

USSA leads way for historic true minority representation

Floor walkout overcomes racism

By Kelvin Wee
Emerald Associate Editor

On Monday night, I witnessed the birth of a revolutionary movement.

As one of the seven University delegates to the United States Student Association's 1989 Summer Congress at

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Berkeley, Calif., I saw USSA make history by becoming the first national organization to amend its constitution in favor of equal representation for people of color on its board of directors.

However, the path to achieving equality on the USSA board of directors was not without obstacles. The truth is, it took an ugly walkout during an administrative plenary session in protest of voting results to an amendment sponsored by the National People of Color Coalition on Sunday to shake some USSA delegates out of their latent racist modes.

The first amendment submitted to USSA members for consideration requested that the number of representatives for the People of Color Coalition be increased from two to five. The basis for this request was that there were too many ethnic groups within the minority community to be represented by only two persons.

Had it been approved, the constitution would have expanded the number of seats to offer African-Americans, Asians, Chicano/Latinos, International Students and Native Americans a respective voice on the USSA board. Much to our surprise, the floor voted down the amendment.

One excuse I heard for opposing the amendment implied that people of color would return for more seats on the board of directors if they are given the extra three seats. In addition,

the opposition reflected the fear that other caucuses, such as the Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay caucus or the Non-traditional Students Caucus, would return the following year demanding more seats.

One day after the mass walkout, the NPCC demanded that the number of seats be increased to reflect true diversity and equality on the board of directors. This time, the coalition demanded the restructuring of the board and other changes, including one to assure a 50 percent mix of people of color and whites on the board.

This amendment, much to the surprise of many delegates, including myself, passed with a mandate.

Apart from the ugly and the bad, there was the good. The ideas many of the 236 delegates from 31 universities and colleges shared with each other will be brought back to and tested by the respective campuses to improve student conditions in those areas.

Although many delegates, including all seven of us from the University (Tim Hughes, Sharon Surrett, Armando Morales, Jacqueline Arnold, Maria Mendosa, Yaelen Wong and myself), may leave the congress exhausted from the hectic schedule, most will not leave empty-handed. This is because USSA offered countless means by which delegates could educate themselves and bring back the education to spread through their respective campuses.

In addition, there were many speakers and workshops. Included in the well-stocked list of speakers was Karen Thompson, a lesbian activist. United Farm Workers Activist Vice President Oscar Mondragon and Alfredo DeAvila, Center for Third World Organizing's director of training, were also there.

The most impressive speaker, in my opinion, was Shen Tong. Shen was one of the several

student demonstrators from Beijing who managed to escape to the U.S. after the Chinese government massacred thousands in Tiananmen Square two months ago. He spoke of his experiences, sometimes through an interpreter, and shared the hopes of the many Chinese students with the USSA delegates.

For most of us, this was our

first USSA congress. And again, for most of us, we hope this will not be our last. The sharing of ideas and opinions, the opportunity to meet with students from other parts of the nation and begin networking with them was what most of us were rewarded with. Eventually, most of the delegates, like myself, left with the idea that there actually was hope for the

future.

In short, all students can benefit from their institutions' partnership with USSA because it offers all delegates the opportunity to bring back ideas and already tested means to make education accessible to all and just a select few.

In addition to his USSA activities, Kelvin Wee is an associate editor for the Emerald.



Club sponsors weekend hike

German Club members hike to Three Finger Jack Mountain via Canyon Creek Meadows this Saturday. A trip sheet with maps and a detailed description is posted on the club's bulletin board across from Friend-

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ly Room 202. Announcements of future hikes this summer will also be posted there. When the Emerald resumes publication this fall, look in this space for further announcements of German Club activities, all of which are free of charge and open to members of the University community and their friends. For more information contact Helmut Plant, club adviser, in Friendly Room 312 or at x4059.

Deadline for submitting Et als to the Emerald front desk, EMU Suite 300, is noon the day before publication. Et als are run the day of the event unless the event occurs before noon.

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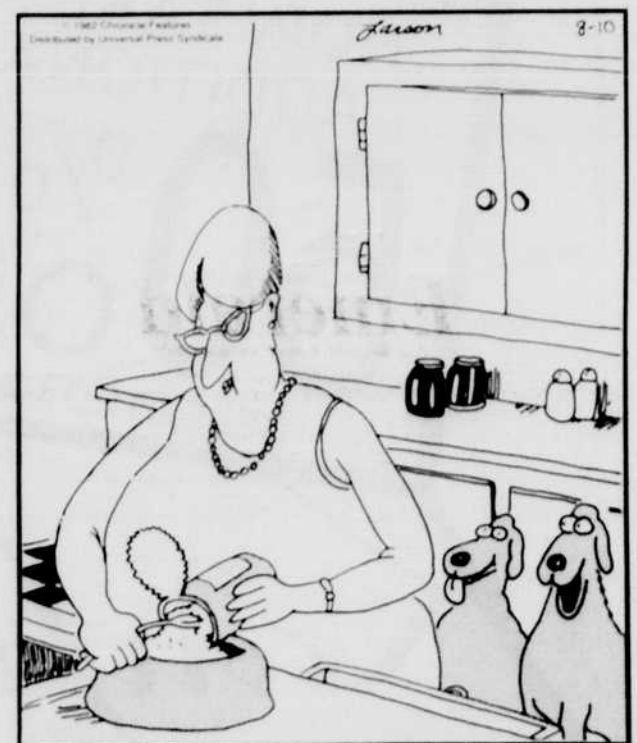
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Commentaries will be published as space and time permit. Because of these limitations, the Emerald's commentary space cannot be used as a forum for debate and response between individuals or for matters that are better dealt with in the letters section.

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By GARY LARSON



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