

SENATE COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL CONCERNS
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 7, 2003

[In these minutes: Welcome and Introductions, Presentation Opposing the Divestment from Israel Resolution, Student Protest Resolution Update, Sustainability Resolution Update, Proxy Voting, Mount Graham]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate or Twin Cities Assembly; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate or Assembly, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Mark Pedelty, chair, Judi Linder, Ruth Taylor, Roger Beck, Karen Holtmeier, Susan Von Bank, Greg Schooler, Robert Blair, Susan Craddock, Kenneth Heller, Margaret Kuchenreuther, Kara Ferguson, Joel Helfrich, Brandi Linderman, Melissa Williams

REGRETS: Jennifer Oliphant, Yvonne Redmond-Brown, Albert Cooper, Ben Senauer

ABSENT: Sheri Huerd, Julie Sweitzer, H. Jeanie Taylor

OTHER(S): Hy Berman, Riv Ellen Prell, Martin Dworkin, Amy Olson, Julie Swiler, Sara Stein, Ted Helgl, Koby Nahmias, Lila Foldes, Tracy Molm, Mark Rotenberg, Steve Hunegs, Samir Nassar

I). Professor Pedelty called the meeting to order and asked those present to introduce themselves.

II). OPPOSITION TO THE DIVESTITURE FROM ISRAEL RESOLUTION:

Professor Hy Berman passionately read a prepared statement opposing the divestiture from Israel resolution before the Social Concerns Committee. He began by noting the Israeli/Palestinian conflict continues to be the subject of intense and emotional debate around the world and on many university campuses. It is a complex issue that can be examined from many different and legitimate perspectives. According to Professor Berman, the ultimate answer to the turmoil is the creation of a free and democratic Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

In addition to providing the committee with historical facts to support his position, Professor Berman pointed out that the resolution before the committee relies on historical inaccuracies, alleges false human rights abuses, compares Israel to South African apartheid and is a one-sided attempt to de-legitimize Israel. He believes that both sides of the Israel/Palestine issue must work together for a peacefully negotiated solution based upon respectful dialogue.

Next, Professor Riv Ellen Prell, before reading her own statement, provided members with a statement drafted by Professor Bruno Chaouat who was unable to attend today's meeting due to a prior commitment.

Professor Prell began her presentation by describing herself as a left-winged Zionist who stands in solidarity with Israel's peace movement and political left as well as Palestinians who desire a two state solution. She believes that the only way peace will be achieved is through the concerted efforts of two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, both of whom will have to be ready to make substantial concessions. Professor Prell is offended by the resolution before the committee because it distorts reality and rewrites history in ways that erase the experience of world Jewry, which is both European and Arab, with nationalist aspirations. While Israel needs to be held accountable like all other nations; its occupation is wrong and should be stopped. The divestment articulated in the resolution before the committee will not stop the occupation or create peace. Professor Prell further noted that this resolution holds Israel to a standard it holds no other nation in the world. To conclude, she stated that divestment resolutions of this type strengthen the forces in Israel opposed to compromise and negotiation and weakens the forces that favor a negotiated settlement.

Following the statements by Professor Berman and Professor Prell, Koby Nahmias relayed a personal story of ethnic cleansing.

Last in the series of spokespeople opposing the divestiture of Israel resolution, the committee heard from Professor Martin Dworkin. Professor Dworkin referenced his desire for peace and revulsion for this resolution. To frame his opinion he mentioned 3 key points:

- The resolution is based on a fundamental and inaccurate premise by suggesting that Jordan's occupation of the West Bank for 17 years was legal and Israel's occupation was not.
- Equating Israel with South African apartheid is grotesque, offensive and inaccurate. South Africa was a minority controlled military regime that repressed a huge majority not by social custom but by explicit statute. Israel is a parliamentary democracy with statutes that explicitly prohibit discrimination against its citizens regardless of their ethnic background or religion.

Professor Dworkin communicated a proposal introduced by Alan Dershowitz asking that the University of Minnesota make a list of nations, in order of their violations against human rights, and advocate divestment from each of these countries starting at the top in terms of severity. It would be quite some time before the State of Israel would be reached.

- This divestment effort has passed through several institutions of higher education including Columbia University, Harvard, Barnard College, Penn State, etc. and in every case faculty, students and alumni have overwhelmingly rejected it.

In closing, Professor Dworkin called upon committee members to reject this “foolish, biased and counter-productive proposal”.

Professor Pedelty opened up the meeting for questions and/or comments from committee members.

- Melissa Williams thanked representatives opposing the divestiture from Israel resolution for attending today’s meeting. While everyone is in agreement that this occupation is problematic, there are differences in opinion on historical matters and how the occupation should end. Ms. Williams further noted that the resolution is a statement about the Israeli government. As far as the issue of apartheid, Archbishop Tutu and other anti-apartheid activists believe that this is an apartheid situation. This resolution asks the University of Minnesota to divest until violations of international law are resolved. The reason Israel has been targeted for divestment is because it is the number one recipient of aid from the United States. Ms. Williams agrees that human rights violations in other countries should also be addressed. United States citizens need to know that the money paid to their government in the form of taxes is being used to promote social justice for everyone.
- Professor Prell asked for clarification on the point in the resolution which states that Palestine is occupied. From Professor Prell’s perspective this appears to insinuate that there is no right to a Jewish state. Melissa disagreed with this assumption and defined the use of the terms Palestine and Israel in the resolution. According to Ms. Williams, U.S. citizens do not have a right to determine how people in this region govern themselves, but U.S. citizens do have a right to say how their tax dollars are spent and what these dollars fund. When aid is being spent on military equipment and training, U.S. citizens have a right to voice their opinions and this is what the resolution is addressing.

Professor Pedelty announced that due to the limited meeting schedule, if there are any other documents or points of view on this issue, they be forwarded on for distribution to committee members prior to the May 5th meeting.

Professor Pedelty noted that part of the May 5th meeting would be devoted to discussion of this issue. He invited anyone who would be interested in hearing the debate attend the meeting. There is no rule that stipulates the committee has to vote for or against this resolution in May. The committee may, in fact, decide it does not enough information to vote and the issue could be tabled until the fall.

Ms. Williams stated her comments today were an attempt to clarify some points that were made earlier that she believes were inaccurate.

The committee’s attention was drawn to a handout ‘Anti-Semitism/University of Minnesota.’ The question was raised whether it is fair to muddy up this resolution with

racist allocations and hold the people of Palestine and the drafters of this resolution accountable for every nation in the Middle East.

In closing, Professor Prell asked members to understand that this resolution presents the divestiture from Israel issue as being uncontested when in fact it is highly contested. She further asked that members be clear about what is meant by Palestine, Israel and apartheid as defined in this document. To pass this resolution without fully understanding these issues would be a grave mistake.

III). STUDENT PROTEST RESOLUTION – Professor Pedelty updated members on the Student Protest Resolution passed by the committee in March. All resolutions going before the Senate for action must first go before the Senate Consultative Committee (SCC). In this case, the SCC decided this resolution was not within their jurisdiction. The resolution was then forwarded on to EVPP Christine Maziar for action. EVPP Maziar notified Twin Cities faculty members that in the event of war with Iraq, the decorum of the classroom should be maintained and people’s rights to debate the matter in a civil fashion should be permitted. Although the path of the resolution was different than intended, the committee did take a stand to support students’ rights to express themselves under these circumstances.

IV). SUSTAINABILITY RESOLUTION: Professor Pedelty briefly updated the committee on the sustainability resolution. Due to the ambitious nature of this resolution there remains a lot of work on all but one of the categories of the resolution. Ecowatch will bring forward at the May 5th meeting a simple resolution requiring that all paper used on campus be composed of 30% post-consumer waste.

V). PROXY RESOLUTIONS:

1. Hewlett Packard Company – “Adopt Code of Conduct for China Operations” – the committee unanimously passed this resolution.
2. General Electric Company – “Report on/Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions” – the committee unanimously passed this resolution.
3. General Electric Company – “Report on Ties to State Sponsors of Terror” – the committee voted against this resolution.
4. General Electric Company – “Report on Waste Storage at Nuclear Plants” – the committee passed this resolution.
5. JP Morgan Chase Company – “Executive Compensation Review” – the committee passed this resolution.
6. Citigroup Inc. – “Link Executive Pay to Social Criteria” – the committee unanimously passed the resolution.

Because the committee did not have 3 of the resolutions for the proxies, they abstained from voting on these resolutions. These proxies may be voted on by e-mail. Professor Pedelty asked members to watch for these proxies electronically, and, if they receive them, to vote promptly.

VI). OTHER BUSINESS:

Professor Pedelty noted some of the agenda items for the May 5th meeting: Ecowatch resolution, proxy resolutions, divestment discussion.

Joel Helfrich distributed a Mount Graham resolution and supporting documentation for members to review. Mr. Helfrich noted an excellent position paper by Dr. Donald O. Straney that he will provide to those that are interested. As background information for new members, Professor Pedelty explained the committee's actions on this issue last year.

Because new developments have occurred since the Social Concerns Committee acted on this issue last year, Mr. Helfrich would like to see the committee take a stronger stand. Several members agreed that due to the scope of this issue it is unlikely the committee will be able to resolve this issue in May. Mr. Helfrich asked for input from members concerning this issue and indicated he would provide Renee Dempsey, Senate staff, with electronic copies of the information he distributed today so it can be forwarded to those not in attendance.

VII). Professor Pedelty noted the committee would meet in May for 2 hours, 2:30 – 4:30, instead of 1.5 hours. With no further business, Professor Pedelty adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate