

LESSONS OF THE STANFORD SIT-IN

Please return to  
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Generally when we in the chapters report on campus successes we chronicle events, dwelling on romantic episodes. In this analysis, however, I try to explore the strategic lessons we learned during our sit-in this Spring at Stanford.

To refresh the memories of those who have read the inaccurate NLN description of our May 6-8 demonstration, the sit-in was a qualified success. We won the lifting of suspensions (for an earlier CIA demonstration) and complete amnesty for the current sit-in. We fell short on our coalition's demands for student judicial and legislative power. More important, however, we found a large, new constituency of liberals who want to be radicals, if only we'll show them how.

A Sunday-night planning meeting, attended by over 200, preceded our previously publicized Monday-noon deadline. Characteristically, it reflected a broad base of coalition nature between radicals and student-power-liberals. A "tactical committee" was elected to plan the occupation of a university building, and to coordinate efforts to build support. This committee, although it included some very radical people, felt responsible to maintain a moderate, non-militant image. The "tactical committee" did an excellent job of mobilizing support (over 1000 attended our noon rally at the deadline), but it did not prepare adequately for occupation of the building they selected, the Old Union. The committee merely arranged to have a few people inside the building when it closed for lunch. Imagine their chagrin when the building was cleared,

locked, chained, and guarded by campus police at 11 am. When, following the noon rally, the students marched over to the Old Union, they found it inaccessible. While some of the name leadership felt we could call this a victory (the building was closed) and come back Tuesday, it appeared that the protest might fade away, for lack of focus or direction.

Fortunately, concurrent to the late Sunday night meeting of the official Tactical Committee, a group of "ultramilitants," experienced as monitors in Oakland, held a brief meeting to assure entry into the building. Some of this group had already "cased," the building, expecting that it would be the target. Without/<sup>my</sup>divulging the exact nature of how and when this group entered the building, the net result was that three reached the front door (at about 1 pm) and cut the chains easily with a bolt-cutter.

Such an attack was opposed, even feared, by leading members of the tactical committee (although the "ultramilitants" received cooperation from some), for it could have turned off much of our potential liberal support. It was done, however, with guerilla finesse. It is probable that this well-prepared, independent group saved the demonstration.

One of our first acts in entering the Old Union was to chain it open (with our own, thicker chains). We felt that the policy of KKK keeping the building open was a key to our success. Before I explain the specific advantages, I shall attempt to enumerate some factors particular to Stanford, which

permitted such a policy.

First, due to our threatening rhetoric (and Columbia), the administration had removed files from the building, making it very difficult for secretaries or officials to do work. Secondly, we were always confident that the police would NOT be called. Not only would that have been politically inexpedient for the administration, but it was logistically difficult (suburban Palo Alto has no tactical squad). And thirdly, the Stanford campus police, typical chaperones for ruling class youth, well-trained only at tire-chalking, hardly presented any danger (one was pushed on his ass during an early encounter).

The "Open Union" policy help creat good publicity. We publically invited secretaries to work, <sup>both</sup> on and off campus. The implicit threat of escalation kept the University from risking full use of the building. Some secretaries, kept from work by the administration, joined the sit-in. In addition, we engaged in polite conversation with the harmless campus cops (one was a black Viet-vet, another a former member of a militant railroad union). We also kept the building clean. (We were able to prevent, with difficulty, what could have been a false consciousness that we were moderate for principle, not pragmatism.) Brothers from outside ridiculed the apparent lack of militancy, but it was clear to the demonstrators that such a stype of confrontation, in this situation, was a strategy for victory. It was largely because of our principle of "minimum force necessary" that we were able to attract not only widespread support, but the participation of many McKennedy liberals, as well as the children of some VIP's.

One important result of the open-building strategy was that it permitted various levels of commitment. The sit-in took place during most midterms, yet students could leave to go to class or to study. We could leave to shower and to eat (such activities don't make one any less revolutionary). Of the 650 who eventually signed a statement of participation, only about ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ 200 slept over the two nights. Often only a handful stayed in the building as rallies, meetings, and seminars were held in the grassy courtyard.

Often sit-ins are conducted in such a fashion that the sole ~~XXXXX~~ political activity is the occupation of the building. At Stanford this was not the case. We used the Old Union as a "Base camp" for squads of speakers (for dorms), poster hangers, and leafletters. Generally it is difficult to get a leaflet distributed at Stanford. During the sit-in we were able to send out a score of early wakers from the Old Union to greet students/as they began to arrive <sup>with leaflets</sup> <sup>on campus</sup> as early as 8 am. The task of saturating the campus with leaflets was eased through the temporary liberation of the registrar's mimeograph machine.

When the confrontation began, the administration scheduled an emergency meeting of the academic council (the full ~~XXXXXXXX~~ faculty at the rank of Assistant Professor or above) for 4:15 Wednesday, expecting general endorsement. At many schools, demonstrators have <sup>a</sup> made/phony extension of class analysis and have ignored, or even actively embittered, the faculty. It

is still possible to maintain that significant change will not come by pleading to the faculty, yet still accept their role as an influential constituency. At Stanford, at least, the faculty and students ~~XXX XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ have the same ~~social~~ *class* *status* ~~position~~ (upon graduation). At San Francisco State the SDS chapter did not lobby for faculty support, and the faculty voted down their major demand. At Stanford, the faculty supported our position of no suspensions. Hence, we won our major demand. SF State lost.

Our strategy for winning faculty support was a simple one. Not only was it successful in winning support on the major vote (the faculty, of course, did not support us on everything), but we convinced a number of liberal students that we were pragmatic. The day before the faculty meeting we stuffed faculty mailboxes with a letter, in moderate rhetoric, listing our demands and inviting them to visit us at the Old Union to observe the sit-in and to discuss the issues. We also sent a letter to the Stanford Daily asking faculty to come to our "Open House." A number of professors ~~XXX~~, and were impressed by our willingness to discuss the issues (the Stanford administration had been using the standard "smear" that confrontations disrupt dialogue). While most of those who visited us were somewhat sympathetic, the Open House hardened their position in support of our demands. When it came to the crucial vote (no suspensions), we won, approximately 280-240, in the face of strong administration intimidation.

*Too confusing omit*

The first night of our sit-in the Naval ROTC annex on campus burnt ~~at~~ the ground, mysteriously. (It had been partially destroyed by fire a few months previously.) A group of liberals wanted to hurriedly issue a statement that we had not done it, and <sup>have</sup> opposed such action. Fortunately, an administrator, in recognition of our alibi, said that there was no reason to connect the fire with the sit-in. (The fire was ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ over a mile away). Those of us who prevented ~~an~~ a debate over the desirability of sabotage (and thus preventing a big split) were glad that we did not panic.

Not all went well with the Stanford sit-in. It almost fell flat. The Student Body President, a leader of the sit-in, called a general assembly of the student body the first evening. ~~Two~~ thousand students attended, mostly from dorms and frats. The assembly voted between 70% and 80% in support of our demands, and amnesty, and between 60% and 70% against our tactics. The Tactical committee was clear in not wanting the sit-in put up to a general vote, <sup>but</sup> ~~XXXXX~~ the Student Body president ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ allowed such a vote, and implied that it would be binding. We lost the vote, and at a subsequent meeting of the sit-in, the majority voted to leave, (trapped by the <sup>general</sup> majority vote). Fortunately, ~~XXX~~ a hard core of fifty to a hundred of the sitters-in stayed (with one rock band) while the others marched over to a mass meeting called by the administration. Fortunately, the Provost of the University made a complete ass of himself, and the sit-in was on again. We were lucky.

Militant action should never be put to the vote of anyone who happens to be at a mass meeting (We had a similar difficulty during October Week--Oakland), unless you count the proxies of 700,000,000 Chinese, who have as much right to vote about your action as passers-by. We were able to eliminate the non-participant vote for the rest of the sit-in merely by requesting that those sitting-in sit down to have their votes counted.

2 / The opponents of the sit-in did not want to swell our numbers, so they did not sit down--and ~~XXX~~ thus could not vote.

Some of ~~THEY~~ ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ our demands were for student judicial power, the abolition of double jeopardy, and general due process. A tri-partite committee of faculty, administrators had been working on such "reforms" to the current system for some time. Although the student members of this committee ~~XXXX~~ all participated in ~~XXXX~~ the sit-in, they felt that their responsibility was to negotiate for stronger reforms under the pressure of the sit-in. Against the warning of sit-in leaders against closed door negotiations, they met with their committee and sold <sup>out</sup> the judicial reform demands. Once they signed an agreement, we lost our bargaining position on these issues. (Fortunately, the issues are bullshit). It is very important that groups engaged in political confrontation not elevate leaders as negotiators without first responsibility to the group. In most situations open door negotiations should be pressed for. We were aware of the dangers, but we were unable to stop it.

The strongest criticism I have of the sit-in was the political content (or lack thereof). Anxious for liberal support, many radical leaders would speak in the rhetoric of "student power" and "irrational, mean administrators." Most radical appraisals of the situation at mass meetings did not receive massive applause, so leaders did not push a strong radical analysis. In an effort to help the students understand the ~~XXXXXXXX~~ context in which they act, a number of us forced small seminars, to replace boring mass meetings. Some of these seminars provided a clear perspective and helped some new radicals blossom. Others, however, merely dwelt on judicial reform. Some were at the other extreme, discussing Marxism-Leninism or corporate power without relating ~~it~~ to the sit-in. Very little was said about Stanford's massive military programs or the role of ~~our~~ University in producing a ruling class.

Fortunately, a few did raise these issues, and as others wanted to understand our analysis of social change (which seemed to be successful in the instant of the sit-in) they asked for a radical education. This summer we are setting up seminars for people who were emotionally radicalized by the sit-in, but did not receive the political education that they deserved.