

PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE

STUDENTS--1400

Copyright PNS

NEWS ANALYSIS

CAMPUS PROTESTS: RITES OF SPRING OR REBIRTH OF STUDENT MOVEMENT?

By Bill Sievert*
Pacific News Service

*Bill Sievert, former education editor of Saturday Review, is a correspondent for the Chronicle of Higher Education.

BERKELEY, CALIF., JUNE 6--

In the wake of this spring's sudden spurt of campus protests, some student leaders are talking cautiously of a revival of the spirit of activism that swept American colleges in the sixties. But are U.S. students actually on the verge of launching another nationwide student movement, or are they merely acting out the traditional rites of spring?

As schools let out for the long hot summer, that is the question many student leaders are privately asking themselves.

The student uprisings of the 1960s had their roots in the civil rights movement that blossomed during President John Kennedy's "New Frontier." Again today, the U.S. has a new Democratic president pushing human rights. A rising chorus of students appears to be picking up the cry.

But, as today's student activists are well aware, there have been false alarms before.

In the spring of 1975, a ripple of student unrest swept

-more-

across more than two dozen campuses from New York to California. Hundreds of angry students picketed, sat-in and rallied over such economic concerns as skyrocketing tuitions and reduced budgets for ethnic studies and minority recruiting.

There were more student demonstrations that spring than in any year since 1970, when some 400 campuses were shut down or disrupted in the wake of the U.S. invasion into Cambodia.

Student leaders claimed the movement was being reborn and the protests would spread in the fall. But they didn't.

The same student rumblings were repeated in the spring of 1976. But, come fall, all was quiet again.

Street protests, mass rallies and building occupations had become exclusively a product of spring, when students--like everyone else--needed a tension release.

But the problem with spring protests is that it's difficult to maintain momentum into the fall.

"We're very concerned about keeping the momentum going," admits Ann Henkels, co-student body president at Stanford University, where 294 persons were arrested during a recent sit-in against the school's investments in South Africa.

"Our administration keeps saying it's just spring fever. They think they can sit back and we'll go away. But students don't get arrested just for fun. They're risking their futures."

The number of student arrests this spring--highest since 1970--is interpreted by some as a sign of a significant escalation in protest politics. They also note that the interests of students appear to be broadening again.

After several years of concentrating on "bread-and-butter" issues (tuition and fees) or other local concerns (supporting a fired instructor), most of the protests in recent months have

involved national and international political issues that relate to university life.

Berkeley sociologist Franz Schurmann describes the mood as "similar to the very early '60s, before the Vietnam War, when you had the Peace Corps, active politicking, and the civil rights struggle."

Aside from protests at Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania against Henry Kissinger as a "war criminal," the major issue this spring has been university investments in corporations doing business in racially separatist South Africa. Apartheid is THE issue many student leaders believe will forge a new coalition among U.S. students.

It has sparked militant protests at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Minnesota and Hampshire College in Massachusetts. But nowhere has the issue received such wide and vociferous support as in California.

Refusals by Stanford and the nine-campus University of California to drop their huge stockholdings (worth over \$600 million) in firms doing business in South Africa have sparked the creation of a statewide, 15-chapter coalition of students known as Campuses United Against Apartheid (CUAA).

At Stanford, a recent rally and sit-in sponsored by the CUAA brought out 600 students (294 of whom were arrested)--the largest student protest the University had seen in five years.

At U.C. Santa Cruz, 419 persons were arrested during a recent anti-apartheid sit-in, making it the largest mass student arrest since the "Free Speech" demonstrations of 1964 that ushered in a decade of political activism.

Student leaders in California believe that history will repeat. "The CUAA is thinking in terms of a long-term commitment,"

says Ann Henkels. "We've already adopted the position that we'll campaign against institutional racism in the U.S. as well as in South Africa. What the students really want to do is change the organization so that it also can take on such issues as the problems of Third World students, affirmative action and the Bakke case."

(The Bakke case involves a recent state Supreme Court ruling, now under appeal, that U.C.'s special admissions programs for minorities constitute reverse discrimination and are unconstitutional.)

One indication of the long-range potential of this spring's campus protests is the variety of students taking part--ranging from hardened Maoists to elected student government officials.

"There's not a strong liberal versus conservative identity, not much of a racial identity--really not much of a political affiliation involved at all," says Jim Clark of Minnesota.

Most students "don't even remember the student movement of seven years ago," he says. "They have not been politically polarized in one direction or another."

Joe Leitmann a student senator and organizer of a recent teach-in on South Africa at Berkeley, agrees that "University investments in South Africa is a very good issue because almost anyone can unite around it."

But Leitmann concedes there are tactical problems. Hard-line radicals, particularly the Student Revolutionary Brigade and some CUAA leaders, hope to link the South African issue to domestic racism and revolution. But, Leitmann says, more moderate students "don't believe a revolutionary situation exists in the U.S. We want to work on progressive changes we can actually accomplish."

Jim Clark of Minnesota agrees: "We're focusing on reachable

goals. Our regents CAN get rid of their investments in South Africa."

Clark and other student leaders believe that President Carter's public pronouncements on human rights abroad have helped inspire the current student interest in South African apartheid.

"Carter's stance has given us a foot in the door," Clark says. "If you see a lot of human rights coverage in Time magazine and on television, it gives indirect support."

Adds Leitmann of Berkeley, "Carter has raised public awareness, but it's just been talk. It's up to the students to provide real leadership."

Ironically, most of the protests against university dealings in South Africa have been overwhelmingly white. "I'm sort of embarrassed to admit it," says Leitmann, "but at first our movement was almost lily white. Now we've linked up with the campus Third World Coalition, and we're seeing more ethnic involvement."

Ann Henkels of Stanford notes that as white protesters expand their issue base to include such local minority concerns as special admissions programs, more blacks, as well as Asians and Chicanos, are joining the protests.

But there have also been a few **ominous** signs. After voting for a general strike at Berkeley, student organizers dropped the plan when they began hearing complaints that it was "too late in the year" and "too close to final exams."

Berkeley protesters also have met with indifference and even opposition from some students, particularly younger ones. During a recent candlelight march by about 150 anti-apartheid demonstrators, dozens of dormitory students hurled water balloons and epithets at the marchers from their high-rise windows.

But opposition and indifference surprise no one in an era when most students are more job-oriented than political. An annual
-more-

national survey of attitudes among freshman, published last winter by the American Council on Education, found that more than half of the freshmen consider themselves "middle of the roaders" and only 2.2 percent think of themselves as radical or "far left."

A College Press Service survey of student newspaper editors last fall found that most students "care more about secure personal futures than revolution or social or political change."

In fact, this spring's student unrest has involved only about 14 campuses and no more than a few thousand students--out of 1700 campuses in the U.S. with some 11,215,000 registered students.

Yet where protests have taken place, they have made a strong impression. At Hampshire College in Amherst, students occupied the administrative offices for three days until college officials agreed to sell off \$200,000 worth of stock in several corporations, including three that do business in South Africa.

And, at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, students won an opinion from the state Attorney General that the University's holdings in companies doing business with South Africa violate a state measure that outlaws business with any company that condones discrimination.

"It's hard to predict whether we'll be able to keep it going in the fall," admits Jim Clark of Minnesota. "It really depends on how well the motivators get organized."

In California, CUAA members hope to begin building alliances next fall with students in other states whose schools have South African investments.

"I think it will take a national consciousness for us to succeed in overturning apartheid," says Stanford's Henkels, "but the idea of a long-term commitment is growing. I really believe we're seeing the birth of a new student movement."

####