

CHAPTER 7

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT BUILDS AGAIN

Relocation to phoney homelands, separation of families - I can't understand. Twenty three million can't vote because they're black. We're stabbing our brothers and sisters in the back. I ain't gonna play Sun City.

-Little Steven

On a national level, student activism had reached new heights during this period in addition to locally. Many universities were forced to divest their financial holdings from companies doing business in and with South Africa. The student movement for divestment was also successful in getting many corporations to disinvest from (or pull out of) South Africa and the U.S. Congress to approve limited sanctions against South Africa in September of 1986.

THE STUDENT ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT

Anti-apartheid activists have placed moral concerns above the economic self-interest of the university. Their appeal to a higher morality and universal values of democracy and self-determination have been significant in their ability to attract participants. The idealism of the divestment supporters presents a qualitative change in the state of students activism since the global economic crisis of 1974; in addition, the university administration was seen by students as the enemy in a clearcut way. This realization, coupled with economic problems, would lead students to become increasingly critical of the administration. However, the vanguard nature of the movement along with the administration's repressive tactics and the emergence of mainstream liberal leadership at a critical point led to a quick destruction of what had been just as quickly built. Additional factors contributing to this decline resulted from internal weaknesses of the student movement. In the period following the 1986 rise and fall of the student movement, there have been signs of regeneration.

SPRING 1986 PROTESTS

The spring 1986 semester at UT was ushered in with a feminist demonstration celebrating the *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision supporting a woman's right to control her body through abortion. Under the Reagan administration, this right had come under increased assault due to the influence of the religious right on the government. The demonstration, which was organized by University NOW, was successful; around 200 people participated. The presence of anti-abortion religious fundamentalists who were counter-demonstrating served to attract increased support.

Many progressive single issue groups existed on campus; most of their work was focused on education and lobbying, but all the groups held public demonstrations and protest activities. The Central America Peace Initiative (CAPI) advocated an end to U.S. intervention in that region. The Steve Biko Committee continued its divestment campaign. United Campuses to Prevent Nuclear War (UCAM) worked to educate students about the participation of UT in research and development of nuclear weapons. University NOW worked on educating students about child care, date rape, abortion and

birth control. The BSA publicized the need for minority retention and recruitment and the reality of institutionalized racism at UT. The November 29 Committee for Palestine worked to increase awareness of the Palestinian issue and to oppose Zionism. AXLE attempted to help the various organizations communicate with one another.

DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST RACISM

February was Black History Month when issues of institutional racism and the history of Afro-Americans were aired.

In March, the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity held a 'porter party.' Publicity for the party depicted blacks in servile roles. A contingent of about 50 students met in the Student Union, made signs and marched to the party - lining up on the opposite side of the street. The police and the press arrived immediately. The fraternity members became violent, hurling beer cans across the street at the protesters first and then crossing the street to taunt. The fraternity partiers tore up demonstrators' signs and even assaulted one demonstrator who filed a criminal complaint. The police chased down the assailant and arrested him. The violent reaction of the fraternity members was all captured on that evening's news. The fraternity promised not to have a party again around a racist theme.

STUDENTS BUILD SHANTIES, HOLD MILITANT PROTESTS

At the end of March, the American Committee On Africa (ACOA) called for a national student week of protest activities against apartheid. The BSA and Biko got permission from the university to erect a shanty on the campus to symbolize the oppression of South Africa's black inhabitants. While BSA and Biko held several demonstrations calling for university divestment, the SA held a student referendum in which the students voted to support the divestment resolution. The faculty and the staff passed similar resolutions. The regents argued that they would lose too much money if they divested.

As this controversy simmered, news reached UT students about other anti-apartheid protests around the country, most notably at Columbia University and the University of California at Berkeley. At Berkeley, thousands of students had stayed awake all night guarding their shanty as the university administration had threatened to tear it down. When the police arrived, a violent confrontation ensued initiated by the police arresting people and firing tear gas cannisters at the crowd. The students responded by throwing bottles, rocks, and trash at the police. They took to the streets to prevent the police from taking those arrested off to jail. The effect of learning about this demonstration and the many others throughout the country in late March was tremendous on activists at UT. Their turn to direct action was easy following this news and the recent success of the demonstration against the racist fraternity.

A member of AXLE, Greg Milner, was busy talking to the administration about keeping the BSA shanty up after the anti-apartheid week of activities. Despite numerous attempts, the university refused, claiming that it would not be timely. Miller argued that UT kept its investments in South Africa year-round and that apartheid existed all the time. The administration refused to back down.

AXLE organized a roundtable discussion in which the various activist groups participated. The discussion centered on whether or not to commit civil disobedience to keep the shanty up. It was decided by a narrow vote to do so and subsequent meetings

were held to plan the demonstration and to construct another shanty; six people committed to remain on the West Mall with the shanty after the free speech hour (noon-1 p.m.) ended.

On Friday, April 4, seven people took the shanty onto campus and began a demonstration on the West Mall. The students made speeches, worked on the shanty, sang, chanted, and held placards. They issued two demands: that UT withdraw all its finances from companies in South Africa and that UT end restrictions on exercising free speech. The UT police stood by for hours watching and hoping that the demonstrators would go home. The administration was probably hesitant to make arrests since it was Round-up weekend when many alumni and parents were in town.

More students joined the protest; the administration decided to make arrests as the demonstration was growing larger. A total of 42 were arrested for violating the university rules. As they were being arrested they announced that they would be back the following Friday. They were taken to Belmont Hall and released once the protest ended.

In the middle of the week, the U.S. bombed Libya. Another protest was held illegally. The three leaders were arrested. Throughout the week, the campus was buzzing with the news of the demonstration. The organizers met and worked to prepare for the next action. Most of the people working on the plans were seasoned activists who had been involved in student activism in the past several years. However, none of them had ever experienced anything on the scale of the second demonstration.

On April 11, the 42 arrested the previous week marched up to the area of the West Mall in front of the Student Union carrying a banner (which denounced apartheid) and sporting gags to symbolize the denial of free speech. As people began to gather, the previous arrestees were gradually replaced by 42 more demonstrators who were thereby expressing their willingness to commit civil disobedience. There were over a thousand people participating by the time the protesters marched to the West Mall stairs. This time, there were three demands: that UT divest, for free speech on the campus, and that all charges be dropped against the 42.

When the demonstrators reached the West Mall stairs, the crowd filled up the mall. They held up the banner, spoke, and yelled for UT to get out of South Africa. Two lines of Austin police and UT police lined up to the north of the mall; the fear of a violent confrontation was pervasive. The police began to arrest the speakers and leaders. As they were arrested, more people would take their places. This continued until 182 people had been arrested.

Two students - David Blacker and Tim Reilly - organized the Anti-Apartheid Defense Fund (AADF) and a benefit for the Sunday night after the second protest. The benefit was a huge success with speakers from the BSA and Biko and music from various popular bands. The AADF raised thousands of dollars for legal defense and offense. A lawsuit was filed by members of the National Lawyers Guild against UT for denying free speech to its students.

Massive meetings were held that week with legal counsel and plans were laid for yet another Friday demonstration which proved to mobilize an even greater number of people. That Friday, students held a teach-in on the Union Patio discussing the various elements of apartheid. As they marched to the West Mall, the police did nothing but videotape and take photographs of the demonstration. The anti-apartheid protesters then moved to the Main Mall, which was not a free speech area. Again, no arrests were made.

The protest continued for about an hour and was declared a victory for the freedom of speech.

As the end of the semester neared, a funeral march around campus in the rain was held. Students began to study for finals. Another protest was held during the graduation ceremony; four people were arrested the night before for pasting anti-apartheid flyers up around the campus and for dyeing the fountains red.

As a result of the lawsuit, the publicity and the large number of arrestees, the university dropped its charges against all 227 arrestees and that summer held hearings on the issue of the free speech restrictions. The free speech time period was extended to last two and one half hours. Also during the summer, the University of California System divested as a result of the Berkeley demonstrations.

STUDENT RADICALS FORM NEWSPAPER

At UT, several students involved in the anti-apartheid movement decided to found an alternative newspaper. Throughout the summer they held meetings and made the necessary plans. The first issue of *The Spark* was published in September; the structure of the paper was collective.³¹ It focused on international politics, UT, the counter culture, the music scene and provided a forum for alternative viewpoints.

DIRECT ACTION, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE CATCH ON

Other events of the summer included picketing businesses involved in South Africa, protesting with the farmworkers from south Texas whose union was busted by UT, and another direct action incident at McDonalds in June. The McClock action resulted from working conditions at McDonalds around town. McDonalds promised that customers' orders would be ready in one minute and placed timers at the cash registers. Five direct action teams of three persons each headed to the targeted McDonalds. Leaving a driver in the car, the two others on the team ran into the restaurant declared that:

We are acting in solidarity with the fast-food workers of Austin; right now McClocks are being smashed all over town.

They ripped the cardboard clocks to shreds and left behind leaflets which read:

Tired of working by the minute? The recent McDictator's campaign forcing you to work 2 or 3 times faster without doubling or tripling your inadequate wage is an insult both to you and to the customer - who is invited to profit by your humiliation... Workers of the World, Unite !
(*Spark*, September 5, 1986, p. 7).

The following day, McDonalds decided to end its McClock promotional campaign. This was another victory for the students and the workers. The students began to believe in the effectiveness of direct action.

This belief spread to other members of the student body. When library hours were reduced in early September, about 800 students began to hold a study-in at the PCL library in protest. Liberal Arts Council President Michael Whellan was able to take control, however. The *Spark* reported:

³¹ By a collective, I mean that decisions were made democratically - there was no editor or hierarchy.

What tameness, after the lobby of the PCL library was absolutely packed with students on September 10. Between 60-70% of them wanted, in the word of one Republican electrical engineering major, 'to stay here until they drag me out.'

With that kind of broad-based support, it would have been easy to occupy the library for days, not just five minutes past closing. Instead, Whellan gave the first and only speech inside the library, and exhorted the students to leave, they marched out singing "The Eyes of Texas."

Another demonstration was held later that month. A few hundred students marched to the Capitol to protest higher education cuts. The student government types were the leaders; their indecisiveness about whether to hold the march accounted for the turnout of only about 200 people. The SA elements' ability to exert leadership over the burgeoning student movement accounts partially for the setbacks of the fall semester.

The failure of the more experienced and militant activists to initiate and lead the Fall movement must also be considered. At the time, AXLE had folded and a new organization Democracy In Academia (DIA) formed. The more disciplined activists had joined the newspaper or returned to single-issue political campaigns. In addition, some of the activists were out of touch with the students at the beginning of the semester.

ACTION AGAINST APARTHEID

Immediately following the flopped march to the Capitol in late September, several veterans of the direct action on the eve of the graduation ceremony and that of the McClock busters made an attempt to re-assert the militancy which was beginning to die as a result of the SA leadership of the two previous protest. They died the UT fountains bright red and issued a communique to the *Daily Texan* stating that the fountains had turned red as a result of the blood streaming forth from the university because of its support for apartheid.

Some anti-apartheid activists began calling for a sit-in to demand divestment. The issue had begun to die for three reasons: as a result of the state of emergency imposed in South Africa, the lack of media coverage of the uprisings there, and the very success of the single-issue movement in winning the divestment of the UC System, a Congressional bill (and many municipal ones as well) in September 1986 imposing some sanctions on South Africa, and the disinvestment of many large companies from South Africa. The activists felt that immediate action was necessary to pressure the university to divest. And on October 20, 1986 sixteen students took over the president's office demanding that UT divest from South Africa.

The occupation of the president's office was both poorly planned and reasoned. It was inherently a vanguard action, because it was planned in secrecy by people who knew and trusted each other without the support of large numbers. Involving outside people, many of them felt, would have meant risking a complete failure. The people who planned the action met several times before October 20. Most of them were members of DIA; some had been heavily involved in the spring protests. The romanticized vision which most of them had of the action prevented them from carefully planning strategy and from thinking through the possible consequences.

At any rate, no one expected the administration to overreact as it did. The sixteen entered the building at different times and from different entrances; at 7:45 a.m., they

came up the stairs and the elevators to the fourth floor. As they arrived, one member of the group announced to the secretaries in the office that the group was occupying the office to demand divestment and that if they chose to remain in the office that would signal their support for the demands. Neither the secretaries nor Vice President Ed Sharpe chose to leave. After waiting several minutes, the militants secured the doors with bicycle locks and chains and began piling desks up against the doors. Others ran out onto the balcony and hung a banner which read "Apartheid Kills, UT Divest Now." Others were busy telephoning potential negotiators and the press.

Meanwhile, one of the secretaries activated the alarm (apparently installed after the 1975 takeover) and the police arrived minutes later. They stood out in the foyer, staring through the glass doors as the demonstrators sat down in a circle to discuss their feelings. They had been inside the office for about 25 minutes when they heard the sound of breaking glass in the east wing of the suite. The police broke through glass windows in the library, injuring themselves and destroying a painting.

The students retreated into the inner-most office, securing two of the three doors. The police soon broke in through the door which was not yet secured. What ensued was violent pandemonium. The demonstrators all sat down peacefully on the floor and locked arms. The police went berserk, knocking over plants and computers. They began beating several of the students on the side of the room closest to them. Blood splattered. The students pleaded for peace; finally the chief of the operation told the others to take it easier. All sixteen were arrested and taken to the UT police station in Belmont Hall where they remained for four hours until being taken to Travis County Jail. Administrative and criminal charges were filed against the UT-16 under the 1969 anti-riot law and rule. The administration attempted to file several felony complaints against the sixteen, but County Attorney Ken Oden refused to accept the charges.

While the UT-16 were in custody, hundreds of protesters on the main mall began to dip their hands in red paint and make handprints on the Main Building to symbolize the blood on the hands of members of the university community due to UT's investments in apartheid. A roving band of demonstrators sat-in at several buildings on campus. In the early afternoon they dispersed. Through the use of videotapes, the police chose three of the protesters for arrest, because they perceived these people to be the leaders. The university filed both criminal and administrative charges against these three as well.

The unfavorable media coverage, the repression and the lies of the UT administration served to demoralize the students thoroughly. The students did not rally to their cause. The vanguard had misjudged its following in the premature, somewhat desperate action. The majority of students were not prepared for such an action and had not been in any way involved in its inception. In addition most students' commitment to fighting for UT divestment was shallow, because it did not clearly effect their self-interest. The strategic mistakes were: carrying out the action too early in the morning when the possibility of a large support protest was not feasible, the occupation of a large area with many glass windows which left them vulnerable to the police, and a failure to study the history of protest to acquaint themselves with the 1975 occupation and the ingredients of its success.

On an administrative level, the penalty was assessed to be a one-year suspension (equivalent to three semesters); on a criminal level most of the students were sentenced to jail time, ranging from three to six months. The participants who chose to plea bargain

received probation while those who pled not guilty and went through a jury trial were sentenced to jail time. The police brutality, the severity of the punishment, and the lack of support from the students was unexpected. Most students abandoned protest; several of the long-time activists became extremely demoralized.

A UT-16 member referred to the action and the divestment campaign in a *Spark* article:

The Regents have proven, over years, that they will not divest because students petition with logically and fiscally responsible arguments. Only continued student protests and the ensuing embarrassment will force a board as reactionary as the Regents to divest. The structure of the Board of Regents lies at the heart of the problem. These individuals all just happen to be white and are appointed by the governor as a political favor. They do not even pretend to represent students. (*Spark*, November 1986, p. 11).

WOMEN ORGANIZE

In the aftermath of the UT-16 Tower takeover, a radical feminist organization began - Women Inside Sexist Hell (WISH). It sprung from disillusionment with male leadership and sexism within progressive groups, and served as a discussion group where women could discuss feminism and sexism within the student movement. The group planned a small International Women's Day celebration for March 1988. Some problems developed, mainly distrust and an age and experience gap which left many of the women out in the cold. The group did serve as a place where women could challenge each other to assert more leadership within the student movement, and helped some develop a feminist analysis of society.

STUDENTS UNDERTAKE DIRECT ACTION AGAINST CONTRA LEADER

Nevertheless, in February 1987, direct action was again used. Activists called for a protest at the Hyatt Regency Hotel when Mario Calero - chief procurement officer for the Nicaraguan contras - was scheduled to speak at a YCT convention. About 100 showed up to protest Calero's presence in town. Fountains were dyed red, flyers were strewn (from the 25th floor) around the hotel. Eleven conservatively dressed demonstrators infiltrated the convention. When Calero began to speak, they loudly denounced him, unfurled a FSLN flag and attempted to conduct a citizens' arrest of Calero on the grounds that he had violated both national and international law. Calero's bodyguards quickly seized the protester with the handcuffs, the Sandinista flag, and several of the women's winter coats. The protesters were escorted out of the hotel. Although many members of the media were denied entry into the hotel throughout the action, they did not report on this act of censorship. However, the story was carried internationally.

Spark reporter Marc Salomon was kicked out of the room because the YCT had identified him from their files as a subversive. Soon the scandal broke that the YCT had taken grade reports from the UT computer system. The group was delegitimized thoroughly following this and the political changes resulting from the Iran-Contra Scandal and the ensuing distrust of government.

SOME MOVEMENT SETBACKS

As the movement seemed to be building itself up again, several attacks were made on the shanty. The shanty had been destroyed numerous times and the perpetrators had never been apprehended. Two activists requested a gun permit to guard the shanty, without submitting the idea to a group decision. The resulting negative media coverage was damaging again to the movement. A large group of activists held a meeting the next week to discuss what had happened. This was perhaps the first meeting since the office takeover at which activists began to analyze the state of the movement and the effects of certain activities on the size of the movement.

In a *Spark* article of April 1987, the following analysis was presented:

If we are trying to bring about a truly democratic, non-racist, non-sexist, egalitarian society, we must reflect such values in our interaction with each other and in our organizing work.

It is hard not to feel powerless against the weight of an international economic system whose ideology is supported, legitimized and perpetuated by a mass media and educational system that grind out complacent acceptance.

This alienation (and often boredom) can lead us to radical action for its own sake and to self-aggrandizement. (*The Spark*, April 1987, p. 16).

The article suggested that activists attempt to get more in touch with students, end their cliquish social behavior, get involved in grassroots movements in the community, build up organizations as the basis of a resurgence of the student movement, and address issues which effect the self-interest of students.

1988: PROTEST INCREASING

Campaigns against CIA recruitment on campuses followed the anti-apartheid movement in 1987 with a legal victory at U.Mass.-Amherst (the so-called Abbie Hoffman-Amy Carter Trial) and many victories in preventing CIA recruitment efforts. During the spring semester of 1988 this trend of increased student militancy has continued, as evidenced by the increasing number of sit-ins and building occupations carried out by groups of Third World students in various parts of the country and by deaf students at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Students are beginning to fight back and to win, notably at U. Mass-Amherst and Gallaudet.

Progressive students are also attempting to build a national organization. In February 1988 over 700 student delegates met to establish such an organization but failed largely due to differences between white progressives and Third World students which developed during the anti-apartheid movement on a national level.

In 1988, over 2000 students marched to commemorate Martin Luther King. Black students on the campus have continually challenged the university's failure to recruit minorities.

In March 1988, a forum on the CIA was held in the Texas Union. One of the speakers was a CIA administrator who spoke of the agency's program to recruit students and to enhance its image among intellectuals (also to contract with professors to provide research). Two students were arrested for distributing literature at the door; they had violated a university rule which had not been enforced for years. Incidentally they

opposed the CIA's presence on campus. Although the university tried to press criminal charges against one of the protesters for failure to identify himself, these charges were not accepted at the time however. At the same forum two nights later, several activists distributed literature and were not arrested.

Since then, it has become obvious that the university no longer intends to enforce its rules which deny students their constitutional rights to free speech and assembly. This point is exemplified in the failure of the school to arrest students at meetings and protests on the main mall (which is not a legal free speech area). A protest against the CIA's recruitment efforts on campus was held there in April; around 200 marched to Jester Center where the CIA was conducting interviews. They succeeded in closing down the interviews and in protecting one of the protesters from arrest.

UT police had seized Robert Ovetz for hitting a recruit with a placard and taken him into a women's bathroom. The crowd remained outside the bathroom refusing to allow the police to take Ovetz out to the paddy wagon. When the police realized that the crowd was not going to disperse, they attempted to take Ovetz out of the building. A scuffle resulted between students and police, Ovetz was freed. The militancy and solidarity exhibited by students at the anti-CIA protest led to a victory, though a small one.

Also during April, disabled students held a dramatic protest at one of the shuttle bus stops to demonstrate how inaccessible the student transportation services are for disabled people. As they publicly encountered mishaps and falls trying to board the buses, the point was graphically driven home to many.

At the end of April it seemed that the administration was trying to undermine some of the gains made by graduate students back in 1981. Despite Austin's glutted housing market, the university raised rent prices at its Married Student Housing facility. This outraged married students (most of whom are in graduate school) because of the already low wages they receive and because they know that property value and rents are decreasing everywhere else in town.

On April 25, teaching assistants, assistant instructors and research assistants were told that the state would no longer pay their insurance premiums, amounting to a 14-17% pay cut in their already low wages. They held several meetings (illegal according to the UT rules) on the main mall to discuss retaliatory action. Although they discussed going on strike and refusing to grade final exams, they decided that such an action would lead to their being fired according to Texas law. Instead they chose to pursue a lawsuit and to threaten to inflate their students' grades until they received their insurance premiums, and no cost of living adjustments in their wages to compensate for the insurance loss.

UT President Cunningham told the graduate students that he would get back to them on the problem in ten days; it was no coincidence that in ten days classes would end and the student newspaper would no longer be published. Most of the students were not duped and demanded more immediate action. At a mass meeting, the students insisted on collective decision-making; several shouted that COGS had never done anything beneficial for the graduate students. They refused to accept student government leadership and direction, because of its wimpiness and its ties to the administration. The chair of the Faculty Senate made a public announcement of the faculty's support for the graduate students. The Wednesday meeting was characterized by a lack of both

organization and unity but on Thursday, the graduate students met on a departmental level and elected representatives.

At their meeting that afternoon (April 27), administration officials were planted throughout the audience. Cunningham's vice president - Livingston - attempted to tie up the meeting by speaking for over half an hour without offering any concessions. The students voted the administration official off the podium and out of the room and then began discussing their intentions for action. They held a demonstration on Friday where they issued their demand that the administration reinstate their health insurance benefits at the same level by May 6. The administration offered a settlement on May 5 that the premium amount would be added to the TAs and AIs salaries but that they would no longer be eligible for the premium-sharing plan. As I write this, the situation has not yet been resolved and graduate students plan to continue pressing their legal concerns and organizing over the summer.