

Student protests are once again in the news, but how significant are they? Will marching feet be heading for the picket lines this fall, or just back to class?

By Marc Cooper

come to believe what everyone else said about students being apathetic. We were wrong."

His news editor, Diana Elliot, has a similar perspective. "I don't know why, but this is the first year there have been really large protests. Students I know are now more aware of politics and issues than just a year or two before," she says.

While the large campuses on the East and West Coasts, like Columbia, Harvard, Rutgers, Cornell, Berkeley and UCLA have captured much of the news coverage of the resurgent student movement, the activism has spread nationwide.

Protests, rallies and sit-ins were held this year in areas like Wyoming and Nebraska; on campuses where protest groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) could hardly organize a chapter in the late Sixties, let alone stage a demonstration.

In more conservative areas of the country, student activism, while growing in presence, is still viewed with skepticism. "Liberals are still seen by many as far-out, weird, bearded oafs," says Ellen Williams of the University of Texas *Daily Texan*.

Nevertheless, rallies at the Austin campus organized by the Black Student Alliance attracted over 500 people last spring. In March, 2,000 University of Texas students paraded to the state capitol to protest increased tuition fees.

The Austin campus was not the only Southern school to experience protests. The Universities of Florida, Missouri, Louisville, North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke were among

the other campuses that got involved this year in anti-apartheid demonstrations.

Karey Murakami, who has reported on student protests for *The Michigan Daily* at Ann Arbor, speculates that students have been moved to action over a long list of grievances.

"Most students got pretty tired of hearing how conservative they had become. This created a backlash," said Murakami, adding, "World events have been quite a catalyst to action. The police violence in South Africa, the CIA mining the Nicaraguan harbors . . . these things didn't go unnoticed by students."

At UCLA, where hundreds of students camped out on campus for weeks in a makeshift 'Mandela City' (named for South African political prisoner Nelson Mandela), Sociology Professor Maurice Zeitlin suggests that today's protests are taking place because the South Africa issue was tailor-made for sparking the new rebellion. "This issue invites an absolute moral choice, and that's crucial in our culture," he explains. "You need an issue that involves stu-



Protesting Berkeley students' administration building sleep-in.

dent self-interest, but not only that. You also need moral outrage."

"The large, highly visible movement you see now is not a rebirth," said Josh Nessen, a leader of the Columbia protest and now a staffer at the American Committee on Africa (ACOA). "It was always there, at least in root form."

Williams at the *Daily Texan* claims

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◀ **Apartheid was the major issue in campus protests.**

University of Colorado students ▶ protest CIA presence on campus.

that the November Presidential election got students thinking about political issues. "The University Republicans were able to sign up about 800 people, and the Young Democrats pulled together just as many."

The big question now facing student activists is whether or not they will be able to sustain their movement. One presumably necessary ingredient for success is the ability to win victories.

On this score the activists can claim some progress. They take credit for helping to pressure Congress to moderate White House policy on Central America, and making the arms race and nuclear policy subjects of acceptable living room discussion in Middle America.

A more tangible result is the growing list of universities and municipal and state governments that are withdrawing investment funds from South Africa.

Yet doubt remains regarding the future of the movement. McFetridge, for one, isn't making any bets. "By the end of the Spring semester things fell off (Continued on page 13) ▶