To: The Executive Committee
From: Bob Wolff
Subject: Tutu’s Visit and Update

Well, folks, I think it may be just within the realm of possibility that all the work we have done for all these years may be about to pay off. [Then again, it may not, but I prefer to be optimistic.] Let me give you a brief narrative account of the events of the past several days, and then explain why I think we may be about to win our struggle.

This is Monday afternoon. Saturday at about 3:00 p.m., I was called by Channel 5 TV in Boston. They said Tutu had just arrived at Logan airport for the Overseers’ meeting on Sunday [yesterday], and they wanted me to appear on TV. Upon more sober reflection, the decided they didn’t want me to appear, but I managed to reach Gay Seidman [at her parents’ home in Boston], and told her Tutu was in town. The next morning, she called to tell me that he had scheduled a press conference at his hotel in Harvard square for 5:45 p.m., right after the meeting. She asked me to alert the press, and I called a dozen newspapers and stations. Later on Sunday I was called by Tutu’s new aid, father Mazwi Tisani, and invited to a meeting with “His Grace” Monday morning. I have just returned from that meeting.

The sum and substance is this: Tutu was asked by Overseers Chair John Whitehead to make a brief presentation at the opening of the meeting on developments in South Africa, which he did. At the end of the meeting, Tutu asked that the subject of divestment be put on the agenda of the next meeting, in April. Whitehead was quoted in the CRIMSON [see enclosed copy of clipping] that if Tutu wants the subject to be discussed, he supposes it will be discussed. Whitehead also allowed as how developments in South Africa might require a change in Harvard’s policy.

This is dramatic news, inasmuch as Harvard has said for half a year now that the subject of divestment is closed.

Tutu’s position now, which clearly must be ours as well, is that if de Klerk does not release Mandela, lift the state of emergency, and enter into irreversible, serious negotiations within three months, Harvard should publicly announce its intention to divest.

Tutu, by the way, told me several stories to illustrate how important external sanctions are to de Klerk. He spoke to de Klerk minutes before leaving to come to the United States, and when he said “I will speak to you when I return from Boston,” de Klerk’s response was, “Tell them to lift the sanctions.”

My political analysis of the situation [i.e., my hunch] is that as the result of developments in South Africa, the ground has shifted underneath Bok’s feet very rapidly. What was, yesterday, a sober, serious, middle-of-the-road position on divestment has suddenly become a right-wing resistance to the movement for negotiations. Tutu appears to be committed to returning here and pressing for divestment. I now realize that he values the Harvard card much more highly than I would have thought. It seems to me that Bok is in grave danger of being painted into an impossible corner. Indeed, if Bok has any brains [which is rather like...
saying, in the context of Massachusetts politics, if John Silber has any brains!] he will change his position before Tutu returns.

Clearly, we need to keep up the pressure, for what may turn out to be one last campaign. Our cry must be that if de Klerk does not begin negotiations by May 1, Harvard must divest. That fits nicely into our timetable, because our big mailing will go out in early April [at just about the time of the next Overseers' meeting, by the bye.]

A few additional tidbits of news. Tutu wants to write a letter, on his stationary, thanking our members for their support. If he does, I shall of course send it to all of our members [with a request for money, needless to say.] The petitions were turned in today. I stopped counting after a while, but there were about 600 signatures. I am having the non-members' names put on the computer, and shortly my wife and I will fold, stuff, seal, stamp and send a mailing to them inviting them to join HRAAA.

Another nice item: yesterday, Donald Woods was unbanned after thirteen years, and at ten a.m. gave a telephone interview to a Johannesburg paper - the first time it was legal to quote him in South Africa since his banning.

Now to serious business: we need money. Those of you who have received calling lists, please slog through the lists. Peter - any movement on the big contributors' front? If Philip Stern is too sick to be approached, what about joining with Damon to get Bob Bentley to put up a matching grant of, say, $3000? Our deadline for raising the money is early April, at which time the printer, the mail house, and the post office must be paid.

Jan and Judith are beavering away on the benefit. Chester has kindly taken on the job of soliciting and checking over statements from the candidates. Is there any progress on Commencement Week activities by the 25th and 50th classes, other than the benefit performance?

We have a real chance to bring this entire effort to a successful conclusion, and actually make a genuine contribution to the termination of apartheid. If you folks will just keep up the good work, we may even leave, as our legacy to Harvard, a core of progressive Overseers with whom they will have to contend for years to come!

All the best.

Bk