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Students plead guilty at hearing



Photo by Jeff Paslay

If U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan allows a pretrial diversion for Efrem Mehretab (seen here at right with defense attorney Bob Larson), the University senior will have to perform community service, but it will not result in a criminal conviction on his record.

□ Hoop, Arias admit guilt in connection with Federal Building vandalism

By Pat Malach
Emerald Editor

Two University students entered guilty pleas to misdemeanor charges of destruction of federal property in connection with an April 30 protest at the Eugene Federal Building that followed the acquittal of four white Los Angeles police officers charged with beating black motorist Rodney King.

At a Sept. 8 hearing in U.S. District Court, Brian Gregory Hoop, 27, and Carlos Alejandro Arias, 30, pleaded guilty to destroying U.S. government property valued at less than \$100, a misdemeanor charge with a maximum penalty of one year imprisonment and a fine of \$100,000.

Prosecutors recommended a pretrial diversion without a criminal conviction for a third defendant in the incident, University student Efrem Mehretab, 20. U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan has 30 days from the hearing date to decide if he will grant the diversion.

As part of the plea-bargaining agreement, John Ray, assistant U.S. attorney in charge of prosecuting the case, recommended all three defendants pay restitution for the windows damaged, perform 200 hours of community service and write a letter to the court acknowledging responsibility and apologizing for their roles in the demonstration.

Hogan set a Nov. 16 sentencing date for Hoop and Arias.

All three defendants had earlier been indicted and entered pleas of not guilty to felony charges of destruction of federal property valued at more than \$100. The felony charge carries a maximum penalty of a 10-year prison term and \$250,000 fine. However, federal sentencing guidelines would have dictated a penalty of six- to 10-months imprisonment if convicted of the felony.


Ray said the government agreed to allow Hoop and Arias to plead guilty to the lesser charges because the investigation into the incident revealed the defendants "had no premeditated intent."

"They did not march to the Federal Building with the idea of breaking windows," Ray told the judge, "but got caught up in the frenzy of a student rally turned mob. The misdemeanor charges adequately characterize the nature of the crimes."

If the judge accepts the conditions of the agreement, Arias, a graduate student from the Dominican Republic, will have to pay the government \$553.84 in restitution. Hoop, a senior majoring in architecture, will owe \$138.46. Both men will also serve probationary periods of no more than three years. Mehretab, a senior finance major, will have to pay \$415.38 in restitution and will be in the diversion program for 18 months.

Ray told the judge he offered the diversion to Mehretab as an acknowledgement of his efforts to calm the crowd following the window-breaking protest.

After the hearings, Arias and

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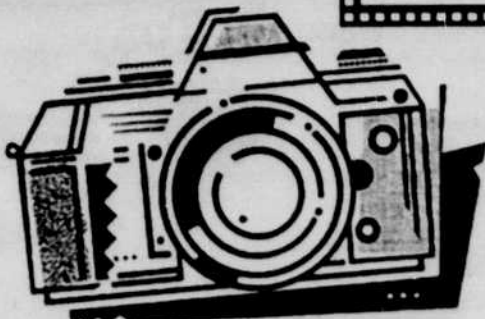
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