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Cartoons stir protest at SDSU

Students cry racism, take copies off racks

By Eleanor Yang

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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Several thousand copies of *The Daily Aztec* were seized yesterday by two dozen Muslim and Asian students at San Diego State University in a protest over political cartoons in the student-run newspaper.

The protesters piled the newspapers in front of the student center in an area known as the Free Speech Steps, and taped some on the ground spelling out the word "racist."

At issue were two political cartoons that ran in *The Daily Aztec*. One, published [Sept. 25](#), depicted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as camels with President Bush in the middle, thinking, "Definitely time for a regime change."

Another cartoon ran [Oct. 22](#) and showed an overweight man labeled China speaking in broken English in reaction to the North Korea Nuclear Program.

The two cartoons generated several letters and demands for apologies.

"It makes my blood boil to hear someone label Middle Easterners camels," said Omar Behnawa, president of the Muslim Students Association and one of the organizers of yesterday's protest.

During the noontime protest, University Police estimated an additional 50 students joined the organizers in chanting: "What do we want? . . . An apology! . . . When do we want it? . . . Now!"

Although some witnesses said they saw copies of *The Aztec* being torn up, and access to the newspapers blocked, University Police were

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unable to confirm that. No students were cited, and afterward, the group helped replace some newspapers to the racks, said University Police Sgt. Claudia McDaniel.

Free-press advocates yesterday called the actions outrageous.

"This is an inconceivable and scandalous assault on freedom of speech," said Thor Halvorssen, executive director of the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. "The answer to speech you do not like is more speech."

Behnawa said he and other students complained about the cartoons to the newspaper staff and the associated student government to no avail.

University administration officials did not defend the cartoons, but spokesman Jason Foster said, "We don't always agree with the opinions in *The Daily Aztec*, but as an independent paper, they have their right to publish what they feel fit to publish."

"The goal of this protest was to get the newspaper to think twice before attacking different ethnicities," Behnawa said.

However, *Aztec* Editor Jessica Zisko said the newspaper staff has no intention of apologizing for the cartoons.

"Editorial cartoons will sometimes anger people, and I understand that passions can get inflamed by images," Zisko said. "The theft and vandalism of newspapers is not the solution. It's an ultimate form of censorship."

The cartoonist, senior Dan Carino, said he was surprised by yesterday's protest because [he wrote a column last week](#) in which he tried to explain his work.

"The camels," he wrote, "were used because they were accurate in depicting both leaders' caricature . . . it was never my intent to 'dehumanize' the people of the Middle East or reduce them to animals."

Zisko said the independently run newspaper will now have to deal with advertisers upset over yesterday's limited distribution. The newspaper is printed four times a week and has a daily circulation of 15,000.

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