

ARTS and FEATURES

People of Color Caucus to address minority concerns in SEAC

By VICKI HYMAN
Features Editor

In response to the need of minorities to have the basic human right to an unpolluted environment, the People of Color Caucus was established as a subcommittee of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC).

The caucus originated in October at the second annual national SEAC conference, called Catalyst, when SEAC members who were concerned with the lack of minority representation and emphasis on minority issues in the movement met to discuss these problems.

"We claim that there are not more minority groups in the environmental movement because they (SEAC) don't address a lot of the minority issues directly," said caucus initiator Kirti Shastri, a freshman from Asheville.

There is an agenda made for what SEAC considers important, Shastri said. "However, when they make this agenda, they don't ask the people of color," she said.

"People of color have so many other things going on that they have to deal with: the direct racism, the poverty, worrying about where they're going to sleep or the roof over their heads,"



Shastri said. "They have to deal with a lot of issues that come off as so separate from the rest of the movement, but they need to be addressed," she said.

"When we started the People of Color Caucus, we forced them (SEAC) to define their environment as also what directly affects the people," Shastri said.

Environmentalism cannot stand alone, said caucus member Caroline Philson, a sophomore anthropology and geography major from Charlotte. "Environmentalism has to take into account that people's environment is not always the rainforest," she said.

"SEAC's main issue is the environment, but different people have differ-

ent environments and SEAC has been neglecting people of color and people of a lower socioeconomic status, and SEAC will no longer, as an institution, do that," said Philson.

One environmental issue that particularly affects minorities is hazardous waste dumping, Shastri said. A majority of all toxic sites in the U.S are in or near poor neighborhoods, she said.

"Many of these poor neighborhoods are people of color neighborhoods," Shastri said. "It's not a coincidence in this country that they are the poorest people."

White upper-class neighborhoods have the money and political voice to keep toxic sites out of their neighborhoods, Shastri said. "But for these people (of color) who often lack funding, lack education, lack the time needed to lobby politically, there's little they can do when the government says 'Okay, we're going to put the toxic sites here.'"

The caucus did not say this is the fault of the environmental movement, "but we're saying that to get the minority people involved in the movement, you've got to make it relative to them," Shastri said.

"Minorities have to be able to be on the decision-making bodies that decide

this is what's important in our world today so that a lot of their issues are dealt with," she said.

The initiators of the caucus were met with opposition concerning the rule that the caucus was only open to people of color, who are defined as "not white," Shastri said.

This rule has more to do with historical repression than skin color, Shastri said. "We think it's very important that people of color, since they are directly affected with the prejudices and the racism and see it directly in their community, are the ones who make the decisions as to what the agenda should be," Shastri said.

The caucus feels that whites can sympathize and help, Shastri said. However, "It's just that when it comes to the voting on these issues, it is important these people who have historically been repressed be able to make a decision standing on their own for the first time," she said.

The initiators of the caucus set up two groups, the People of Color Caucus, which is the decision-making body, and the People of Color Caucus and Allies, which was set up to include white members of SEAC who wish to participate and help the caucus.

"We do realize that there is a lot of input the white community can give us and a lot of people who are willing to work towards the same goals," Shastri said.

The only difference between the Allies and the actual People of Color Caucus is that the Allies don't have the same voting privileges, Shastri said. The Allies will have the privilege of being heard, but they won't be allowed to vote on the agenda, she said.

By its very nature, the People of Color Caucus cannot have the white vote and still accurately be represented, Philson said. "The whole basis for forming the caucus was the fact that minority-related environmental issues were not being addressed," she said.

However, some members of SEAC who would like to work for a larger minority voice feel excluded by the separation between the groups.

"I feel like this is so the bleeding heart liberal can feel like they're doing something rather than just watching people of color going and taking care of themselves," said SEAC member Ruby Ji Sinreich, a sophomore environmental protection major from Nags Head.

The caucus is not allowing whites to try to relate to their problems, Sinreich

said. "By excluding them, you're just cutting them off more from the experience they could be getting and learning from the people of color," Sinreich said.

White people who are not well-educated and poor and have no political voice are just as often affected by the lack of environmental standards, Sinreich said.

"But they can't be in the People of Color Caucus even though they are discriminated against in that very same way," she said. "So you're cutting them out even though they have just as much concern in that area."

The caucus presented a statement to Catalyst that said the all-white hierarchy in SEAC seemed to exemplify an unintentional institutional racism, Shastri said.

"The words were very harsh, but they were meant to activate a group out of complacency. We say that Catalyst was a great start, but it's not enough," she said.

"It caused some anger, but the anger was what was needed to cause a little bit of friction to start the movement going, to get people excited and to get them thinking, if nothing else."

Court has great influence on civil rights

By SCOTT MAXWELL
Staff Writer

Law professor Daniel Pollitt and political science professor Richard Richardson spoke to a group of eight yesterday afternoon about the effects of the U.S. Supreme Court on civil rights.

Undaunted by the small turnout, consisting of two reporters, five students, and one Chapel Hill citizen, Pollitt began to speak about the United States Supreme Court.

Pollitt began by summarizing the history of the Supreme Court and the nominations for justices in past years.

He then addressed the kind of justices that presidents choose. "They appoint people who they think will carry out their theories of governing," he said.

Since these appointees remain in their positions for such a long period of time, the presidents who appoint the most justices will have a great influence for many years to come, Pollitt said.

"Where we are today is that we have a court that is dominated by people appointed by Nixon and Reagan," he



He went on to explain why he thought that recent appointee David Souter was a poor choice by giving examples of Souter's past decisions.

Souter defended a decision to lower flags to half-mast on Good Friday. This was not meant to honor Jesus as a Christian, because that would be against separation of church and state, but the gesture would "celebrate that this was a good man."

Souter took this argument all the way to the Supreme Court. It was overruled, Pollitt said, but not without wasting the nation's money.

Richardson prefaced his talk by

stressing the importance of citizens carefully choosing their president.

"The appointing power of presidents is enormous in regard to what they can do because of the justices' long term impact," Richardson said.

"I've often contended," he added, "that federal judges live longer than anyone else."

Both Richardson and Pollitt agreed that there would be some major changes in many of the controversial issues in the nation soon, such as abortion.

Pollitt said first there would be minor steps, such as requiring parental permission for minors to have an abortion. America will go from there, he said.

Richardson concluded by speculating on the future of civil rights in America.

"It's not occurred yet — I think it's happening now across the country — and I think Mr. Bush will bring about the conservative civil rights revolution that has been promised now since Nixon's administration."

SEAC

State officials' vision of the future is "simple-minded" and hazardous waste sites may be a consequence of having a major highway within 10 miles of 95 percent of the state's residents, she said.

Problems plague the state because of a lack of funding, while the state highway system has a \$9.1 billion budget, Abbott said.

"Let's paint a picture of this state: 49th in SATs, lowest in infant survival, libraries without books, classes without teachers, we have the 10th-worst air quality in the nation and we have

Mandela

The Panamerican/Panfrican Association's involvement in Mandela's appearance at UNC came from a desire to enhance her trip with fundraising efforts, Pritchard said. "We had no role whatsoever in bringing her to UNC."

Evelyn Toliver, co-chairwoman of Human Rights Week, said she received a call from Mpofo Wednesday morning confirming the cancellation.

Campus Y officials would not comment on financial losses the cancella-

tion caused, although Human Rights Week did lose money. Hatcher-Wilson said it was too early to assess the damage.

Donald Boulton, vice chancellor of student affairs, said losses from the cancellation have been minimized as much as possible. If the news of the appearance's cancellation had come later, losses would have been much greater, he said. "Whenever the Y puts on a program like this, the University rallies around and pitches in."

Student organizations will be influential in reaching legislators about the state's environmental concerns, Abbott said.

After the speeches, the group marched

around the Highway Building carrying banners and posters, blowing kazoos and chanting "Defund the DOT/Stop oil dependency."

Alex Guettel, SEAC co-chairman, said he was pleased with the participation and media coverage of the march because it helped spread SEAC's message.

"There was a lot of state press around — that was good. The point is that the people of North Carolina know what's going on, that the Highway Trust Fund is out there wasting all the money we spend on our gas taxes," he said.

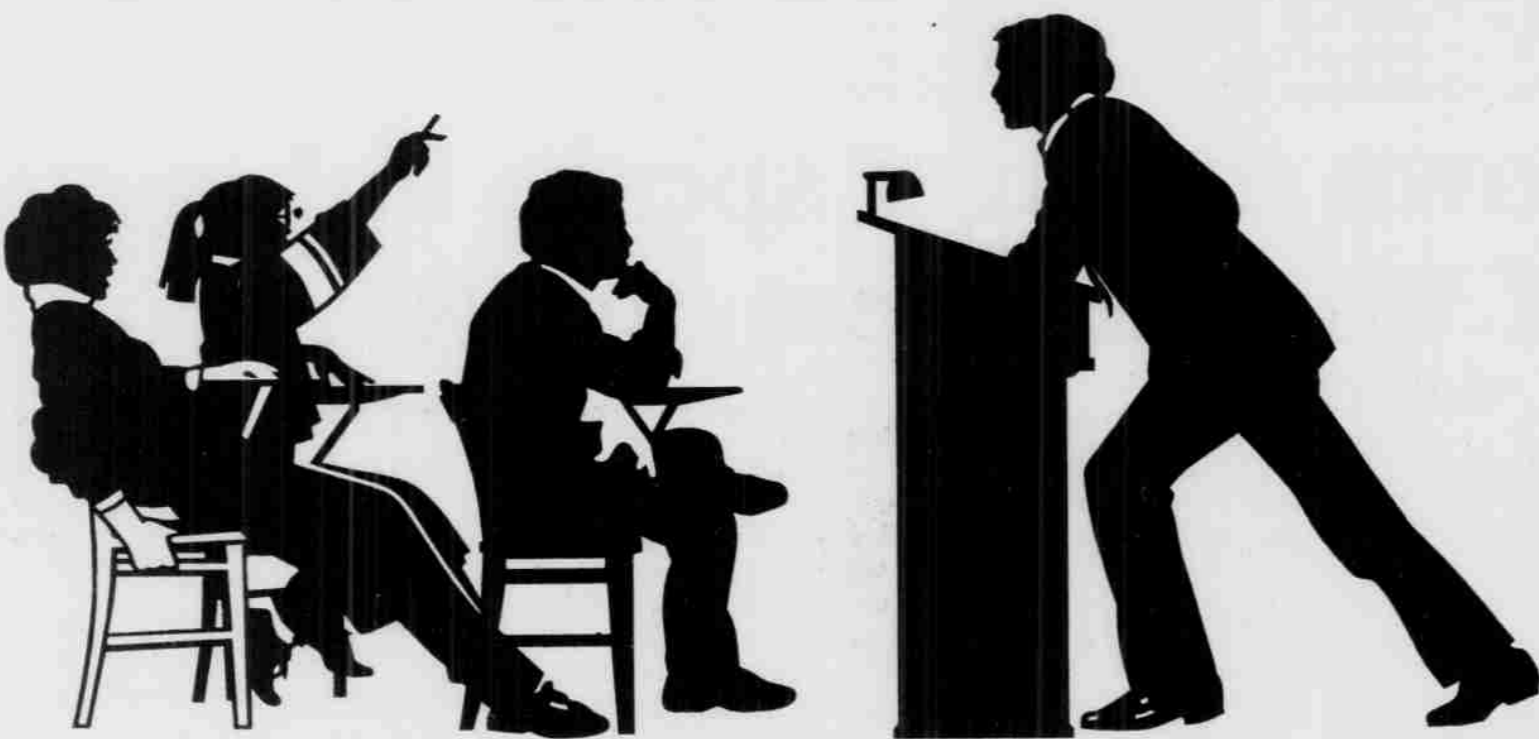
"Also, the legislators know that the people are concerned about these issues," Guettel said. "It helps to set the foundation for what we (SEAC) will be doing over the next few months — lobbying to the legislature to get them to change the Highway Trust Fund."

"We're going to keep coming back to Raleigh," he said. "Most of the people who support us in Chapel Hill are already on our side. We're going to try to use students from all over the state to try to use pressure, on a more broader base than Chapel Hill."

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