

Radicals vocal in renewing activism

UNC-CH events at the epicenter

By **JESSE JAMES DECONTO**
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH - Activists from the Mayview Collective couldn't protest anti-immigration speaker Tom Tancredo at UNC-Chapel Hill two weeks ago. They were busy protesting Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers at N.C. State.

They were dogging Rogers again April 20 in Charlotte when fellow activists from Chapel Hill and Carrboro invited them to protest another former congressman's coming to UNC-CH to speak against illegal immigration.

These are among the Triangle's radical left, idealists for whom liberal is not enough.

They held a funeral for capitalism on Franklin Street. They've protested coal-fired plants near Asheville, military recruiting in Chapel Hill, environmental racism in southwestern Wake County and "land grabs" on the coast.

"All struggles against oppression are really linked," said Haley Koch, 22, a UNC-CH senior who was arrested after the Tancredo event and has butted horns with

SEE LEFT, PAGE 4B

e&State

LEFT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

developers over gentrification. "If there are things that bind us, it's our sense of need to create social change."

Three Mayview activists and three from Orange County were arrested eight days after Tancredo's visit on charges of disorderly conduct, accused of "loud and boisterous talking and yelling" during a talk by former Virginia congressman Virgil Goode.

Chancellor Holden Thorp, the ACLU and civil-rights activists past and present have condemned the protesters for violating free speech. The protesters say Tancredo, Goode and their sponsor, Youth for Western Civilization, stand for racism and white supremacy.

"The students in opposition are being branded as threats to freedom of speech," said Attila Nemezc, 28, an organizer with Mayview's umbrella organization Action for Community in Raleigh. "This is a liberal smokescreen for tolerating and perpetuating the oppression of immigrants."

Fighting 'The Man'

Today's polite liberals would appear to share common ground with the activists. But they don't go far enough. For the more radical activists, examples of "The Man" include:

■ Thorp, a guitar-playing university chancellor who frequents a Carrboro food co-op but apologized for the protesters' actions.

■ Greenbridge Development, a team of environmental builders the activists see as intruding into a historically black neighborhood.

■ Rogers, an energy executive who promotes clean power but is building new coal-burning plants until his company can afford green technologies.

"When you see that disconnect, your two options are to ei-

ther fight against it or to accept it," said Ben Pearlstine, 22, who lives at Mayview, a six-member commune attached to the ACRE headquarters near Cameron Village in Raleigh. "Acceptance ... just isn't something that I'm OK with doing."

Pearlstine has no criminal record in North Carolina, but three of his housemates were arrested for shouting at Goode. Pearlstine said the trio refused to talk to the media because they fear reprisals by white nationalist groups.

Andrea Bazán of Durham, who leads the National Council of La Raza, can attest that fear is valid.

Someone broke into her home on the night after the Tancredo protest and left a note implying her organization was to blame. She opposes Tancredo's anti-immigrant rhetoric but said the protesters went too far.

"The way to address it is not by ... shutting down a speaker," Bazán said.

Civil-rights activist Dan Pollitt, Kenan professor emeritus at UNC's law school, said Carolina students have a long history of protest movements, but even Malcolm X and David Duke, two men at opposite poles of the bitter battle for desegregation, were allowed to speak on campus. "There'd be tough questions and boos and hollering, but they always listened," said Pollitt. "It was hostile, but no one suggested [they] leave the stage or anything."

'A scare campaign'

Students were much more subdued at Goode's speech, and the university administration was quick to point out that none of those arrested that night were UNC-CH students. Some of the activists attribute that to Thorp's threat of criminal charges and honor-court hearings for the Tancredo protesters.

"They're running a scare campaign on campus," said Chapel Hill resident Mike Bandes, 25,

one of those arrested. Bandes, a warehouse worker who volunteers caring for animals on weekends, doesn't consider himself an activist, but he's concerned about Youth for Western Civilization, which opposes "radical multiculturalism," affirmative action and mass immigration.

The newly formed Carolina Protesters Defense Committee has called for an independent investigation of the campus police response to the protests, but Thorp has said an internal investigation by the Department of Public Safety will suffice.

Anti-condominium

Koch declined to comment on her own criminal charge, but fellow senior Ben Carroll said he thinks police targeted the communications studies major because she is standing up against the "monied interests" of Greenbridge, a planned 10-story condominium project in downtown Chapel Hill.

Koch and another woman held a banner across the front of a classroom while Riley Matheson, president of Youth for Western Civilization introduced Tancredo.

"No individuals were targeted for arrest," said Campus police spokesman Randy Young. "The arrest made was solely based upon the disorderly conduct."

The Mayview activists say they are not just about protest.

They are involved in community service through ACRE, which feeds the homeless in Moore Square Park through Food Not Bombs, provides free bicycles through the 1304 Bikes program, and teaches self-reliance through community gardening.

"This movement isn't just about conflict," said Mayview's Pearlstine. "It's about trying to build something better ... trying to build strong communities."

jesse.deconto@newsobserver.com
or 919-932-8760