from the Private Secretary of the Minister of Information (1966–78), classified under the heading MNL. In spite of the indication 1966–78, the latest files dated from 1974.

3 The relevant holdings of the Bundesarchiv (BAr) are compiled in Andreas Kellerhals (ed.): *Schweiz–Südafrika, 1948–1994: Archivbestände und parlamentarische Vorstösse*, Bern: Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv, 2000. The author consulted those files that were generally entitled with 'Visits by Prominent Swiss'.

4 Deon Geldenhuys: *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making*, Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa for the South African Institute of International Affairs, 1984, p. 30, 175–176. <http://www.safoundation.org.za>.

5 Correspondence with Eggstein, 28 August 2002.

6 "Schwarz und Weiss – in Schwarzweiss nicht zu malen", *Weltwoche*, 19 September 1985, p. 21. See also *Who's Who of Southern Africa*, 1972. Johannesburg.

7 He was in correspondence with the Swiss Ambassador in Pretoria, Roy Hunziker, in connection with the visits of Bächtold/Felder/Meyer in 1967 (BAr, E2200.178 (-) 1984/167 [AZ

Apartheid and South Africa's Isolation

South Africa found itself increasingly isolated by the international community as of the early 1960s. As a result, the ending of its pariah status became Pretoria's central foreign policy objective. By the early 1970s, bureaucratic struggles erupted over the style to be pursued to improve the country's international standing. In particular, officials from the Department of Information, simply referred to as Information, judged the Department of Foreign Affairs' policy style as being too mild. Those most critical were Cornelius 'Connie' Mulder, Minister of Information since 1968, and Eschel Rhoodie, Secretary of Information since September 1972. Based on a network of personal and bureaucratic connections, Information rose in status under Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes 'John' Vorster (1966–78) and strongly impacted on Pretoria's foreign policy in the first half of the 1970s. In 1972, it became a separate department, and in 1973, Vorster approved Information's first five-year plan with a budget of 13 million South African Rand, 18.7 million US Dollars at the time. In comparison to that, Information's total budget for 1967/68 was only 590,000 Rand⁸. This exponential increase enabled Mulder and Rhoodie to upgrade Information and embark "on a large-scale secret propaganda offensive"⁹. Their strategy was to invite to South Africa "opinion formers and the decision makers in the world, to influence their stand on South Africa", with "Politicians, Members of Parliament, religious leaders, top business people, newspapers, individual newspapermen" as targeted groups¹⁰.

In Switzerland, Information was confronted with comparatively little anti-apartheid activism. The Mouvement Anti-Apartheid de Suisse (MAAS), formed in 1965 in Geneva by church groups, was the first civic organisation to condemn Pretoria's policies. However, in spite of its name, it was geographically restricted to the French-speaking part of Switzerland and remained relatively apolitical. This only began to change in the early 1970s, resulting in the formation in 1975 of the politically leftwing Anti-Apartheid Bewegung (AAB) in Zurich. Although the AAB held a country-wide position, the MAAS continued to exist with its clerical roots and the support base in the western part of Switzerland¹¹. The following section explores the Department of Information's response to the increasing anti-apartheid lobbying in Switzerland.

Pretoria's Public Relations Campaign in Switzerland

Based on the available archival documentation, interviews and correspondence, a picture emerges whereby from 1967 to 1976 forty-four relatively prominent Swiss accepted the Department of Information's invitation to visit South Africa (Table 1). Three of them, Allgöwer, Olivieri and Zbinden, had this opportunity twice, while Jäger and Lang had previously enjoyed invitations from the South

101.0]), that of Markwalder/Moser/Neiger and Schwarzenbach in 1969 (BAr, E 2200.178 (-) 1985/134 (1) [101.0]). See Table 1.

8 NAT. ARC., MNL, IN10/2, 1, 1966–67 (File 'Information Programmes: Publicity'); Deon Geldenhuys: *The Diplomacy ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 148; Eschel Rhoodie: *The Real ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 84, 99–100.

9 Deon Geldenhuys: *The Diplomacy ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

10 Eschel Rhoodie: *The Real Information Scandal*, Pretoria: Orbis SA, 1983, p. 98.

11 Samuel Batzli: *Die Antiapartheidbewegung der Schweiz im Spiegel der Zeit (1945–1990)*, Bern: Historisches Institut der Universität Bern, 1992 (unpublished Seminar Paper).

Table 1. 'Prominent' Swiss Visitors in South Africa, 1967-76*

Year	Month	Name	Affiliation	Cat.
1967	?	Staiger, Emil	Prof., German language and literature studies, University of Zurich	A
	02	Bächtold, Kurt	Editor, <i>Schaffhauser Nachrichten</i> ; Member, Council of States (Schaffhausen)	J/P
		Felder, Hans-Rudolf	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Luzerner Neueste Nachrichten</i>	J
		Meyer, Kurt	Editor, <i>Der Bund</i>	J
1968	02	Dürrenmatt, Peter	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Basler Nachrichten</i> ; Member, National Council (Basel-Stadt)	J/P
		Gigon, Olof	Prof., Classical Philosophy, University of Bern	A
		Kneschaurek, Francesco	Prof., Economics, University of St. Gall	A
1969	01/02	Schwarzenbach, Edmund	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i>	J
		Markwalder, Hans	Surgeon, Inselspital, Bern	A
	02	Moser, Fritz	Finance Minister, Canton Bern	P
		Neiger, Alfred	Head, Language Service, Swiss Dispatch Agency SDA	J
	11	Allgöwer, Walter	Editor, <i>Brückenbauer</i> ; Member, National Council (Basel-Stadt)	J/P
		Gut, Theodor	Member, National Council (Zurich); Editor-in-Chief, <i>Zürichsee-Zeitung</i>	J/P
1970	02	Wassmer, Hans-Ulrich	<i>Der Bund</i>	J
		Zbinden, Rudolf	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Solothurner Zeitung</i>	J
	02	Ritter, Peter	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Bieler Tagblatt</i>	J
1971	07	Monnier, Claude	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Journal de Genève</i>	J
	09	Olivieri, Guido	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Feuille d'avis de Lausanne</i>	J
1972	?	Dubs, Rolf	Prof., Economics Education, University of St. Gall	A
	?	Meister, Jürg	<i>Appenzeller Zeitung</i>	J
	?	Kuhn, Werner	Lecturer, Adult Education Centre, Zurich	A
	?	Jäger, Jakob	Editor-in-Chief, news agency Swiss Political Correspondence SPK	J
	01/02	Hersche, Otmar	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Vaterland</i>	J
	09	Burckhardt, Lukas	Finance Minister, Canton Basel-Stadt	P

1973	?	Schwytzer, Annemarie	Rundschau, Television Station DRS	J
	?	Siegrist, Rolf	News agency Swiss Political Correspondence SPK	J
	?	Buri, Fritz	Prof., Systematic Theology, University of Basel	A
	?	Tauber, Herbert	Foreign Affairs Correspondent, <i>Die Tat</i>	J
	?	Neuenschwander, Ulrich	Prof., Systematic Theology, History of Philosophy & Protestant Theology, University of Bern	A
	?	Rich, Arthur	Prof., Systematic Theology; Head, Institute for Social Ethics, University of Zurich	A
	?	ten Doornkaat-Koolman, Hans ..	Lecturer, Institute for Social Ethics, University of Zurich	A
	?	[Brenk, Erich	Minister, Birmensdorf, Canton Zurich	C
		[Furrer, Walter	President, Church Synod, Zurich	C
		[Hess, Walter	Minister, Church of St. Peter, Zurich	C
		[Linsi, Ernst	Minister, Church of St. Jacob, Zurich	C
		[Müller, Ernst	Church Council, Canton Zurich	C
		[Vogelsanger, Peter	Minister, Fraumünster Church, Zurich	C
	10/11	[Aeberhard, Robert	Deputy Editor-in-Chief, <i>Bieler Tagblatt</i>	J
		[Kempf, Othmar	Editor, Tages-Nachrichten	J
		[Schnetzer, Max Roger	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Oltner Tagblatt</i>	J
1974	03	Jaberg, Ernst Benedict	Justice Director, Canton Bern	P
	03	Widmer, Sigmund	Member, National Council (Zurich); Mayor of Zurich	P
	07/08	Büsser, Fritz	Prof., Church and Dogma History, University of Zurich	A
	10	Olivieri, Guido	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>24 heures</i>	J
1975	04/05	Lang, Hans	Editor, <i>Echo der Zeit</i> , Radio DRS	J
1976	10	[Allgöwer, Walter	Editor, <i>Brückenbauer</i> ; Member, National Council (Basel-Stadt)	J/P
		[Zbinden, Rudolf	Foreign Affairs Editor, <i>Solothurner Zeitung</i>	J

Notes. Cat.: Category; A: Academic; C: Church; J: Journalist; P: Politician. The bracket signifies that they travelled in a group.

* BAR: E2200.178 (-) 1984/167 (1) (AZ 101.0); E2200.178 (-) 1985/134 (1) (AZ 101.0); NAT.ARC., MNL: IN16, 4, 1966-68; IN10/1, 2, 1966-68; INL22/1+2, 71, 1968-70; INL22/3+4, 72, 1970-72; INL22/5+6, 73, 1972-74; INL22, 74/7, 1974-75.

Africa Foundation in 1966 and 1963 respectively¹². It is possible that further such visits took place up until 1977, possibly documented in files housed in the Swiss Federal Archive, not presently accessible. In that year, South African newspapers exposed Information's clandestine activities, resulting in the 'Information Scandal'. The impression created was that taxpayers' money, worth millions of Rand, had been wasted on projects with little benefit. The appointed Commission of Enquiry found Prime Minister Vorster and Minister Mulder to be the main offenders and responsible for the irregularities¹³. Due to the mounting political pressure, Vorster resigned in September 1978, Mulder became Minister for Plural Relations and Development, Rhodie's political career ended in 1977 and Information was reintegrated into Foreign Affairs in 1980¹⁴.

What follows is an examination of the application and implementation of Information's strategy in Switzerland.

Table 1 reveals a number of issues. First, the strong increase in activities in 1973 corresponds to the Department of Information's strengthened profile, while it can also be interpreted as a consequence of Pretoria's growing awareness of anti-apartheid sympathies in Switzerland at the time. In particular, the invitation of six church people from Zurich – they presumably travelled in a group – can be seen as an attempt to prevent a situation developing similar to that of the MAAS which received church support. Second, the main geographic focus was on the German-speaking part of Switzerland. This is an indication that Pretoria considered it to be of paramount importance to have the opinion-makers in Basel, Bern and Zurich, the country's economic and political centres, on its side. Third, an analysis of the visitors' occupations reveals the participation of nineteen full-time journalists, eleven academics, six church representatives, four politicians in executive positions and four members of the Federal Parliament (MP), who were simultaneously newspaper editors. This selection mirrors Information's strategy as described above.

The Information Section at the South African Embassy in Bern was responsible for selecting and subsequently establishing contact with the targeted Swiss people. Prior to issuing invitations, it verified that they were not fundamentally opposed to South Africa. In order to assess the prospective visitor's viewpoint, a screening process usually took place in the form of a meeting, often an invitation for lunch or dinner¹⁵. Not surprisingly, therefore, the journalists that were invited came from newspapers whose political orientation can be described as liberal or right of centre. In contrast, Information invited no journalists from the more leftist Zurich daily *Tages-Anzeiger* or the weekly *Weltwoche*. Similarly, the MPs belonged to the economy-friendly Freisinnig-demokratische Partei (FDP) (Bächtold, 1961–79; Gut, 1966–79), the liberal Landesring der Unabhängigen (LdU) (Allgöwer, 1963–79; Widmer, 1963–66, 1974–91) and the Liberale Partei (Dürrenmatt, 1959–79), while the ministers of the cantonal executive organs were from the Liberale Partei

12 NAT.ARC., MNL, IN10/1, 2, 1966–68; interview with Lang, 26 August 2002.

13 Mervyn Rees, Chris Day: *Muldergate*, *op. cit.*

14 James Barber, John Barratt: *South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945–1988*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 247–251.

15 Telephone interview with Aeberhard, 6 August; written correspondence with Büsser, 12 August; telephone interview with Dubs, 5 August 2002.

(Burckhardt, 1966–80) and the conservative Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) (Jaberg, 1966–79; Moser, 1958–74)¹⁶. As for the choice of politicians, this did not mean that they were uncritical party followers. However, against the background of the Cold War and South Africa's flourishing economy, Pretoria could well anticipate that they, as well as the above mentioned journalists, would not unduly criticise its racial policies. This could not necessarily be expected from the Sozialdemokratische Partei (SP), from which no parliamentarian was therefore invited. In confirmation of this suggestion, journalists Olivieri and Zbinden, and politician Widmer openly declared that they were on the side of the whites who insured that their strategically important country remained a bulwark against communism. Olivieri succinctly put it that he was "against Apartheid as long as this did not lead to Soviet dominance in South Africa"¹⁷.

As for the church representatives who visited South Africa, Dogma and Church History Professor Büsser described them as the "spiritual leaders of Zurich's evangelic-reformed church"¹⁸. Equally, the academics Buri, Neuenschwander, Rich and Büsser himself, adhered to the protestant or evangelic-reformed church as ministers and later as professors at the Universities of Basel, Bern and Zurich¹⁹. The choice of these men was not coincidental as they had some affinity with the Calvinist-based worldviews of the South African Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) that underpinned apartheid ideology.

While specific reasons accounted for the invitations of the above mentioned groups of people, a small minority of people were *ad hoc* guests of the South African government: Alfred Hotz, South Africa correspondent for Radio DRS, proposed his colleague Lang; Linsi arranged Dubs's visit as a gesture for the latter's care of his children during their studies in St. Gall; Dürrenmatt and Gigon asked Kneschaurek, an acquaintance of theirs, to join them; Bern's Finance Minister, Moser, indicated the name of his counterpart in Basel, Burckhardt, to the Embassy²⁰.

The remaining part of this paper focuses on the scope of the visits and in how far the impressions gained influenced the visitor's perceptions of the South African situation. For that purpose, the author interviewed or communicated with those twelve visitors who are still alive²¹, while consultation of the publications and newspaper reports by journalists and politicians of their visits also proved to be in-

16 <http://www.parlament.ch>; telephone interview with Burckhardt, 12 August; correspondence with the Ratssekretariat des Grossen Rates, Bern, 13 August 2002.

17 Telephone interview with Olivieri (21 August), Widmer (6 August) and Zbinden (2 September 2002).

18 Telephone interview, 26 August 2002.

19 For their biographies, see http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/b/buri_f.shtml (Buri); Alfred Schindler (ed.): *Die Prophezei: Humanismus und Reformation in Zürich. Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge von Fritz Büsser*, Bern: Lang, 1994; *Who's Who ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 138 (Büsser); Werner Zager (ed.): *Christologie: verantwortet vor den Fragen der Moderne*, Bern: Haupt, 1997, p. v–vi; *Who's Who ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 516 (Neuenschwander); Arthur Rich: *Wirtschaftsethik: Grundlagen in theologischer Perspektive*, Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1987; *Who's Who ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 574 (Rich).

20 Interview with Lang, 26 August; telephone interviews with Burckhardt (12 August), Dubs (5 August) and Kneschaurek (19 August 2002).

21 Aeberhard (6 August), Büsser (12 & 26 August), Burckhardt (12 August), Dubs (5 August), Hersche (9 August), Kneschaurek (19 August), Lang (26 August), Monnier (12 & 13 August), Mrs Neuenschwander (26 August), Olivieri (21 August), Widmer (6 August) and Zbinden (2 September).

formative. This was the case with Aeberhard²², Allgöwer²³, Dürrenmatt²⁴, Gut²⁵, Hersche²⁶, Meister²⁷, Monnier²⁸, Olivieri²⁹, Schnetzer³⁰, Schwarzenbach³¹ and Zbinden³².

Information's standard tour for all visitors, whether in a group or single, began in the Johannesburg-Pretoria area, then proceeded in a circle to Cape Town, the Transkei, Durban, or the other way round, before returning to Johannesburg. Each visit included a stay in a game reserve, usually the Kruger National Park. All interviewed visitors agreed that the entire journey was of a very high standard with First Class international and sometimes chartered domestic flights, luxury accommodation, company of competent Information people, etc. Information drafted the itinerary, but the guests could still make specific wishes that were generally granted. The only known exception was Dubs's request to pay a visit to a prison for black people; this was not allowed. Other than that, several visitors noted that they were free to walk around on their own, even in a township such as Soweto.

Information's selection of the places and institutions that were usually visited and the meetings that were generally held was not random, but was aimed at presenting the positive aspects of South Africa. It is possible to sum up the various components and argue that Pretoria hoped to bring across four main messages. First, apartheid did not oppress the black people but advanced their development. For that purpose, emphasis was put on what was called "separate development" at the time. In particular, the concept of the 'independent' homelands and the urban townships was presented as the best way for black and white to develop separately while retaining their cultural identity. Excursions were always made to the Transkei, meeting with Chief Kaizer Matanzima, and Allgöwer and Zbinden even attended the homeland's 'independence' celebration during their visit in October 1976. The townships Soweto and Daveyton near Johannesburg were also frequent destinations, as well as Radio Bantu in Durban with its broadcasts to the various

22 "Apartheid, ein Verbrechen", *Bieler Tagblatt*, 3 December 1973.

23 "Ärgernis Apartheid", "Einmalige Bildungsleistung", "Weltbeitrag der Wirtschaft", *Brückenbauer*, 16, 23, 30 January 1970.

24 "In Südafrika ist jetzt August", "Britische Tradition in Kapstadt", "Was heisst 'Apartheid'", "In der Transkei", "Durban – Grosstadt und Ferienort in einem", "Natal: die Heimat der Opposition", "Johannesburg – einst Goldgräberstadt, jetzt Industriezentrum", "Auf der Suche nach dem Löwen", "Südafrikanische Nachlese", *Basler Nachrichten*, 10/11, 14, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, 29 February, 1 March 1968.

25 "Südafrika: Chance und Gefährdung (I–VII)", *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 14, 21, 25 March, 1, 9, 14, 17 April 1970, and "Mittag im Krügerpark", *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 4 April 1970.

26 "Bericht über Südafrika (I + II)", *Vaterland*, 18, 25 March; "Redaktionsgespräch: Was geschieht in Südafrika", *Vaterland*, 8 July 1972.

27 *Der Weltkirchenrat und sein Blutgeld: von der Oikumene zum Weltkirchensowjet*, Interlaken: Internationale Studiengesellschaft für Politik, 1975.

28 *Afrique du Sud: un essai d'interprétation*, Geneva: Journal de Genève, 1979.

29 "Afrique du Sud méconnue et mal aimée (I–IV)", *Feuille d'avis de Lausanne*, 9, 10, 12, 13/14 November 1971; "Afrique du Sud: des faits que l'on refuse de voir", *24 heures*, 6 November 1974.

30 "Südafrika steht gegen Weltmeinung", "'Apartheid' – ein wüstes Wort", "Spielen die Weissen ehrlich?", "Heikle Aufgabe – Schwarze ausbilden", "Farbige Fabrikarbeiter – ein Problem", "Die Inder und Mischlinge kämpfen", "Weisse Dienste für schwarze Menschen", "Vier Parteien ringen um ein Problem", *Oltner Tagblatt*, 29, 30 November, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 December 1973.

31 Edmund C. Schwarzenbach: *Südafrika: Stein des Anstosses*, Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ Schriften zur Zeit, 13), 1969.

32 "Südafrika: entscheidend ist die Zukunft", *Solothurner Zeitung*, 28 April 1970.

black ethnic groups. Evidence on the good quality of the health and education system provided to the black population was presented through visits to the largest hospital in Africa, Baragwanath in Soweto, and other clinics, to the University of Zululand near Durban, and the Hotel Training School Garankuwa near Johannesburg. As the second message, the white government was presented as politically liberal and reasonable, and the existence of white opposition parties was underlined. Importantly, Information seems to have restricted the political aspect of the journey to the journalists and politicians, assuming that this would be the main focus in their reports. Meetings most often took place with Minister Mulder and the relatively liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roelof Frederik 'Pik', while the conservative Pieter Willem Botha, then Minister of Defence, appears to have been interviewed only once by a journalist, Schwarzenbach. In contrast, an encounter with Helen Suzman from the opposition Progressive Party was usually part of the visit³³. In order to demonstrate, third, the prosperity of the white South African economy, mining activities in the Johannesburg area were shown and discussions with business representatives, some from Swiss companies, took place. The fourth central message was South Africa's geo-strategic importance to the Western world. This was highlighted by the visit to Cape Town and the nearby naval base Simonstown, from where the sea-route around the Cape of Good Hope was monitored. This had become particularly crucial after the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967.

Assessing the Impressions

This section attempts to assess the impact of Information's strategy of changing the apartheid perceptions in Switzerland to improve Pretoria's image, with the conducted interviews and the available reports again serving as the basis. Before presenting the evidence, it must be borne in mind that these journeys took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, only a relatively short period after the granting of independence to most, but not all, African countries. A somewhat colonial sub-tone was thus discernible in the reports. Further, given the transport and communication facilities in those days, South Africa could still be considered to be in a remote corner of the world and relatively little was really known about it. It was thus not surprising to learn from several of the interviewed that their impression of South Africa had been one of simple black-and-white thinking prior to their visit. Given their privileged access to information, it is safe to argue that the average Swiss citizen with no specific connection to South Africa was even less knowledgeable and therefore could be quite easily influenced.

To begin with a few general comments, the Swiss visitors gained a more nuanced view of the South African situation with the realisation that the situation was much more complex than previously thought. For example, cognisance was taken of the existence of the Indian and Coloured population, and of the division among the whites themselves, between the Afrikaans and English speakers. Generally speaking, the journeys resulted in a degree of understanding for the position of the whites and the apartheid policy. Olivieri complained that there was a tendency

33 Formed in 1959, changing its name to Progressive Reform Party in 1974.

among the opponents of apartheid “to show only the negative aspects”³⁴. Hersche took this point one step further:

Some reports on South Africa exhaust limit themselves in listing the disadvantages of this systematic race separation. The impression is sometimes created that South Africa was a huge discrimination institute, with the whites having nothing else in mind but to oppress the poor Bantus, Indians and Coloureds. Such coarse generalisations only block the view to the real problems³⁵.

Regarding the issue of discrimination, Dürrenmatt had this to add:

During the entire three weeks we have not seen one single black, no hotel porter, no servant, no worker in the numerous factories, who would have behaved in a submissive (...) way toward the whites. They were always polite. But never slave-like. Is that nothing?³⁶

At the same time, the journeys did not result in the visitors completely revising their principal stance that apartheid was not acceptable. Büsser, for example, still saw the “necessity for political changes – certainly in direction of democratic conditions”³⁷. However, the central questions were how and when. Regarding the latter, there was agreement. Allgöwer, for example, felt: “For the time being, the results of apartheid are, objectively seen, significantly better than any of those that can be produced by other solutions of the race problems”³⁸. Hersche concurred: “an integration cannot be realised in the foreseeable future”³⁹. Consequently, the view prevailed that external pressure on and boycotts against Pretoria were not advisable. Furthermore, Büsser considered revolutionary actions to bring about a regime change to be “impossible and pointless”⁴⁰. There also existed a consensus that the white regime was a bulwark against communism, whose tools were the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the anti-apartheid activists, as suggested by Meister and Schwarzenbach⁴¹. While revolution and sanctions were not considered appropriate to change the apartheid system, the visitors shared the view that economic realities would lead to its demise. Allgöwer argued, for instance, that the many hours spent by the black labour force to commute between the townships and the cities was a waste of time, and money: “In the long term, the system therefore leads to a loss, which is intolerable for the national economy.”⁴² Hersche also mentions the lack of trade union activity, but that this could be a force to bring about political liberalisation in the future⁴³.

Based on these attitudes, the idea of “separate development” with homelands was judged to be a sensible form to organise South Africa’s social and political life, even though only as an interim measure and not as the final solution. Gut felt that the “envisaged *ultimate goal* of this policy – cultural and social separation with par-

34 Translated from *Feuille d’avis de Lausanne*, 10 November 1971.

35 Translated from *Vaterland*, 18 March 1972.

36 Translated from *Basler Nachrichten*, 1 March 1968.

37 Correspondence with Büsser, 12 August 2002.

38 Translated from *Brückenbauer*, 16 January 1970.

39 Translated from *Vaterland*, 8 July 1972.

40 Correspondence with Büsser, 12 August 2002.

41 Jürg Meister: *Der Weltkirchenrat ...*, op. cit., p. 9; Edmund C. Schwarzenbach: *Südafrika*, op. cit., p. 94.

42 Translated from *Brückenbauer*, 30 January 1970.

43 *Vaterland*, 8 July 1972.

allel economic integration – is an illusion”⁴⁴. Yet, for the time being, the homeland idea was considered to be the best option for the black population to catch up with the whites leaving them to remain undisturbed in their current lifestyle. Plenty of catching up was necessary, as the blacks were generally considered to be backward and simply stupid. Allgöwer postulated that “it was not long ago that they had come from the bush”, that “the Bantus were partly still living in the stone age from a mental point of view”, and that “the blacks, according to a concurring opinion, have difficulties with mathematics and all abstract disciplines”⁴⁵. In that context, the visitors underlined the tremendous efforts and financial sacrifices made by the white government to provide the black population with education, medical and other facilities that could not be found anywhere else on the African continent. All the newspaper reports and publications together convey a sublime message whereby the white man was, after all, superior to the black man, and that only he was able to bring economic prosperity and transport infrastructure to the country, as well as perform the first heart transplant in history. Schwarzenbach summed it up:

South Africa, however, is a *highly developed industrial nation*, a highly differentiated economic entity. Only the whites, who have created the only country on the African continent that is not underdeveloped, are capable of running and further developing this complex entity. This not so much because all whites are representatives of the culture and civilisation that is imitated around the world and whose fruits are desired by everyone. Rather the modern technical world *requires an attitude of mind*, whose foundation was laid in certain cultures in a long process – this simply did not happen in others⁴⁶.

Finally, several visitors also argue in favour of the homeland system feeling that it kept apart various ethnic groups that otherwise would fight each other, usually with a reference to the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70). This led Allgöwer to the statement that “there is order – in contrast to most African states”⁴⁷, with Dürrenmatt adding that this order was maintained with less policemen than in “the city of Hamburg!”⁴⁸.

The overall impression was that the situation in South Africa, in the final analysis, was not as bad as often presented, for example in some Swiss newspapers. Aeberhard specifically referred to articles in the weekly *Weltwoche*⁴⁹ that made him curious to discover what it really was about, and then to learn that this biased reporting was not justified⁵⁰. Burckhardt put it nicely by stating that the living conditions of the black population in South Africa were similar to those of the blacks in New Orleans, in the south of the United States, where he had studied, and concludes that “it is possible to live [in South Africa]”⁵¹.

Compared to this overwhelmingly positive apartheid image in twenty-eight full-page newspaper reports and three publications, the negative aspects or the views of black people were only given peripheral treatment, and examples that the auth-

44 *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 17 April 1979. Emphasis in the original.

45 Translated from *Brückenbauer*, 16 and 23 January 1970.

46 Translated from Edmund C. Schwarzenbach: *Südafrika*, op. cit., p. 9. Emphasis in the original.

47 Translated from *Brückenbauer*, 16 January 1970.

48 Translated from *Basler Nachrichten*, 14 February 1970.

49 Such as that of 8 June 1973.

50 Telephone interview, 6 August 2002.

51 Telephone interview, 12 August 2002.

ors found most irritating are now presented. Gut's seven reports, surprisingly, contain the most criticism. Right at the beginning of one report, he bluntly declares: "Four million whites in South Africa are opposite sixteen million non-whites. They have the political rights, the economic power, the privileged workplace. These are the facts of *apartheid*."⁵² The same contribution lists several examples of the so-called "petty apartheid" – separation regarding access to restaurants, beaches, etc. – and the "Immorality Act" – interdicting any relationship among the colour bar – as one of the cornerstones of apartheid. Gut writes about the African National Congress (ANC) in sixty-two words, describing an event at which fifty people gathered to listen to recorded ANC paroles as a "prick in an otherwise rather peaceful country"⁵³. No other author even mentions the ANC's existence, while Dürrenmatt speaks of "terrorists" that were sentenced, most certainly referring to Nelson Mandela⁵⁴. No author makes any mention of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) or the South African Communist Party (SACP). Gut also devotes some space to a meeting with Radio Bantu reporters, who complain about Pretoria's censorship practices that curtail their journalistic freedom⁵⁵. Olivieri is the only other author who details an interview with a black person, namely that with a Transkei opposition leader who strongly criticises the homeland concept⁵⁶. The same writer also mentions an example of what petty apartheid means, recounting an experience of two black men being stopped by white policemen, because they walked around in a white suburb at 10:30 at night⁵⁷. Finally, Hersche is the only visitor who writes that the homeland system is unfair, as these entities were economically unproductive and only occupied 13% of South Africa's land, compared to the whites' access to 87% of the ground that could be used for agriculture and were rich in mineral resources⁵⁸. How little contact the visitors had with the black population – or, rather, how successfully Information prevented this from taking place – can be assumed on reading Allgöwer's note:

It is difficult to say how the blacks themselves feel about the order. It is not easy to get in contact with them. They stop immediately when being spoken to and reply politely. However, they display distrust and answer prudently, especially when a government representative is present.⁵⁹

As has been noted earlier on, Information carefully chose its guests according to their political attitudes and opinions regarding apartheid. As a result, it was not a selection of overtly critical Swiss journalists, politicians academics, and church people that visited South Africa. The standpoints in the available reports and publications from journalists and politicians are therefore not surprising, and it is relatively safe to assume that the views of those, whose impressions were not recorded, were similar.

52 Translated from *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 25 March 1970.

53 Translated from *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 9 April 1970.

54 Translated from *Basler Nachrichten*, 1 March 1968.

55 *Zürichsee-Zeitung*, 1 April 1970.

56 *Feuille d'avis de Lausanne*, 12 November 1971.

57 *Feuille d'avis de Lausanne*, 10 November 1971.

58 *Vaterland*, 25 March 1972.

59 Translated from *Brückenbauer*, 16 January 1970.

Conclusion

In judging the achievements of Information's strategy, it can be considered a success in that after their visits to South Africa, well-respected Swiss published many Pretoria-friendly reports and books. The main purpose of Information's public relations strategy, however, was to get the message across to a wider section of the population to curb the growth of anti-apartheid movements. An evaluation of the extent to which this "trickle down effect" took place is difficult. It is merely possible to have a look at the relevant circulation figures of the newspapers in which reports appeared: *24 heures* (Olivieri) 96,500, *Basler Nachrichten* (Dürrenmatt) 23,000, *Bieler Tagblatt* (Aeberhard) 29,100, *Brückenbauer* (Allgöwer) 588,000, *Feuille d'avis de Lausanne* (Olivieri) 90,100, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Schwarzenbach) c. 90,000⁶⁰, *Oltner Tagblatt* (Schnetzer) 8,000, *Solothurner Zeitung* (Zbinden) 33,500, *Vaterland* (Hersche) 53,600, *Zürichsee-Zeitung* (Gut) 18,000⁶¹. These figures are impressive and the only other significant papers in German that could not be won over by Information were the *Tages-Anzeiger* and the *Weltwoche* with circulation figures of 230,000 and 103,800 respectively in 1972. It is not possible to argue that the reports in these newspapers prevented the Swiss anti-apartheid movement from gaining massive popular support as enjoyed by those in the United States or the United Kingdom, but it was a contributing factor and Pretoria's objective was thus fulfilled.

60 Average of the 1968 and 1970 figure. This newspaper is also included, as Schwarzenbach's book is based on his reports in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

61 Correspondence with WEMF AG für Werbemedienforschung, Zurich, 4 September 2002.