



Katrina Scott, outgoing president of the Committee for Justice in South Africa, speaks at a divestment rally in October outside Old Main.

Katrina Scott: Committee for Justice in S. Africa president sets PSU's gears in motion against racism

By NANCY FUNK
Collegian Staff Writer

Katrina Scott clearly remembers the first Committee for Justice in South Africa meeting of the semester last fall — only three people showed up.

Today, however, the group's numbers are 20 times that of the first meeting, and as Scott leaves the position of Committee president and hands over the reins to another active member, she looks back on the past year.

Fall Semester began with little encouragement. When all of the core members of the Committee graduated during the spring of 1985, Scott was left to rebuild the group herself.

"I remember the first time I saw Katrina," says Black Student Coalition Against Racism member Marlon Kirtan. "It was during a divestment rally in the spring of 1985, she wanted to speak to the crowd and we were afraid to let her because once a real nut spoke and it was a disaster."

"She kept bugging us and I didn't want to let her speak, but finally she ran up and practically grabbed the mike. The audience loved her and she has been kind of a hero ever since," he says.

Undergraduate Student Government President Matt Baker also remembers that day, saying "People had tears in their eyes after she spoke."

Scott grew up in Jamaica, where she says "even the most uneducated people knew about apartheid." She felt strongly about the oppression of Blacks in South Africa because her mother is white, while her father is black.

"In South Africa, we wouldn't have been allowed to live together. They would have separated us into three different living areas," she says.

In Jamaica, Scott learned about the heritage of Blacks. Because Jamaica is 99 percent black, schools are much more concerned about teaching black history than they are in the United States, Scott says.

Scott's father, a 73-year-old retired civil engineer, was active in the anti-apartheid movement in Jamaica, and still lives there with Scott's mother.

As a freshman at Penn State, Scott began her studies in architectural engineering, following in the footsteps of her father. Now, Scott has decided against engineering and has opted for general arts and sciences.

With plans to enter graduate school in the fall, Scott hopes to study the geography of Africa.

"I just wasn't into building big buildings anymore," she says.

Scott is also a resident assistant at the Martin Luther King Interest House in Atherton Hall, which attempts to bring different cultures together.

As national media turned to apartheid last year, showing vivid, colorful examples of Blacks beaten by police and oppressed by the South African government, Scott decided to take action within her own world, the world of Penn State.

And when Scott learned of the University's \$7.6 million in South African-related companies, she grew angry at what she viewed as hypocrisy on the part of the University.

Baker says he and other pro-divestment leaders were "so impressed" with Scott, they nominated her for Committee president.

"She was a hard worker and dove into her responsibilities as president. She was critically intelligent and could get to the heart of the issues," he says.

So began the rebuilding of the Committee. Scott advertised the Committee in the Free University class schedules and distributed leaflets, but at first, received little support. Slowly though, people came out of the woodwork and offered their support to the cause.

"The three people who were there from the beginning were former Black Caucus President Larry Patrick, Matt Baker and former Black Student Union President Marlon Kirtan," she says.

Kirtan says at first he was disenchanted with the Committee because of low Black membership.

"My main involvement was in trying to get more Blacks involved," he says.

Scott believes the University, with its stocks in companies doing business in South Africa, is directly supporting the system of apartheid. By absolving these ties to South Africa, the University, along with several other American universities, would make a statement to the South African government that the United States would not take part in supporting and contributing to racism.

During the fall semester, Scott and other black leaders knew the University Board of Trustees would decide whether or not to divest that January, and knew it was crucial that board members and students be reached about the issue before that time.

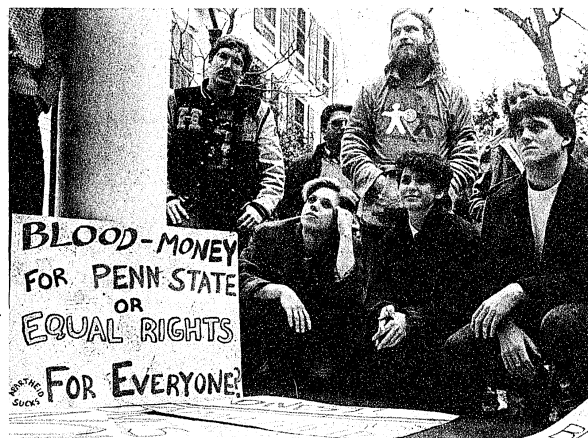
But Scott says she had little hope that the University would divest.

"We had written letters to the trustees and had received several responses. We knew the issue was being handled by the finance committee and that the people in support of us weren't on that committee," she says.

On a warm fall afternoon, Scott and other student leaders spoke to a crowd of about 250 students about apartheid while urging them to get involved in future protests.

As the group grew, more protests were planned. And the University experienced a 1960s-like whirlwind of protests, with Scott and other vocal student leaders stirring crowds of students in front of Old Main.

"Katrina came up with most of the ideas for the different rallies and vigils and inspired people to get involved. I did a lot of the legwork. We all worked as a team," Baker says.



Collegian photo / Gregg Zeltin

And after the first protest, the Committee's numbers grew dramatically. Students from all majors and backgrounds came to the meetings and offered support for future action.

Operation South Africa Day was a protest Scott is especially proud of. The day was set up to mirror some of the living conditions Blacks in South Africa live under, like segregated sidewalks, benches and other public facilities.

"Putting the students in the shoes of South African Blacks was the most effective thing about the day," she reflects.

Committee members spent hours making dozens of signs that later would divide the University Mall by race. The signs read "Whites only" and "Non-Whites only" and were held by committee members who asked students to walk and sit at those places designated for their race.

Many students cooperated and the committee members took the opportunity to gather pro-divestment signatures on petitions.

"We put about 70 to 100 people to work for the cause that day and educationally, it was a huge success," Scott says. Weekly protests continued, and as the weather got colder, the numbers of protesters also dropped off. A core group of students braved the cold, however, and stood solidly in front of Old Main, chanting "Divest Now."

"At times I used those Wednesday protests just to think — about what we were doing and the people who were dying in South Africa," Scott says.

And when the trustees meeting came in January, so did the decision not to divest.

Scott and others active in the movement were disappointed with the decision, and began immediately planning strategies to pressure the University to change its decision.

"At some point, although we all believed school was the reason we were all here, many of us regarded school as

secondary and the committee divestment first," Scott adds.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Scott met with Kirtan, Carlton Waterhouse, now BSCAR chairman, and Patrick. It was decided that day that the students would band together, forming a coalition which would include all of the black organizations on campus. Thus the Black Student Coalition Against Racism was born.

BSCAR would work side by side with Committee over the course of the semester. The two organizations erected the shantytown together, and now that her term as Committee president is up, Scott says she wants to work with BSCAR more.

"I am concerned about black students. Many of them are so oblivious to what is going on," she says.

Baker says while the Committee was predominantly white, Scott "always made sure we knew what it was like to be Black at the University."

Looking back at the year, Scott says giving up her presidency will be difficult.

Just last week, Scott won the Malcolm X — Fannie Lou Hamer award for black student leadership. While Scott says she is happy to have won the award, her fellow black leaders recognize that it was her "dynamic motivation of others that makes her such an outstanding leader to blacks," Baker says.

"She is one of my all-time idols," Baker adds. Now, although she wants to stay active in the movement, Scott will have more time to enjoy the company of friends and to read.

"I like to do quiet things," she says.

"But for me, what we are doing is so important," Scott says. "It goes way beyond divestment. I now know that there are about 100 people (Committee members) who have learned about racism, about human rights, and have learned to respect one another."

Last semester, Scott helped organize numerous rallies and demonstrations against apartheid. At a demonstration outside the Hittany Lion Inn during January's Board of Trustees meeting (left), Scott spoke to a crowd rallying outside the inn as University trustees voted not to divest \$7.6 million in South African holdings. Scott is also a resident assistant in the Martin Luther King Jr. Interest House which attempts to bring many different cultures together (below). Other house members, shown gathering in one of the interest house rooms in Atherton Hall, include (left to right) Esther Goltan (sophomore-agronomy), Anne Marie Eckert (junior-journalism), Rohini Kanniganti (junior-chemistry), Nyesha Talleferro (freshman-education), Eric T. Konz (senior-music) and John Mackey Jr. (junior-general arts and sciences).



Collegian photo / Joe Makhsossian