

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVII, Number 46, 6 April 1993 — Barbecue mocks student hunger strike
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Barbecue mocks student hunger strike

By J.J. Lee

Spectator Staff Writer

Counter-protesting the mock-encampment built by the Coalition to Free the Haitian Refugees on Furnald Lawn, the College Republicans sponsored a barbecue yesterday, an action which sparked angry responses from coalition members and administrators.

Coalition members built the encampment on Mar. 31 to symbolize the United States military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the U.S. government is detaining more than 250 Haitian refugees because they may be infected with the HIV virus.

Over 90 coalition members have been participating in a week-long hunger strike to express solidarity with the Haitian refugees, who have been taking similar action since Jan. 29.

The barbecue was held on the north side of the lawn, opposite the area where approximately 50 members of the coalition and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) had built the encampment. The coalition and ISO members then began demonstrating against the actions

of the approximately 40 College Republicans.

The barbecue was specifically planned to coincide with the coalition's hunger strike, according to Ben Sacks, CC '93, the chair of the College Republicans.

"We liked the idea of the smoke and the smell of the food. What could be more American than a barbecue?" Sacks said.

"A barbecue is a good-natured thing, while a hunger strike is a dry, ascetic, feel-bad sort of thing," he added.

Members of the College Republicans said the purpose of the protest was to demonstrate their support for President Bill Clinton's immigration policy.

"We are definitely in support of Clinton's policy. We all believe in free immigration, except for those who have communicable diseases," said Gordon Haave, CC '95, a member of the College Republicans.

The barbecue began at noon and lasted for an hour and a half.

Because the College Republicans had not obtained a permit before starting the barbecue, they were ordered to disperse by Director of Security Dominick Moro, Assistant Director of Security Operations John Madigan, and Director of Student Affairs and Acting Presidential Delegate Lynne Bejoian.

"This space isn't theirs, and they're not entitled to it," Moro explained.

Security officials, who were present from the start of the barbecue, took down students' names and repeatedly told the College Republicans to vacate the lawn, according to Sacks.

Sacks said one administrator informed him that if the College Republicans refused to leave, the police would be called in to arrest them.

As the College Republicans were ordered off the field, coalition members watching the scene responded with cheers, as well as and chants of "Racists off campus now" and "Racist Republicans pick up the trash."

"They have the arrogance to come in here and violate our permit. They lied to us about having a permit. When our rights are violated like this, this is how you get [situations like the Los Angeles riots]," coalition member Marie Louis, CC '94, said angrily.

Bejoian said administrators disrupted the barbecue not because of political reasons, but because the Republicans did not have a permit.

"[The coalition] had authorization to use this space. [The College Republicans] just came on; they had no authorization. It is an issue of one student organization having space, and another group not going through the proper procedures," Bejoian said.

Although security officials told organizers of the barbecue that they were in violation of the Rules of University Conduct, they did not specify which rules, Sacks said.

He added that he thought the use of live coals on campus grounds seemed to be one of the main concerns of the security officials.

A member of the College Republicans had applied for a permit on Mar. 31, but because the permit could not be issued before three to five business days had passed, members decided to stage their protest

without permission, in order to demonstrate before the coalition and ISO ended their own protest, Sacks said.

Following dispersement of the barbecue, Sacks and former chair of the College Republicans Glen Morgan, CC '93, admitted to Associate Provost Stephen Rittenberg, the rules administrator, and Dean of Columbia College Jack Greenberg that they had violated the Rules of University Conduct.

"We took full responsibility for having a barbecue in violation of the rules," Sacks said, adding that he and Morgan did not want innocent students to be called in for possible disciplinary action.

Greenberg said in a telephone interview yesterday that he was not yet certain if charges would be filed.

Many coalition members said they were offended by the Republicans' actions.

"They're trying to make a mockery of people fighting against racism," said Todd Chretien, GS '94, who is a member of the ISO.

Camelle Elie, CC '95, a member of the Haitian Students Association (HSA), expressed anger that the illegal barbecue was not stopped sooner.

"I'm filing a complaint with [Ferris Booth Hall], security, everyone. The fact that it took security so long is atrocious," Elie said.

HSA member Jeannie Samedi, CC '96, said because the College Republicans were not well-informed about the Haitian refugees, they were unjustified in protesting.

"A lot of them came in here and

said, 'We're protesting your right to protest.' This was a silent demonstration and everything was fine until they did this. You have every right to disagree if you have the right data, but they don't even know the facts," Samedi said.

While no violence occurred during the barbecue, some minor scuffles between ISO members and College Republicans arose.

Brian Penn, CC '93, a College Republican, said the counter-demonstrators had used intimidating tactics in trying to bring an end to the barbecue, and attempted to rush the students enjoying the barbecue.

After the barbecue was broken up, several students remained on the field to discuss relations between campus student groups with Associate Provost for Campus Life Gerald Lowrey, who was present during the protest.

Udit Kondal, CC '95, who is the student coordinator for the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Ethnic and Religious Relations Program, proposed that two microphones be set up on Low Plaza so that representatives from both sides could debate issues.

"It'll air both views to the rest of the campus. A lot of people may think that people are just starving themselves for no reason, or having a barbecue without anything to say, and neither side is effectively communicating their message," Kondal said.

Lowrey said he is optimistic that students with different opinions will come to a peaceful resolution.



SPECTATOR/MELISSA CHEUNG

Director of Security Dominick Moro (wearing hat) instructs Chair of the College Republicans Ben Sacks, CC '93, to extinguish the barbecue his group sponsored yesterday on Furnald Lawn.