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Statesman

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SERVING THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK AND ITS SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

SUNY Board of Trustees Votes To Divest South African Funds

By Benjamin Charny
Statesman Staff Correspondent

Albany—The Board of Trustees for the State University of New York (SUNY) voted Tuesday morning to divest SUNY funds from corporations that have dealings with the white-minority government of South Africa. The vote marked the successful end of six months of activity by SUNY students and student organizations, who had lobbied and demonstrated for the complete divestment of SUNY funds invested in companies dealing with South Africa.

The board approved, by a 9-4 vote, a resolution stating "There shall be no further acquisition for money's comprising the endowment funds of SUNY of any South African assets," and also stated that all "South African-related assets currently held as investments of the university's endowment funds shall be sold or disposed of."

Included in the resolution is a stipulation stating that if "as a result of changes in the racial laws and policies of the South African government this board ... shall rescind or modify this resolution."

"This is a prudent action included in the resolution," SUNY Chancellor Clifton R. Wharton said yesterday.

The Trustees said in order to assure fulfillment of their judiciary responsibilities, they would allow divestment to be completed in one year.

After voting on divestment, the Trustees discussed a resolution to create programs that would benefit students who are disadvantaged or unserved by South Africa's higher education system, according to Hugh Tuohey, SUNY communications director.

As the meeting went on inside the SUNY Central Administration Building, more than 150 rain-soaked students stood outside the building, chanting and carrying banners and coffins that symbolized the death of over 650 black South Africans at the hands of police this year.

Referring to the two days of demonstrations by students from 12 SUNY universities, including SUNY Binghamton, Albany and Stony Brook, Wharton said "It probably had less effect than students would like to believe."

Wharton characterized the action as "not a complete reversal" of SUNY policy, because Trustees had voted

in a July meeting to divest \$3 Million in SUNY funds. "Trustees are expressing a strong desire not to call it a reversal of sentiment," Wharton said. "We have agreed all along that there should be divestiture. We had to come up with an appropriate method."

Wharton said that many of the Trustees who originally voted against the divestment proposal took into account the past few months of worsening "undesirable activity which created an unsound business situation." Within the resolution, this concern was expressed. "The situation in South Africa grew more grave with intensive violence without significant reform," the resolution stated.

The corporations affected by the total divestiture of SUNY's \$11,512,994 of investments, according to Tuohey, include Eastman Kodak Company, CBS Communications, IBM, Marsh and McLennan Companies, Abbott Laboratories, Upjohn Company, Ford Motor Company and Johnson & Johnson.

Dern Rotman, public relations officer for the New York State Department of Commerce, said he could not comment on the specific effects of divestment from these corporations without review, but did say that corporations such as Ford, IBM and Eastman Kodak would probably not be affected at all. "You're talking about multi-billion dollar corporations, and you know, as well as I that these [divestments] won't affect them," he said.

Jane McAlevy, president of the Student Association of the State University (SASU), said that protests would have contained acts of "civil disobedience, such as barring the doors" if necessary.

Eric Wilson, a SUNY Binghamton student who along with McAlevy and SASU Organizer Shelly Willy were recently jailed for trespassing at an April occupation of the SUNY Central Business Office, said an action strategy session was held at 5:30 AM Tuesday to discuss possible acts of civil disobedience.



Clifton R. Wharton

When the 9-4 decision in favor of the divestment resolution was tallied, students who were attending the meeting exited the building and proceeded to march up to steps of the Capitol, where they chanted "We want Anderson! We want Anderson!" Senate Majority Leader Warren Anderson, according to SASU spokeswoman Eveline McDougal, is the target of SASU action in the coming weeks, in an effort to get him to sponsor divestment legislation in the New York State Senate.

Anderson's office had no comment yesterday. McDougal said Anderson is one of the chief opponents of legislation which has stalled in the State Senate since June 29, after the Assembly had approved a bill sponsoring divestment.

In the Rain, Some Hope

Albany—It was a victory yesterday for students whose spirit and interest in political activity has been awakened by the push for SUNY divestment.

Hair slicked back by the rain and looking a bit

shaken, Eric Wilson trailed behind a group of 150 cheering students on their way to the steps of the Capitol after the SUNY Board of Trustees voted to divest. "Oh Baby!" Wilson exclaimed. "I've been working on this for six years and this is just terrific."

"It was a really good turnout," he said of the 150 SUNY students who were waiting in the rain outside the packed SUNY Central Administration Building during the four-hour Trustees meeting. "Everybody knew since the discussion on Monday that divestment won, yet people still came to show support and be a part of it."

After marching up State Street from the Administration Building, students arrived at the Capitol, set up banners and coffins on its front steps and posed for photographers while chanting "Anderson! Anderson!" Republican Senator Warren Anderson, the New York State Senate Majority Leader, is targeted as a possible sponsor of divestment legislation in the Senate, according to Eveline McDougal, a spokeswoman for the Student Association of the State University (SASU).

"The ball is in his court now," McDougal said. All State senators will be receiving a deluge of pamphlets and other literature in SASU's attempts to get a Senate sponsor for divestment legislation, according to McDougal. The Assembly passed a bill last session condemning South African policies and suggesting divestment of New York State funds from companies dealing with South African businesses. This bill has

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Reaction from Stony Brook

By George Bidermann and
Vizhier Corpuz

Reaction at Stony Brook last night and today to the news of SUNY's planned divestment was generally joyous, and the impression stated was that the action was proper and at the same time long overdue.

University President John Marburger, who attended the Board of Trustees meeting in Albany, said last night that while he was pleased, it was clear that members of the board had justifiable reasons why SUNY should not divest. "I am pleased with the action that the Trustees took," he said. "I think it's right for SUNY and I believe the situation in South Africa warrants it."

Vice President for Student

Affairs Fred Preston said he hoped the action will "serve as a beginning for a number of initiatives that need to be taken by countries, western nations such as the United States, to put pressure on South Africa to totally eliminate apartheid."

In reference to the push for legislation in the New York State Senate that would divest state pension funds invested in companies dealing with South Africa, Preston said "We can not be less than proud of any state or any institution that chooses to be in the vanguard of expressing its outrage by divestiture or other actions."

Polity President Eric Levine said this morning that he was feeling "pretty good" about the action,

and added "I think that they [SUNY] ultimately came through as an educational institution and showed their true colors by divesting." Levine said he had not yet heard from the busload of Stony Brook students who went to Albany yesterday to join in the protests.

Africana Studies Lecturer Ernest Dube, who was himself a prisoner in South Africa for six years during the 1960s, expressed strong feelings last night about the decision. "At least the SUNY system has become part of the more civilized people who are not more interested in profit than morality. So long as there are people who can behave like human beings, no matter how late — it's better late than never."

Lord, Almighty It's About Time

By George Bidermann

Yesterday, the SUNY Board of Trustees reversed its earlier opposition to divestiture of SUNY funds from companies that do business with South Africa. Its 9-4 vote for divestment was a complete turnaround from its 9-0 vote in April, when the board refused to take any divestment action in response to the continuing policy of apartheid in white-ruled South Africa.

While today is a day for all students who care about the oppression in South Africa to rejoice, it is not a day for praising the SUNY Board of Trustees. Their move represents the only acceptable action they could take; I know it, the students of SUNY know it, and the general public knows it.

But how strongly does the board feel about this issue, which transcends pure business sense and is an issue that tears at the very core of human rights and dignity? Their 9-4 vote is simply not convincing enough.

Even worse is a statement that SUNY Chancellor Clifton R. Wharton made yesterday to a *Statesman* reporter. The Trustees, in voting to divest, took into account the past few months of worsening "undesirable activity which created an unsound business situation" (emphasis mine) he said. Not to worry about the human situation there. Blacks being killed at the hands of their white-government police doesn't harm sales. The turbulence those unruly, violent black people have created is what harms investments.

To the very smallest degree, the reasoning of the Trustees has merit. In today's *Newsday*, some of those Trustees who voted against divestment said they felt other companies less committed to ending apartheid would replace US companies that might be forced to withdraw from South Africa if the divestment movement grows. While credible, this reasoning is off-track. The pressure that divestment will put on South Africa is the hope that all people fighting for divestment have. Maybe that pressure will force South Africa to reevaluate its apartheid policies.

So while everyone is hailing the decision the Trustees made, keep in mind that they could have taken this action six months ago. Keep in mind that their vote of 9-4 was not nearly as convincing as their 9-0 vote in April to not take any action on divestment. Keep in mind that this is the same group that was responsible for fining SUNY students, even sending some to jail, for voicing their opinions and taking action.

And what of these SUNY students who have committed themselves to the cause and fought all this time for divestment? Every inactive student who reads this, including me, owes them a damn great amount of thanks. Thanks for being there when we couldn't, or wouldn't. Thanks for giving us a sense of respect again. Thanks for reawakening the activist spirit that has lain dormant for so long, a ravaged and bony shadow of what student involvement was in the 1960s.

At the same time, remember this: things don't ever get done until someone does them. Commit yourselves to an ideal, and the victory can someday be yours. Fight for freedom, fight for justice, and fight for an end to oppression. Without sounding like a dreamer, someday it can and will happen.

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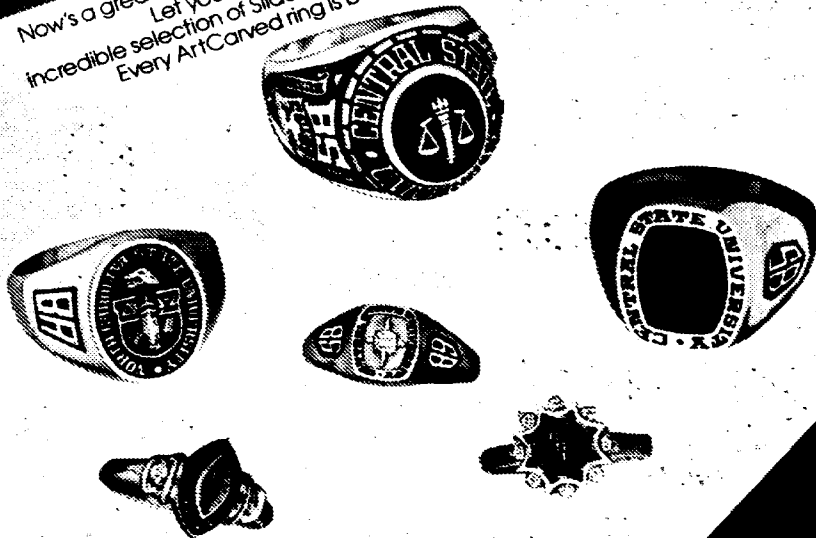
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Board of Trustees Votes to Divest

(Continued from Page 1)

been stalled in the Senate because according to McDougal, Anderson "quashed it."

Wilson said that the success of SASU's lobbying was due to particular Trustees who were targeted and received letters from SASU president Jane McAlevy.

Themba Ntinga, an African National Committee spokesman who was present at the two days of protests, spoke on the steps of the Capitol, addressing the crowd with a megaphone. "This time, I'll be going back with good news instead of bad," he said. "This is one issue we've worked on for ten years. Thanks go out to all involved. Finally, we've had a dream come true. One day, we might see a free South Africa."

Several students from SUNY Binghamton, which Wilson said brought the most students to Albany, stood by the steps of the Capitol long after the crowd dispersed, with SASU members heading to their offices to discuss future action. "We came all the way here, even though we knew our support was trivial at this point," said Amy Morgan. "The Trustees really decided yesterday that divestment would happen. I'm just glad I was here to see a cause fulfilled."

Steve Gawley, president of SUNY Albany's student government, wore what he called a symbolic black suit and white shirt. "Together, SUNY students can do anything," he said. "It took months of coming back, networking with other schools, showing students the power they have. The jail terms were the heavy part."

As other student leaders took to the steps of the Capitol to rejoice and say a few words to the crowd, the rain stopped and the sun momentarily peered through the overcast sky. "See," said SASU Minorities Organizer Francisco "Paco" Duarte, "the sun even came out for us today."

—Benjamin Charny

Many thanks to Ben Charny, Sondra Mateo, Jim Mackin, Ray Rhodes, Diane Butler, Vizhier Corpuz, Alan Golnick and Pam Spagnuolo for making it happen.

Let's Face It

Reporter: Michele Hirsh
Photographer: Gila Cohen

Question: What's your reaction to the news that the SUNY Board of Trustees voted Tuesday to divest all SUNY funds in businesses dealing with South Africa?



Tony Oppenheimer, 21, Senior:

"I feel that what SUNY is doing is a proper action to stop the encouragement of foreign countries attitudes towards racism."



Ron Love, 18, Sophomore:

"It feels like all my hard work, my non-drinking coke, my marching, screaming, and sleeping-out was finally worth it."



Ellen Abramowitz, 21, Grad Student:

"I believe that Stony Brook's concern is genuine and I agree with their stance against apartheid, but I'm a little concerned that these economic sanctions will end up hurting the same people they're supposed to help."



John Shen, 20, Junior:

"Actually I'm quite happy that Stony Brook has taken a stance against apartheid, but I believe that divestment may hurt the blacks of S. Africa economically."

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