

The Issue of Divestment at Hamilton College



a pamphlet by Hamiltonians for Divestment

What is Apartheid?

Apartheid is a racist system by which 4.7 million white persons control and oppress over 22.7 million native black people in South Africa. A complex of over 150 laws has been passed by the white South African regime to ensure that black persons are kept subordinate. Any attempt to effectively challenge the white minority rule is met with violence and often death. The blacks of South Africa comprise over 80% of the population and yet they have their lives dictated by a white minority of about 16%. The extent of their oppression is horrific, and we must help.

U.S. dollars play a critical role in propping up the apartheid system in South Africa. Because U.S. involvement provides capital and technology needed by the white minority to maintain its absolute domination over the black majority, millions of Americans are

moving to divest their funds from the corporations and banks that continue to collaborate with apartheid.

In a letter to the Hamilton Community on March 8, 1986, William M. Bristol III, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, outlined Hamilton's views on the issue of divestment. The Board of Trustees decided that while the college should not hold the securities of financial institutions who make new loans to the South African government, or of companies whose business activities in South Africa are a significant portion of their total activities, that investments in companies that are signatories to the Sullivan Principles and that are making good progress on implementation of these principles would continue. In this same letter it was reported that the Trustees do not believe that American companies are supporting apartheid. They also do not feel that by holding securities in companies doing business in South Africa, they are tacitly approving of apartheid. We, the proponents of divestment, disagree.

Each company that operates in South Africa supports apartheid in some capacity — directly or indirectly — through goods, services, or money. The Sullivan Principles re-

quest equal working conditions, pay, and training for all workers, but make no mention of equal employment. Only 5% of the black population is employed by companies adhering to the Sullivan Principles. These principles make no call for changes on the condition of nonwhites in South Africa as a whole. These principles are not binding and the companies which are signatories to these principles have effected no change in the system of apartheid whatsoever.

Hamilton College presently has \$12.2 million invested in companies which do business with the racist South African regime. Because these dollars and these companies serve to perpetuate the oppression of blacks in South Africa, we have asked Hamilton to divest from companies doing business in South Africa. We maintain that by investing in these companies, we have an indirect hand in oppressing the black people of South Africa.

While there is no way to separate the moral, political, and economic implications of divestment, the issue is above all a moral one. The primary concerns of those who support divestment are the human rights of the oppressed people of South Africa.

Some Facts on Divestment

Many members of the Hamilton College Community argue that divestment is not the best answer to the abhorrent system of Apartheid. Often, these individuals claim that by divesting colleges lose their ability to apply pressure for change in South Africa. This claim implies that Hamilton College, as a stockholder in companies doing business in South Africa is using its influence to promote change in South Africa. A resolution was presented to Hamilton College as a shareholder in the Newmont Mining Corporation. It proposed total disinvestment at the end of '86 if significant changes had not occurred in South Africa. **The Hamilton College Board of Trustees voted against the resolution, thereby failing to use our influence to abolish the racist policy of Apartheid.**

As of May 1986, over 50 colleges and universities across the country have totally divested themselves of stocks in corporations which do business in South Africa. These colleges include: **Columbia University, Bates College, the SUNY schools, Mount Holyoke College, the University of Vermont, and the University of Wisconsin school system.**

Currently, over 50 schools have at least partially divested their holdings. These institutions include: **Amherst College, Harvard University, Williams College, Trinity College, Yale University, Northwestern University and Wesleyan University, Vassar College, Tufts University, and The University of Pennsylvania.**

A Realistic Chronology of Events

Fall 1985 After students and faculty voice concerns on the issue of divestment, the President agrees to establish an advocacy committee to advise the trustees. Despite the President's promise, the committee was changed at the last minute into a representative council with no advocacy powers whatsoever. At the fall meeting of the trustees the representatives were only given fifteen minutes to speak.

March 1—8, 1986 A week of demonstrations and teach-ins are organized by H.O.P.E. (Hamilton Organization for Peace on Earth). Shanties are erected in front of Bristol Campus Center in freezing rain and snow; over twenty students sleep in subzero weather as the trustees arrive on Friday. 350—400 students attend the various teach-ins, 100—200 attend a vigil bonfire. Information is distributed throughout the campus advocating total divestment. The week culminates in the trustees releasing one disjointed four page statement defending the Sullivan Principles. The trustees claim to support companies which have a I or II rating with respect to implementation of the Sullivan Principles.

March 10, 1986 At a general meeting in the Chapel, Hamiltonians for Divestment is organized. It is organized without any hierarchical leadership based on the principles of participatory democracy.

Thursday, March 13, 1986 78 students of HFD sit-in at the Office of Communications and Development for two hours. The students read educational pamphlets and articles advocating total divestment. The President later claims that secretaries were harassed. Despite the HFD request to have the issue explored, the President simply and only maintains this claim as an accusation without substantiation.

Friday, April 4, 1986 With a symbolic black coffin, 80 students sit-in at the Buttrick administrative building. In keeping with the *Guide to Policies and Procedures of Hamilton College*, the students remain quiet and do not block any doors or hallways. Several students deliver speeches advocating total divestment. No secretaries or administrators complain of "disruptive behavior" except the President. After a designated period of time, HFD proceeds with the coffin to the **Admissions Office**. They are locked out and are met outside by the college lawyer. When asked why the students were locked out, the lawyer replies "The college can do whatever it likes." The students remain outside in the rain for the designated time of one hour.

Tuesday, April 8, 1986 100 students sit-in quietly at the Admissions building. The President arrives and demands the students' names. The group decides to vote on whether to give names. The President declares the voting "disruptive." The group then decides not to vote and not to give names. The President then redefines the silence as "disruptive." In the words of the President, "You are not welcome here." Once again the protest is entirely within the parameters established by the *Guide to Policies and Procedures*.

April 17, 1986 After erecting a shanty with permission of the Emerson Literary Society (off-campus property), HFD decides to erect a shanty in front of the Black and Latin Students Union with full support from that organization. Although it is on college property, no administrator tells HFD that its presence is objectionable.

April 23, 1986 Four representatives and approximately sixty supporters from HFD travel to New York City. The representatives meet with the Trustee Committee on Finance and discuss divestment for the duration of an hour. The committee makes no concessions and continues to insist that although they abhor the system of apartheid, they do not believe that Hamilton should divest. The other students protest outside the building, yes—in the freezing rain. The good Reverend Jeffrey Eaton, when asked about the continuous bad weather, remarked "I think we're being tested."

April 24, 1986 A third shanty is erected at McEwen Circle. This was Prospective Student Weekend, so HFD held a teach-in and handed out educational information to the prospective students. A symbolic graveyard was constructed in front of Bristol Campus Center. Although it was Prospective Student Weekend, or perhaps *because* it was Prospective Student Weekend, neither the President or any other administrator complained about the activities.

April 30, 1986 HFD erects a shanty around the Alexander Hamilton statue. Late in the afternoon Vice-President Dan O'Leary orders physical plant workers to tear down the shanties. Despite the pleas of HFD members and physical plant workers, O'Leary orders the dismantling, disregarding the safety of students protecting the shanties. Physical plant tears down two of the shanties but are driven away from the shanty on McEwen circle by over 150 students. Physical plant workers concerned with the safety of the students refuse O'Leary's demand to move through the peaceful protestors. After discussions on the circle, HFD decides to move the shanty over in front of the statue of Alexander Hamilton in an act of conscious civil disobedience. Over 150 students surround the shanty and over 70 students sleep there. Several drunken students shout racial slurs and threats at several black women of HFD.

May 1, 1986 Students stand next to the shanty in defiance of the President's demand that the shanty be torn down. The protesters actions still remain within the parameters established by the *Guide to Policies and Procedures of Hamilton College*. As usual, it rains all day. At 4:00 p.m., the President calls 13 members of HFD (including 2 faculty members) into his office on the pretense of negotiating. Instead, he hands them a court injunction with their names on it. The injunction sets a hearing date and provides the President with a restraining order effective immediately. He can call in the police and have HFD members arrested for assembling on campus, whether peaceful or not. After HFD makes it clear that they will not abandon the shanty, the President calls in the police. For logistical and legal reasons, the state troopers refuse to arrest the students. At one point during the day, over 160 students, 10% of the student body, waited to be arrested. Late that evening, Dean of the College Melvin Endy tells HFD that he asked the President to open discussions with HFD. The President agreed to negotiate.

Friday, May 2 In an agreement reached late in the day, HFD agrees to remove the shanty off college property. The college in return agrees to set up another meeting between HFD and the Board of Trustees, after which the Trustees will vote once again on the divestment issue.

Tuesday, May 6 At a faculty meeting, a vote confirms faculty support for HFD and their objectives; only 10 faculty members dissent.

Wednesday, May 7—Class and Charter Day At the awards ceremony, divestment supporters receive 60% of the awarded commendations; faculty break rank in the processional and most wear signs and pins expressing solidarity with HFD.

Friday, May 9 The hearing on the injunction is held at the Oneida County Supreme Courthouse. Justice John R. Tenney denies the President's motion for a preliminary injunction and removes the temporary restraining order. In the words of the defendants' lawyer, "Today was a total victory for the divestment movement." The college lawyer remarked as he walked out of the courthouse, "See you, guys" and shrugged his shoulders. The sun was shining; it was a beautiful day.

May 9—present HFD has continued to argue for total divestment and has also expanded its concerns into the realm of racism on the Hamilton campus. Racial slurs and threats via telephone, mail, and direct confrontation against minority students in our movement have made us painfully aware that racism is by no means a distant phenomenon. We have begun to lobby for an African-American Studies Program and other measures to make Hamilton a healthy and safe environment for all students, regardless of their race or sex.

The Issue is Racism

Today's Symbolic Actions

During today's Commencement ceremonies several hundred students, faculty and parents are expressing solidarity against the Hamilton College Board of Trustees' decision that endowment funds should and will be invested in firms that do business in South Africa. You will notice a variety of different forms of personal silent protest throughout the day such as:

- Shanties, representing the physical oppression of blacks in South Africa, will be erected in front of the Chapel near the statue of Alexander Hamilton.
- Seniors and members of the audience will carry balloons and wear red swatches symbolizing black solidarity; the balloons will be released in unison, expressing hope that the blacks in South Africa will soon be free and that racism throughout the world and at Hamilton will be eradicated.
- Graduating Seniors, upon receiving their diplomas, will hand a letter to the *Chairperson* of the Board of Trustees stating that no money will be contributed to the College until it adequately addresses the general issue of racism at Hamilton, particularly through divestment.
- Some students will refuse to accept the College's gift of a wooden cane by silently placing it on the stage during the processional.
- Upon exiting the ceremony after graduation HFD supporters will sing "We Shall Overcome."



Strength in numbers

If you support our group's actions, we would appreciate donations. If you wish to contribute to the divestment movement at Hamilton, please send your checks payable to *Hamiltonians for Divestment*, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY 13323. If you wish to support education on apartheid and the divestment movement nationally, please send your tax-deductable donations to *The Africa Fund*, 198 Broadway, NY, NY 10038.

If you have any questions, please talk to any member of our organization or obtain material at our information table. If you support total divestment and an end to racism, we ask that you write William M. Bristol, current Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, or Ralph E. Hansmann, current Chairperson of the Finance Committee. Please write them via President J. Martin Carovano, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY 13323. Thank you for your time. Through education, we are attempting to work for a better Hamilton and a better world.