

SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

Thursday, October 8, 1998

625 Campus Club

1:30 PM

In these minutes:

Total Oil Resolution, Public-Private Partnerships, Culture Fair, Announcements

MINUTES

Present: Robin Brown (Chair), Lori Clark, Mike Davey, Jean Niemiec, Julie Sweitzer, Amelious Whyte, George French, Doris Rubenstein, Friedrich Srien

Regrets: Margaret Kuchenreuther, Joel Nelson, Sheila Warness, Wesley Matson

Absent: Catherine Forseide

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

The Social Concerns Committee met at 1:30 PM on Thursday, October 8, 1998 in 625 Campus Club in Coffman Memorial Union on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota.

MEETING MINUTES.

The meeting minutes from June 4, 1998 were approved as written.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS.

Professor Robin Brown, Chair, introduced himself and welcomed members to the 1998-99 Social Concerns Committee. He reported that although the committee lacks a set of defined tasks, it is advisory through the Senate Consultative Committee to the Senate, it produces texts in its own right in terms of what the committee identifies as a need, and it seeks out other projects, such as the Culture Fair. The committee is therefore a data gathering, fact finding, advisory body. He added that the committee also decides what action the University should take on proxy voting and places the University on record as taking a moral position. Professor Brown stated that he would like to streamline the committee processes, and focus its tasks this year. He reviewed the packet distributed to committee members prior to the meeting that details the guidelines for annual review of major social issues, the regents policy Investment Social Concerns, and highlights from the 1997-98 academic year.

TOTAL OIL RESOLUTION.

In the fall of 1997, the MN Free Burma Coalition (MFBC) requested that the committee recommend divestment from its stock in Total Oil which does business in Burma, a country with a military regime that has devastated the land and murdered thousands of Buddhists since 1988. The committee considered several options regarding the appropriate action to take in response to MFBC's request, and felt it necessary to obtain information from other independent sources in the committee's consideration of this matter. A Burma resolution was written by the Social Concerns Committee, presented to the Senate Consultative Committee on April 30, 1998, presented to and approved by the full Senate on May 14, 1998, and forwarded to the President on May 15, 1998. The resolution prohibited any future University investments in Total Oil due to the use of slave labor on their pipeline construction project until it ceases activity in Burma (Myanmar).

Professor Brown reported that a compromise resolution is currently being reviewed by the Board of Regents, which commits the University to social responsibility in its investments, without including the human rights violation language stated in the initial resolution passed by the Senate last spring. He noted that because the University declined to present the resolution to the Regents as initially worded, he and Sheila Warness, Asset Management, proposed revisions to the language so that it was agreeable to both parties.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS.

Last year, the committee began discussions about its role in public-private partnerships at the University. The committee agreed that if involved in the public-private partnership process, it would serve strictly in an advisory role with no veto power and would review new contracts as well as the renewal of existing contracts. Although the committee would most likely be unable to deny contracts between the University and private companies, it may be able to amend them during negotiations in an attempt to change the behaviors of companies to be more socially responsible.

Committee members agreed that more information needs to be gathered about the process of public-private partnerships. Professor Brown will draft a memo, perhaps for President Yudof, requesting assistance in identifying the initial stages of the public-private partnership process, informing him of the background of the committee charge, and stating that the committee is interested in the impact of these partnerships and eager to provide input in the early stages. The draft will be circulated to all members of the committee by e-mail for their comments prior to the November meeting.

CULTURE FAIR.

Professor George French provided committee members with an update of the culture fair event discussed regularly last year. The committee distributed an e-mail survey to several local international student cultural organizations to determine their level of interest in attending and/or participating in a University Culture Fair planned by the Social Concerns Committee, and received an enthusiastic response. The culture fair will be an all-University event, first taking place as a pilot project on one of the coordinate campuses as a kickoff for planning a culture fair for the twin cities campus in the spring of 2000. The fair itself would consist of lectures, plenary sessions, cultural lunch buffet, theater productions, discussion groups, and demonstrations by participating student organizations at the University. Although a subcommittee will organize many aspects of the culture fair, in consultation with the Social Concerns Committee, representatives were identified in Morris and Duluth who are also interested in helping to organize the culture fair. Professor French will draft a formal report to be circulated to committee members before the next meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

- At the November meeting, the committee will define issues, work on the draft memo by Professor Brown to President Yudof re: public-private partnerships, and review and discuss the formal report by Professor French re: the culture fair.
- Faculty, staff, and students are invited to participate in a dialogue on race between October 28 and November 4; details from Amelious Whyte will be provided by e-mail.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30PM.