

## Report on Recent Events at Kent State University by Syd Stapleton

In a rapid fire series of events in April, the administration of Kent State University has succeeded in unleashing a ferocious witch-hunt aimed at driving all political dissent off campus. Beginning with a campaign of suspensions and arrests originally directed at SDS, the actions of the KSU administration and the defense movement that was built in response to them carry some very important lessons for radicals, especially when faced with rumblings in the Department of Justice about the prosecution of "violent and disruptive" elements on the campuses.

Early in April Kent SDS began a number of actions around three principal demands. Those demands were aimed at specific acts of KSU complicity with military research, ROTC, and Ohio state police research and training facilities. The demands were ones that should have met with an overwhelmingly favorable response on the campus, especially given the lack of sympathy among students for the war in Vietnam or police operations in the black community. The first indication of trouble on the horizon came when only 200 of the 20,000 students at KSU marched on the administration building to nail the demands, Luther style, to the door. While obvious that most students would support the general character of the demands, it became very clear on the march that only a limited number were willing to participate on the basis of the publicity issued by SDS, well larded with "revolutionary" rhetoric.

Clearly prepared for such an eventuality, the University administration had organized a squad of cops and right wingers led by plainclothes cops to break up the march. Barely waiting for their thugs to bandage their knuckles, the administration suspended the SDS charter, arbitrarily suspended 7 students involved in the march, pressed battery charges against 5 SDS leaders and secured a court injunction keeping the five off campus. Not content to throw a political organization off the campus for the alleged acts of some of its individual members, the administration also used the occasion to abrogate an agreement reached shortly before with "official" student leaders setting up a procedure of hearings and student-faculty consultation before any disciplinary action was to be taken.

The acts of the administration seemed as though they were almost calculated to outrage any student or faculty member who had the slightest respect for democratic rights, and it is at precisely such a juncture that broad civil liberties type defense committees have been formed with such great success. Unfortunately the response of the Kent SDS was not to issue a call for such a movement, but to require that concerned students and faculty participate on the basis of a "revolutionary program" or not participate at all. Individual and isolated acts by SDSers were the only response, and in one of them a student carrying a NLF flag across campus was set upon and beaten with impunity by right-wing fraternity members. The order of the day was physical attacks on political dissent.

On February 16th the University opened after-the-fact hearings on the suspensions of the SDSers. Jim Mellon, speaking for SDS, told a rally of 2000 people shortly before the hearings, "We're telling you that the revolution has begun, and that the only choice that you have to make is which side you're on. And we're telling

you that if you get in the way of that revolution it's going to run right over you." Apparently most people originally attending the rally got out of the way, because a few hours later only 150 people entered the building where the hearings were going on. The 150 occupied the building, and that evening police locked them in and arrested the 58 who remained at that point. The seven students originally suspended were charged with felony inciting to riot. Shortly after that event, a total of sixty people had been excluded from the campus and the bails totalled \$120,000.

Students outside of SDS who wanted to form a broad civil liberties defense committee had met with a hostile to unresponsive attitude on the part of the leading members of SDS, but by the time of the hearing felt the situation serious enough to go ahead with or without the agreement of SDS. On the afternoon following the hearing a meeting was held, publicized by word of mouth because of the pressure of time, to discuss plans for mobilizing students and faculty in opposition to the administration's attempt to revive the McCarthy era in Kent. Four hundred people, including faculty members, leaders of the student government, and representatives of practically every political attitude on campus, participated in the meeting, founded an organization called the Concerned Citizens of the KSU Community. The meeting overwhelmingly voted to center activity around the three demands: 1) Drop the charges against the students arrested on April 16; 2) Return to the student code regarding disciplinary actions; and 3) Reinstate the SDS charter.

That evening a rally of 3,000 students voted support for the demands, and elected a committee to present them to KSU President White. The following morning 2,000 people met following the university's public statement that the demands would not be met, and that afternoon 5,000 students and faculty marched through the campus in support of the demands.

The university administration then turned its fire on the Concerned Citizens. In a series of leaflets President White raised the bogey of the "outside agitator," hinted darkly at unspecified "subversive" involvement and unsigned leaflets began appearing on the campus threatening violence in the event of further rallies. Individual leaders of the Concerned Citizens were attacked in the press, and at one point it was charged that the Concerned Citizens was financed by the Cleveland Young Socialist Alliance. Not only was the charge untrue, but it characterized the "Peking Gold" type of slander that the university administration stooped to flinging.

Predictably, some of the less stable elements in the Concerned Citizens broke away under this pressure very early, including the president of the student body. Unfortunately, although the Young Socialists at Kent played an active role in building the Concerned Citizens and raised proposals for mass meetings to discuss the critical questions facing the Concerned Citizens, the absence of other radical-minded students was sorely felt on the steering committee of approximately 75 students.

The vast majority of the students on the steering committee, active politically for the first time, were horrified and confused by the river of vitriol pouring out of the administration offices. Following the march of 5,000 on a Friday there were two solid days of meetings of the Concerned Citizens steering committee. YSAers

on the steering committee proposed a petitioning and educational campaign for the beginning of the next week, to be followed by some action, possibly a massive sit-down or extended teach-in linked to the presentation of the petitions. It was impossible to reach agreement on this or any other proposal for action, and paralysis reigned for the entire weekend. Finally a rally was set for Monday of the next week, but it was impossible to get agreement to issue enough leaflets to properly publicize it.

Unfortunately, the lack of political experience on the part of the leaders of the Concerned Citizens displayed itself further when on Monday they caved in to the red-baiting attacks on SDS in a totally insupportable way. A group of members of the Concerned Citizens steering committee asked two off-campus SDS members to leave the campus, to prevent further attacks by the administration on the "outside agitator" theme. Totally in violation of the whole thesis of the Concerned Citizens, that is, political liberties, the steering committee members present called the cops on the SDSers. While only a few members of the steering committee were involved in this action, and while there was a generally favorable response to a statement issued by the YSA condemning this action, the level of confusion and demoralization necessary to motivate such an act was quite widespread.

The demoralization reflected itself further in the only action called by the Concerned Citizens later that week. The Concerned Citizens set a referendum for Wednesday, April 22, and proceeded to organize the balloting on the basis of voting for or against the three demands, and for or against three alternatives for action, a teach-in, a boycott, and nothing. The election was held with practically no educational preparation around the issues on the campus, and in spite of the fact that thousands of students voted for the three demands and for one of the two actions, the only demands that carried the election was for a return to the student code, and the proposals for action were defeated.

Following the referendum the Concerned Citizens of KSU ceased to function, and the university administration is continuing with sporadic arrests on inciting to riot and other charges. The charges, including felonies, against individual members of SDS have not been dropped, and at any time the administration could open a new offensive.