May 1, 1975

Dear Alumni, Parents, and Friends:

As most of you know from news reports, Brown students boy-cotted classes for four days recently and then occupied University Hall for some thirty-eight hours.

Some of you are undoubtedly upset by these events--critical of our students and their behavior and of the administration for its actions. I can understand this. But I would hope--had you been on campus facing these problems with us and sharing in our decisions--that you would also understand our position.

The purpose of this letter, therefore, is to summarize and explain what has happened at Brown the past few weeks.

First, let me emphasize two factors: that the problems with our students result directly from the University's plan to reduce expenditures over the next three years by about $6 million and the rising cost of education--part of the national inflationary situation--which many feel threatens their ability to stay in college. This retrenchment is absolutely necessary to achieve fiscal stability and thus to protect Brown's long term future. It will surely be a painful process, but I am convinced that it can and will be accomplished without doing irreparable damage to the University.

Students became alarmed over these proposed budget reductions and our inability to increase funds for scholarships. Their concerns are serious and legitimate, and we all share them. I have no doubt that their primary interest is in maintaining the quality and vitality of this institution. Had the administration discussed with students earlier and more effectively the reasons for the priorities among the proposed budget cuts, subsequent events might conceivably have been different, although we must face the fact that there are differences of priorities among members of a university community.

In early March, a Student Coalition was formed to express student concerns. After meeting with the Advisory and Executive Committee of the Corporation on March 14, the Coalition established a Special Committee on Budgetary Priorities to study the issues and propose alternative budget allocations.

After nearly two weeks of debate over the nature and extent of the budgetary information which could be appropriately made available and the circumstances of its release, the Coalition issued a proposal which called for: a) increases in the budgets for
financial aid and student services, b) no further cuts in the size of the faculty, c) increased student and faculty participation in the budgetary process and d) the strengthening of Brown's 1968 commitments to minority students.

In a series of information and discussion sessions with the Special Committee, members of the administration explained the reasons for the 1975-76 budget proposals and sought to allay student fears. As I have said on a number of occasions, I do not believe we were ever as far apart as we appeared to be. On April 13, I responded to the students' proposals, pointing out that the proposed budget was the result of eight months' work by many people and could not be altered, and that we would proceed with the planned reductions in the size of the faculty. I endorsed a faculty resolution to create a mechanism for appropriate faculty and student participation in the planning/priorities cycle which precedes actual budgeting, and I reaffirmed Brown's previous commitments to provide opportunities and supporting services for disadvantaged students.

By this time, there was considerable misunderstanding and distrust. The students found my response unacceptable and voted to boycott classes from April 15-18. On Saturday, April 19, the Special Committee on Budgetary Priorities made their proposals to the Budget and Finance Committee of the Brown Corporation. The Budget Committee considered the student recommendations, but presented to the Advisory and Executive Committee later that day the budget submitted by the administration. The A&E Committee approved the budget without change, but it also urged the faculty to proceed promptly with recommendations for a planning/priority setting mechanism. The trustees also voted to create a committee on minority affairs to review Brown's programs and progress in that area.

The students returned to classes Monday, April 21. Although disappointed with the Corporation's response, the immediate matter appeared to be settled since new procedures were being devised to avoid similar problems in the future.

That day, however, we learned that minority students were unhappy with the response of the administration and the Corporation. The number of minority students applying to Brown had been declining, as had the number of minority students matriculating. Black students feared that in the period of retrenchment ahead, minority students would be most severely affected.

I met with a group of minority student leaders on Tuesday evening, April 22, to present our plans and to allay these fears. I promised more precise details in a clarifying statement by Thursday evening, April 24. Before that statement was presented to them, students entered University Hall on the morning of April 24 and declared they would stay there until the administration promised to fulfill its previous commitments to minority students.

During the thirty-eight hours that they remained in the building, we delivered our clarifying statement as I promised I would do
and sustained meetings were held between minority student leaders and the administration to discuss the details of that statement. The result was an agreement that elaborated on and clarified my earlier statement of April 13 and the Corporation resolution of June, 1973. Late Friday evening, the students vacated University Hall.

Brown had never had a building occupation before—even in the most turbulent days of the late 1960's when this was a common occurrence on many campuses. Because of that enviable record, we did not believe it could happen here. It is surely an unacceptable way of doing business in a university, and the entire community—including Brown's minority students—were saddened by it. I believe that feeling alone will prevent such a thing from happening again, but in case it doesn't, I want to be very clear about how we shall proceed should such an event occur in the future.

I can conceive of no circumstances under which we will again discuss or negotiate the issues and problems of this University while one part of the community is preventing another part of it from conducting the orderly business of the institution. The limit of our response to any future building occupation would be to take whatever effective measures are available to us. I do not intend to grant amnesty of any sort under such circumstances. Moreover, I will ask the University Council on Student Affairs, the agency empowered by the Corporation to adjudicate major student disciplinary cases, to consider the proposal that participation in the occupation of a University building carry the penalty of dismissal from Brown.

Some people feel that the administration should have acted in this instance to have the students removed from the building, or that we should have refused to talk with students while University Hall was occupied. I seriously considered both courses of action. However, the options available to an administration in such a situation are limited and generally unsatisfactory. To seek a civil injunction would have turned the matter over to the courts and the police completely; we would have had no further control or influence. To leave students in the building while we refused to talk would have steadily increased tensions on the campus and would have extended a potentially dangerous situation into Spring Weekend, which often presents problems of its own.

I determined that the administration's response should be measured to the provocation. We have seen to our sorrow in this nation that extreme actions and inflexible positions nearly always lead to consequences that are far more serious and disruptive than the original provocation.

I believe my first consideration in such a situation is for the safety and welfare of the young people who come here to study. And I believe my overriding obligation to Brown is to concentrate on its long term welfare rather than on the passions and pressures of the moment. That obligation applied when we constructed and
reaffirmed our budget; it also applied when students occupied University Hall. I decided that the administration's response should be one of calmness and reason.

There was no violence or threat of violence at any time during these events. There was no damage to property. None of the administrative offices in University Hall was entered by students. The students meticulously cleaned up the building and left it in exactly the same condition as they had found it.

Naturally, I do not condone what our students did. I have made it clear that we cannot do business this way again. Nonetheless, I can understand the fears of minority students that the gains they have made since 1968 may be jeopardized by financial retrenchment.

I want to emphasize that we did not make commitments under the pressure of a building occupation that we would not have made otherwise. I had promised a statement before the students acted and I kept that promise. The agreement which ended the occupation was, as I have said, essentially a restatement of my position paper of April 13, which preceded the strike. It spelled out and reaffirmed the commitments made in the Brown Corporation statement of June, 1973.

The most substantial point of the agreement was a promise to work to increase applications from highly qualified minority students, and thus minority students matriculating, by 25 percent over the next three years. If the effort is successful, that would mean that the number of minority students entering Brown in 1978 would be 125 to 130 students—approximately the same as the number who entered in 1969 and 1970.

I am not trying to minimize or explain away the events of the past few weeks. They were disturbing and, in my opinion, inappropriate in a university community. But the University is not insulated from the problems and pressures which are bearing on our society generally. We must deal with situations, however unpleasant, as rationally and realistically as we know how.

Sincerely,

Donald F. Hornig

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