

# Standing up for humanity: protesters call for freedom

It was just another Wednesday morning. My alarm clock went off at 8 a.m., I got out of bed, showered and sat down to breakfast. The last thing on my mind was that by nightfall I would be in jail. If someone had predicted that I would be arrested while making a political statement on South Africa outside of the Eugene Federal Building, I would have thought they were crazy. But I did get arrested and together with 86 other anti-apartheid protesters, I spent Wednesday night and all day Thursday in the Lane County Jail.

Certainly, I was aware that an anti-apartheid rally had been planned for Wednesday afternoon at the University. I was one of the scheduled speakers who, along with several others, made a strong statement against apartheid and United States economic cooperation with South Africa. What happened after the rally, however, was not in anyone's plan of events.

The big question is, why did several hundred people (mostly students) march downtown to the Federal Building, occupy it and stage a sit-in while chanting "Free South Africa" and "Divest Now." The answer lies in the fact that public tolerance for our government's support of South Africa, and a growing anger over the violent apartheid system has reached an all time high. On the same day that we were arrested in Eugene, 63 were arrested at Cornell University, 58 at the University of Iowa, 112 at the University of California in Berkeley, and 27 at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. This is just a small sampling of the thousands of people who have been arrested during recent anti-apartheid protests at universities around the country.

Martin Luther King Jr. once remarked that there comes a time when the human spirit cries, "I can stand injustice no longer!" After seeing police violence against blacks in South Africa on television, after reading about it in newspapers, after learning about it at University events (films, lectures, etc.), students are no longer remaining quiet on the apartheid issue.

I was startled at how many people showed up for the rally in the EMU courtyard and I was surprised when nearly 500 of those people took to the streets in a protest march to the Federal Building, calling on the state and the nation to cut economic ties with South Africa. The protesters included members of fraternities and sororities, law students, business majors, artists and activists. They represented a group of people

chanted in support of divestment and South African freedom, a tremendous sense of purpose developed. It was then that I realized that the protest had transformed itself from a rally on campus into a conscientious act of non-violent civil disobedience. People wanted to send a firm anti-apartheid message that would reverberate around the country. By 8 p.m., the police arrived in riot gear and the arrests began.

Although I had not planned on becoming a spokesperson during the sit-in, I was so moved by the inner strength and commitment of the protesters to take a stand against apartheid that I decided to speak out with my own feelings. I was not there in an official capacity as the Emerald's editorial page editor, I was there as a human being. As the protesters were carried out one by one to waiting police vans amid tears and applause, I made a public statement to the media on why people had risked arrest to support the nationwide anti-apartheid movement. It was then that I too was arrested.

I am not happy with having spent nearly 24 hours in jail, with being fingerprinted and photographed by the police. But I do not regret having participated in the protest at all. I consider it an honor to have been in the company of so many courageous young men and women who made a personal sacrifice in the name of justice in South Africa. Like Mohandas K. Gandhi, these people went to jail to protest the inhumane policies of apartheid. Like Martin Luther King Jr., they believe that the world can be a better place.

*Costas Christ is the editorial page editor of the Emerald.*

## Impressions by Costas Christ

who joined together in a cause that transcends political ideologies. That cause is the oneness of humanity and the rejection of a legal system of white racial supremacy — apartheid.

By the time everyone arrived at the Federal Building, emotions were running high. In a spontaneous action, the marchers entered the building and sat on the floor of the lobby, chanting "Free South Africa" and clapping hands. I went to the building's security personnel and told them that the group planned to stage a sit-in that would probably last about two hours. But as people sang and

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