

WHY DID WE BLOCKADE ???

Dear fellow student,

The action that the Coalition for Divestment took in blockading Nassau Hall last Thursday was a serious one. We felt that you had a right to understand the reasons behind it.

*** In response to the Coalition's quest for a dialogue about the University's investment policy on companies doing business in South Africa, the trustees met with student and faculty representatives on Friday May 17. We were told that there was interest in re-examining the current policy.

*** After the meeting, President Bowen called a press conference. On Monday the Prince reported: "Pres. Bowen announced at a press conference last Friday that after meeting with students and faculty divestment leaders, the Board of Trustees' Policy and Budget Committee has decided to take no action that would change the University's investment policies."

*** On Wednesday morning, May 22, Dean Lowe called a meeting with members of the Coalition. He had heard that both faculty and students who had attended the meetings were outraged by this misrepresentation, and that a sit-in had been planned. He assured us that the Princetonian had distorted President Bowen's statement and that the issue was still very much alive for the administration and the trustees. We suggested to Dean Lowe, however, that on such a sensitive issue clarity was important, and that President Bowen's office should issue a public statement correcting any misimpressions.

*** That afternoon, President Bowen asked for a meeting with representatives of the Coalition. He admitted that the trustees' and the administration's position had been misrepresented by the Prince, but when we asked for public clarification, he refused. We made three suggestions of

ways to assuage our anger and re-open dialogue on the issue:

- 1) the formation of an ad hoc committee of the Board of Trustees which would examine issues and alternatives;
- 2) the formation of a student -faculty advisory committee to keep in touch with the trustees and mount a lecture series on South Africa;
- 3) the scheduling of an informational seminar for the Trustees at their June meeting.

President Bowen declined all three.

At this point, one Coalition member suggested that any public indication to back his private reassurances would help ease the situation. Again the President gave no indication that he would consider responding publicly to our concerns. With all avenues for dialogue closed, members of the coalition felt that only direct action would convince President Bowen that new steps had to be taken. At 6:00 am Thursday the sit-in began.

*** That afternoon, following the arrest of 89 members of the University community, President Bowen distributed a public statement clarifying his views on divestment, a gesture which he had been unwilling to make the day before.

We regret any disruption of the University community, but we are happy for the effect that the blockade has had in reopening dialogue on this most important issue. We were concerned that all students understand the reasons behind our protest.

Sincerely,
The Princeton Coalition for Divestment