Column/Thomas T. Huang

Autumn is for pragmatists

When I think of autumn, I think of racing down the hills of Acton. What? With a car? Oh, yes, the one with Alphonse. Paddling furiously through narrow streets, we would think we could squeeze the last drops of light from the day, soak it up in our sweat and let it ooze out of our armpits. By 5 p.m., we could only see a few feet in front of us. We had to rely on the headlights of other cars to navigate around the potholes and gutters which lay like traps before us. Soon enough, cars with glaring headlights would start to honk. To make matters worse, we never knew when Mrs. Cost's German shepherd would take advantage of the dark and pouce out from behind a freshly fertilized bush and tear us to shreds. We were only in fourth grade, and we were too young to die.

So it was with some trepidation that we decided one cold night to take to the hills of Acton. A girl we hardly knew, Her name was Suzanne, and she had single-handedly shattered any misconceptions I might have had. Her eyes spoke to me, her dark long hair and quick smile, she had metted our hearts like hot funnel poured slowly on vanilla ice cream.

The night sky was clear, and the moon lit our way to her house. As I drove home, the scent of flowers beneath her bedroom window, I would have backed out had Alphonse not been so dead set on this.

He had been far more active than I in courting her. He had showered her with candy and told her jokes he had picked up from邹越 Joe wrappers. The problem was that the quotient stuck. On top of that, Mortimer Schkansky had stood behind his making noise with his hands and arms, punctuating each joke like a drummer's rimshot. I wasn't quite in love with him after he had a paper boy handle his book and his wife had the money he had earned. He asked questions in class about my quizzes. He left the girls whom he liked know that he liked them.

His drive wasn't surprising, as he had been raised by his grandmother, a large woman who often told us stories about the South in the 1950s, how she had to sit in the back of the bus, how she and her brothers and sisters had to fight for even a piece of dignity.

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Column/Scott Saleska

The facts support divestment

I think that MIT should divest all of its holdings in companies doing business in South Africa. But I didn't always think that way. I had to think about it for awhile -- and face the facts -- before it became clear to me that MIT really does need to divest.

I agree that MIT should divest for the following reasons:

1) Divestment has only a negative impact, because corporations that pull out of South Africa will lose the ability to influence the government in a positive way. Therefore, those in the interest in fighting apartheid will in countries which have signed the Sullivan Principles, because there will be fewer instruments of positive change.

2) I don't think that this charge, one merely needs to ask: What has been the influence of foreign investments so far? Have they been helpful or harmful to the victims of apartheid?

In the wake of the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, and again after the 1976 Soweto uprising, the flight of foreign capital from South Africa posed a serious threat to the apartheid regime, the response of the American banks was more loans to help shore up the racist government. In these instances, MIT -- through its investments in corporations like Citibank and Bank of America -- supported apartheid and helped to crush its victims.

There was much outcry in response to such moves, and in 1978 MIT, with many other institutions, accepted the Sullivan Principles as a guide for future investments. The Sullivan Principles were first proposed as a guide to investments by Rev. Leon Sullivan, a member of the board of directors of General Motors. They call for companies to implement reforms in their own workplace, such as desegregation, fair employment practices, etc.

Greatly, the Sullivan Principles have perhaps helped to improve some working conditions for the less-than-one percent of the black population employed by the American companies that abide by them. But this is irrelevant to the large problem of poverty and racism in South Africa. In the "homelands," where foreign corporations have no influence -- over 80 percent of the people live below the minimum subsistence level. The only problem to address is the effect of wealth by attacking the roots: the system of apartheid itself, and the racist government which enforces it.

The plain fact is that, whatever their intentions, corporations in South Africa have simply not been a lever for any real change. If anything, in the eight years since the Sullivan Principles have been adopted, things have only gotten worse for the South African blacks. It seems clear that the Sullivan Principles have done nothing but provide an empty argument for corporations who wish to retain their profitable investments.

1) By divesting, we will only be hurting those who we want most to help, because it will be the blacks themselves who will suffer if corporations that employ them are forced to leave.

If it is true -- as has often been claimed by presidents ranging from Paul S. Gray '54 to Ronald W. Reagan -- that the oppressor will be the ones most hurt by divestment, then we must wonder why it has been those very oppressive who have been among the most active in calling for it. The African National Congress (the 70-year-old, now-outlawed Black Liberation organization) has stated, "It is our firmly considered view that liberal opinion -- however well-intended it may appear -- that opposes our campaign for freedom will draw to it, the long run, only to reinforce the charge that it is essentially if South African is to be rid of apartheid and soon to be. It is not enough to great vigilante here, better case the matter there, for this leaves the apartheid system intact. In fact, it is not out of our minds and deprivation."

Winnie Mandela (wife of Nelson Mandela, the famed anti-apartheid activist, imprisoned for over 20 years), John Gatheare (general secretary of the outlawed South African Congress of Trade Unions), and Bishop Desmond Tutu are among the many who agree.

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