

Group campaigns to ban South African gold coins

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

"It's illegal to talk about an economic boycott and disinvestment in South Africa, so we need to do it here."

That's why the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights has launched a local campaign to take Krugerrands out of circulation, said coalition spokesman Tom Penton.

A Krugerrand is a one-ounce gold coin exported by South Africa, the white-run, south African nation widely criticized for its policies of racial segregation called apartheid.

The price of a Krugerrand parallels the worldwide price of gold. Area coin dealers recently said a Krugerrand could be purchased for about \$320 (including a mark up for the dealer of about \$20).

"ALL INDICATIONS from (black South African leader) Bishop Desmond

Tutu on down to various leaders in the Free South Africa movement are that we have to try to affect South Africa on an economic level," Fenton said.

"Krugerrands represent 25 percent of the gold exported from South Africa. If we can have some impact with small (coin) dealers, we can work up to larger dealers."

"But the significant thing is we see a tremendous need for some victories. The whole Free South Africa movement is a long-term campaign — it's not something that's going to happen next month or next year."

Fenton stopped short of calling the campaign a boycott. Richard Rosenbaum, owner of Birmingham Stamps and Coins, agreed.

"IT'S NOT A BOYCOTT," he said. "It's an educational program to advise people of alternatives to Krugerrands, because we consider the Krugerrand a symbol of an oppressive government."

Oakland Community College is sponsoring an 18-day college credit study program May 9-27 in Germany, Austria, Hungary and France.

Students may register for "Northern European Art" or "Comparative Politics" and earn three credits for each course.

Vienna, Budapest, Salzburg, Munich, Strasbourg, Fontainebleau and Paris are among the cities on the agenda. Visits will be made to such famous museums as the Albertina, Louvre, Pompidou, Jeu de Paume and the Rodin.

Students will also have an opportunity to see Notre Dame Cathedral, the

Rosenbaum has agreed to four points stressed by the coalition.

"I keep Krugerrands out of sight — they're not in the display case," Rosenbaum said. "I'm not going to advertise or promote the symbol of a repressive government."

"I encourage customers to buy alternative coins from China, Canada, Australia or Mexico. And I have agreed to work with other local organizations to end apartheid in South Africa."

Because he can sell coins similar to the Krugerrand, Rosenbaum said, "My cooperation is costing me nothing. Speculating in gold isn't an investment anyway — it's a gamble, and I don't encourage my customers to gamble."

ROSENBAUM SAID he supports the campaign as a symbolic means of expressing his feelings about apartheid. If the campaign works, he said, "South Africa will simply sell its gold to Switzerland and Switzerland will make gold bars of it to be sold to the public. And when you get a gold bar, you don't know if the gold came from a corpse's teeth, a slave in Siberia or some venturesome guy in California panning (for gold) on a sunny afternoon."

"It's not going to impact South Africa economically. It simply conveys the message that we're not going to cooperate with them by selling symbols of oppression," Rosenbaum said.

SOME DEALERS going along with the campaign seem to be doing so for less altruistic reasons. Others support the campaign but aren't sure why it was started.

Gary Dolziel, vice president of Abbott's Coinex in Birmingham, said, "Everyone here is sympathetic, but we do have to maintain a working relationship with the customer. We give alternatives (to the Krugerrand), but to say we don't like the political regime of South Africa but condone the one in

China is slightly hypocritical.

"What they (the coalition) don't understand as far as buying and selling gold is that if you wear a gold chain, there's a 50 percent likelihood that the gold came from South Africa because they're the largest supplier in the free world," Dolziel said.

Ron Major, manager of Erin Coin and Stamp in Livonia, said, "We agree with what they're doing; it's not hurting our business."

"But we also want to protect our business and our name. We only make \$7 (on the sale of a Krugerrand), so it's

not worth the hassle to have people picketing in front of our shop."

"WE HAVE A LOT of black people buy Krugerrands. They like Krugerrands because they're from their home country. Most of our customers don't even care."

Major said, "We're going to try to do everything we can to go along with them so long as it doesn't hurt our business. But we're not going to turn down a sale."

Penton said the coalition does not expect coin dealers to refuse to deal in

Krugerrands, but hopes they will suggest alternative coins to clients.

Tony Sciallasi, who owns Redford Coin Galleries in Redford Township, said, "We're going along because we approve of what they say about hard times for colored people in mines. We have no problem with what they say."

"And there's no sense going against the grain as far as (the coalition) causing problems. We don't want them to picket here."

"But they're better off going after the big suppliers in the Detroit area who feed the little coin shops."

Study in Europe for OCC credits

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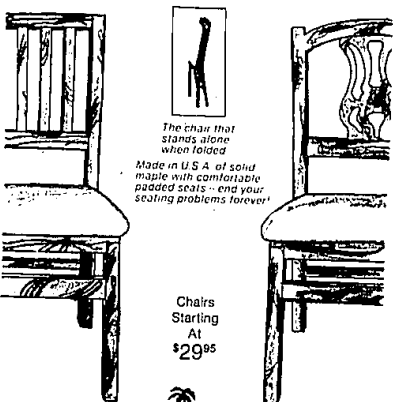
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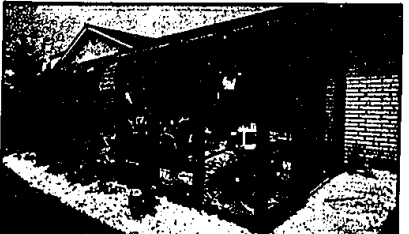
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