

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



Where have all the recent apartheid protesters gone?

Sitting among nearly 1,000 people during the May 1 anti-apartheid rally in the EMU Courtyard, I was surprised and impressed. The gathering was dramatic and full of emotion as students shouted and cheered to the speakers' condemnation of South Africa's racist society.

Everyone present seemed interested and angry that a system of racial segregation was allowed to remain in existence, and it was surprising to see that people still cared enough to voice their rejection of something far removed from everyday campus life.

Countless articles have stated that today's students don't care enough to voice their opinions, and some writers even question whether or not students have opinions at all. I, too, believed this after witnessing a small and apathetic turnout for a rally against proposed financial aid cuts in April. It seemed most students felt protesting was a waste of time.

But the anti-apartheid rally changed this belief. Students enthusiastically supported the speakers and bought anti-apartheid posters. Later, 300 of them marched downtown to the Federal Building to stage a sit-in.

What was so refreshing about the rally was that not only were "die-hard" protesters involved, but so-called

"average" students were there as well. These were students caught up in the fervor of the moment, yet they appeared truly concerned.

But since the original arrests, I have seen this broad-based support fall away. Crowds have dwindled at each subsequent rally or march, and most of those who

Reporter's Notebook

remain are the die-hard demonstrators. Not to say that anything is wrong with protesting, a wide variety of issues, but it isn't as powerful or exciting when most of the anti-apartheid demonstrators have made a life-long career out of protesting itself.

The first time I noticed a change of focus in the anti-apartheid movement was during a rally on the Capitol steps in Salem last month. In addition to speeches against apartheid, one man spoke at length about a campout to protest a planned timber harvest. He must have spoke for 15 minutes, giving detailed directions on how to get to the campsite. Many of those attending the rally supported this man, but most of the "average" students, who were less experienced at protesting, seemed bored and alienated by the talk of log-

ing demonstrations.

Several of these students questioned why this man was speaking. One man told a friend standing nearby that he thought he was here to protest apartheid in South Africa, not timber-cutting practices in Oregon.

As the support from "average" students dropped, much of the focus of the cause had been lost. This became painfully obvious during last week's trial for Gary Kutcher, one of the protesters arrested at the sit-in. Although Kutcher was sitting only three feet in front of the spectators, he was almost ignored.

Instead, some of the spectators spoke of the many protests they had been involved in. One man paced around the courtroom speaking loudly about his involvement in a protest to save old-growth timber, and how he and others were winning a battle against loggers.

For whatever reason, the mass student support for apartheid has been lost. Perhaps students were just experimenting with the idea of "protest," and when their romantic illusions of the 1960s' style of demonstration were shattered, they paid their bail and got on with the rest of their lives. Or perhaps they just didn't have the time to march twice a week.

By Scott McFetridge

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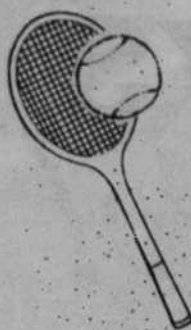
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Put Memorial Week-End on your 1986 calendar and plan to enter next spring!