

309 Cooley - East Quad
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
April 3, 1979

Dear Regent Nederlander:

Unlike many other students I do not feel it is valid to criticize the policies or practices of the University of Michigan toward the government of or the companies engaged in operations in South Africa.

Clearly apartheid is immoral, but morals, politics and economics often prove to be immiscible when mixed together. Thus, it is impossible to isolate one political situation in the world and condemn it for being the worst or most oppressive. Can what is going on in South Africa be considered more drastic than the tens of thousands of political prisoners being killed yearly in the South American nations of Brazil, Argentina or Chile?

Although totally ignoring the politics and policies of South Africa would be wrong, so would divesting from there. Not only would the University be harming American industry but it would also be infringing on industry's freedom of growth and profit. Undoubtedly profit is what capitalism is based on and if South Africa proves to be a country where this sort of practice benefits business then the University would be ignorant to invest elsewhere.

After discussing this issue with other students, many of whom have also written to you expressing their views, I have found that many are narrow minded. Many do not take into account the opposite opinions or the impacts of divestment socially, politically or economically. A few fail to realize the consequences that such a move (total American divestment) could result in the continual deterioration of the United States' image. Other nations after witnessing the diplomatic break with Taiwan and a break with South Africa would be extremely hesitant if not altogether unsure of continued American economic and financial support. In many cases it cannot be doubted that some nations would chose to enlist the aid of a power whose policies were much more consistent. In turn we would not be helping a nation by severing economic and political ties with it but weakening our influence in the affairs of the world.

Perhaps it should be emphasized that the policies that academia chooses to follow greatly effect the public's conception of what should be done. Also if the policy of divestment in politically immoral countries is adopted where is it going to end? Any form of dictatorship or minority leadership definitely masks some sort of oppressive rule as do communistic and even republic or democratic nations. That could eliminate investments in every country in the world, including our own.

Lastly, the University, a public entity in itself, is funded through taxes, private grants and investments. Since it is directly answerable to the public the University of Michigan should do what it can to ease this burden. Being relatively familiar with the state congress appropriations to the University and realizing the importance of the support of big business the U. of M. is in a financially vulnerable position. Divesting from companies that have some aspect of their business in South Africa could reduce the amount of grants received from these and other corporations. This leads to a greater strain on the taxed. The quality and quantity of education, the main reason why students are here, would suffer.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that a seminar be held inviting members of the clergy and professors from the economic and political science departments to discuss this seemingly explosive issue. These experts could definitely express the viewpoints of their field of knowledge, morality, economics and politics respectively. If these men could somehow reach a viable solution without invoking compromise I would suggest that the regents accept it and enact it. The only minor flaw is that such a solution is non-existent. In such a situation all the tangents, ramifications and outside factors would have to be taken into account. Thus the logic that various groups use that divestment will lead to the downfall of apartheid is totally irrational. It is my belief that the University of Michigan through its regents should not become effected by this sudden surge of Utopianism but continue with its present policies toward South Africa.

Sincerely,


Bruce Neal Dorfman

P.S. I would be interested in hearing your comments through personal correspondance.

April 6, 1979

Mr. Bruce Neal Dorfman
309 Cooley - East Quad
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

Dear Mr. Dorfman:

Thank you for your letter of April 3 regarding the University of Michigan policy toward South Africa.

This matter has been referred to the Senate Advisory Committee on Financial Affairs and we have asked the Committee to report back at an early date. It would be inappropriate for me to suggest anything at this time until I have had an opportunity to review their report and recommendations.

I appreciate your sincere interest.

Yours very truly,

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Robert E. Nederlander