

## DURHAM ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

### The Disinvestment Campaign

Members of the teaching staff of the University will be aware that there has been considerable discussion in D.S.U. and elsewhere during the past year on the University's policy of investment, with particular reference to firms with an interest in South Africa. The matter was raised by D.S.U. at the Joint Committee of Council and D.S.U., and Council referred it to Investments Committee, two academic members of Council and the President and three other members of D.S.U. being invited to attend special meetings of this body.

At these meetings, it was agreed from the start that Apartheid was to be regarded as an evil; but there was some disagreement as to the most appropriate course for the University to take. On the one hand, a strong opinion was expressed that, in order to express its disapproval of Apartheid and to contribute in however small a degree to its downfall, all investments should be withdrawn from firms with an interest in South Africa. It was pointed out that some spokesmen at least of the African community in South Africa supported this policy, even if it involved economic crisis and hardship for their people.

On the other side, it was emphasized that the University has no holdings in firms whose involvement in South Africa could be regarded as major. The main relevant holdings (totalling less than £150,000) were in such multiple concerns as I.C.I., Shell and Unilever, who have interests in almost every country in the world. Withdrawing investments from such firms would have an equal effect on such African countries as Kenya, Tanzania and Sierra Leone as on South Africa. At the same time, such disinvestment would not lead to any capital leaving South Africa: instead, stocks sold by the University would be bought by other investors, whether in this country or elsewhere (e.g. in France, Germany or Japan), whose concern for the welfare of Africans might well be negligible.

It happened that at the time when discussions at Investments Committee were reaching a significant point, the Parliamentary Select Committee on wages and working conditions of African employees of British firms in South Africa published its report, including a code of practice for British companies operating in South Africa on such matters as relative rates of pay, opportunities for promotion, workers' welfare and education. The report was accepted by the Government; and this seemed to some members of the Committee to provide a real opportunity for pressure to be brought to bear on those companies in which the University had a financial interest, to ensure that they took steps to defeat Apartheid in an effective way, by lessening the economic and social gap between their workers and the white community. A questionnaire was sent to 13 firms named by D.S.U., asking for information on wage-rates and other aspects of their policy. Replies were received from these firms, some fairly satisfactory, others not at all so. The next step appeared to be to encourage the Government to increase its pressure on the firms concerned to apply the principles laid down by the Select Committee and a letter was sent to Mr. Shore, Secretary of State for Industry, in July.

From his reply it appeared that no effective action was contemplated at all. This may have been one factor which encouraged the D.S.U. members to press with increased vigour for complete withdrawal of investments from all the firms, since no useful pressure could be brought to bear through our shares in them. It is certainly true that our holdings are so small that we could expect to make little impact by sending a representative to shareholders' meetings to ask questions of the Boards of Directors; although the attempt ought to be worth making. Some senior members of the Committee were insistent that, particularly in view of the recent outcry concerning Government policy in connection with the Simonstown naval base, this was a good moment to open a campaign in the Press, urging the Government

apply some genuine pressure to British firms involved in South Africa, with a view to making them accept the recommendations of the Select Committee. It was agreed, however, to write again to Mr. Shore, to ask whether any more effective programme of action was envisaged, now that there was a more effective Government majority.

While the matter was still at this stage, the discussion was overtaken by the decision of D.S.U. to call for a vote of all College J.C.R.'s, with a view to presenting Council with a strong student demand. The Vice-Chancellor considered that academic staff must certainly be consulted at the same time, so that Council might be able to assess the feeling of the whole University, for the financial position of which Council is legally and morally responsible as a Trustee. Since an ad hoc meeting of staff would be unlikely to attract a representative proportion of members, he requested the A.U.T. to take soundings of opinion; and this paper is being sent both to members of A.U.T. and to non-members. It is not the function of A.U.T. to conduct a formal plebiscite, and the figures for opinions expressed on one side or another cannot be considered binding on Council or on anyone else. Nevertheless your answers would be of great assistance to Council in its discussions. It is of great importance that a truly representative opinion should be obtained.

Please indicate your preference for one of the three courses of action listed on the attached slip, and send it, before 2nd December 1974, to:-

Mark Leaf, Hon. Secretary D.A.U.T., Department of English,  
Elvet Riverside.

To: Mark Leaf  
Hon. Secretary D.A.U.T.  
Department of English  
Elvet Riverside  
Durham

I consider that the University should -

- A. Take the first opportunity to sell all its holdings in the thirteen firms with interests in the economy of South Africa.
- B. Retain its holdings in the companies concerned and take all reasonable steps, including representations to the Government, to persuade the companies to improve wages, conditions and prospects for their workers.
- C. Take no specific action in connection with its holdings.

PLEASE TICK THE COURSE OF ACTION WHICH YOU SUPPORT.

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