

Washington Merry-go-round

By Jack Anderson & Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, already under fire for his outspoken opinions, has now been accused of misusing his influence.

The FBI has investigated charges that he improperly pressured federal prison authorities to grant special favors to a prisoner with alleged links to organized crime.

The investigation was conducted in such secrecy that Young's name was omitted from the court records. The charges against him, however, have the smell of a smear.

On April 29, FBI agents interrogated the controversial U.N. ambassador for 40 minutes. They suggested that he may have worked "too diligently" in behalf of Michael George Thevis, a big-time pornography distributor now behind bars.

In other interviews, FBI agents dropped dark hints of bribery. A Justice Dept. source told us outright that Thevis had contributed heavily to Young's past congressional campaigns.

We therefore, conducted our own investigation into the charges against Young. We could find no evidence that Thevis had ever contributed a penny to Young. We also concluded that Young had done nothing improper.

When we confronted the FBI, a spokesman said only that Young "is not under investigation by the FBI." The implication is that the FBI also found no evidence of wrongdoing and, therefore, cut short its inquiry.

Yet Steven Ludwick, who is in charge of criminal investigations for the U.S. attorney's office in Atlanta, notified the courts that Thevis had secured a transfer "as a result of direct or indirect contact with staff members of an extremely high-ranking political appointee and eventually the appointee himself."

This clearly implies that the appointee, whom we can identify as the beleaguered Andrew Young, was guilty of wrongful intervention. Ludwick presumably based the accusation upon the FBI's investigation. Young's former assistant, Julius Hollis, also told us that he has been "intimidated" by FBI agents.

The possibility that the FBI might have tried to cause trouble for Young is disturbing. He was an associate of the martyred Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who had been hounded and harassed by the FBI at the investigation of its late chief, J. Edgar Hoover.

The rigid, revered Hoover, conservative in his ways and narrow in his outlook, had grown up in Washington when it was still a quiet, segregated Southern town. To Hoover, the struggle for equal rights by blacks smacked of rebellion. He, therefore, directed a shameful smear campaign against Dr. King.

There is a lingering suspicion that Hoover's point of view may continue to dominate the policies and actions of the FBI. Thus it is important to review the details of the Young-Thevis relationship.

Thevis was convicted in federal court of conspiracy to commit arson and of transporting obscene material across state lines. His prison file, according to our sources, is stamped "Special Offender." This is a term, we are told, that is used to designate "organized crime figures."

A spokesman for Thevis denied that he has any ties to the underworld. He is also in constant pain, the after-effects of a past near-fatal motorcycle accident. He continues to need special medical attention, as noted by the judge who sentenced him. Last year Thevis asked his congressman to help him secure better medical treatment.

The congressman happened to be Andrew Young; it was his duty to assist his constituents with their problems. Quite routinely, his staff helped to arrange Thevis' transfer from the Terre Haute, Ind., penitentiary to the Lexington, Ky., prison, for medical reasons.

For a congressman to intervene in a prison hardship case is neither unusual nor improper. But Thevis continued to press for a medical furlough so his own doctors could perform a hip operation. This was opposed by the federal authorities who feared Thevis might skip the country.

But once again, Young's staff prepared a letter to the Bureau of Prisons in Thevis' behalf. The first draft was typed on congressional stationery. Young, meanwhile, moved to the United Nations. So the letter was retyped on his new U.N. stationery.

Young was sworn in as UN Ambassador on Jan. 21, 1977. It should be noted, however, that his congressional staff continued to provide constituent services until a successor was elected on April 5, 1977.

The letter, dated Feb. 17, states: "For the past several months, my staff has been engaged in an attempt to help Mr. Thevis to receive humane and just treatment in view of his deteriorating physical condition." The letter supports Thevis' request for medical furlough and concludes: "Please investigate this matter and inform me when Mr. Thevis will be released in view of his needs for further surgery." Young signed it.

A month later, FBI agents called on the legislative aide who drafted the letter, Julius Hollis, and demanded to know why Young was pushing the case so hard. According to Hollis, the agents are not only intimidated him but insinuated that Young might have misused his government position. They also made an oblique reference to bribery, Hollis said.

Yet the subsequent report to the court states that the inmate's "efforts to obtain favorable treatment via intervention by a political figure...included an offer of a political contribution which was turned down." Spokesmen for both Young and Thevis deny that a contribution was even offered.

Footnote: James J. Dunn, the special agent in charge of the Atlanta FBI office, denied that any of his agents harassed or intimidated anyone on Young's staff. We were unable to reach Ludwick. His boss, U.S. Attorney John Stokes, refused to comment on the case.