

*'Ugly, Sometimes Fierce'*

# Beyers' Counterinsurgency

By Michael Sweeney

Last Friday, the student body gathered in Frost Amphitheater to discuss and vote on the pressing issues of University research. When the votes were counted at 10 p.m. that night, it was clear that the students had endorsed the goals and tactics of the April 3rd Movement by an overwhelming margin.

The results of that balloting had immense significance for this University, if not for the nation. Research to kill was condemned here and at SRI. And a clear majority of the students who voted—1633—said they would sit-in if the Trustees did not accede to the wishes of the community in the SRI controversy.

Given the urgent importance of these votes, it seems only sensible that the results should have been communicated to the University community and the mass media with no delay.

But that didn't happen. Except for a special edition of the Daily with skimpy distribution, no mention of the voting appeared in any newspaper or radio news until 18 hours after the results were announced at the ASSU offices.

There is a fascinating story behind that 18-hour suppression of the vote results. It should raise some serious doubts about free press and publication at Stanford. It is a case study in domestic counterinsurgency.

## Worked Furiously

Throughout the sit-in, the Stanford News Service worked furiously to put out a large number of news releases. Robert Beyers and his staff of 20 worked long hours of overtime in writing, printing and mailing releases and answering queries. On some days

the staff worked all night until 5 a.m., and Beyers himself worked non-stop. In short, Beyers tried to provide the news media with everything he judged worth knowing about the sit-in.

Beyers' office took on an additional role during the sit-in: an internal information source for faculty and administration. Special delivery letters to all faculty went out with statements, memos and news releases. Faculty were deluged with Beyers' summaries of sit-in news.

It seemed that Beyers and his associates had assumed responsibility not only for external press coverage, but also for telling the faculty everything they needed to know.

## Policy Change?

But on Friday night, while the stunning votes were being tabulated by the ASSU, Beyers seems to have made a sudden change in policy. On that night, he closed his office early and sent his staff home. Beyers himself was at The Daily office around 9 p.m., but failed to inquire what time the vote counting would be completed (it was finished at 10). Instead, he went home. Beyers has told us that he decided "not to cover it that night... I decided that I would catch it the next day in the morning." Doubtlessly, Beyers' journalistic zeal was dampened because he and his staff were "just physically exhausted."

Beyers went home. He admits that he knew that his inaction made it probable that none of the Saturday morning papers, except for the Daily's limited edition, would carry the voting results. And none of them did.

## Herzenberg Phones

Come Saturday, it seems that

Beyers let the morning pass without finding out how the students voted. But at noon, he received a phone call from Dr. Leonard Herzenberg, associate professor of genetics. Why, asked Dr. Herzenberg, had the faculty received thick packets of news releases that morning but no word of the student votes? Beyers said he had put out no release on the balloting and said he had no immediate plans to do so.

Dr. Herzenberg pointed out that Beyers had previously gone to the trouble of sending special delivery letters to all faculty with news of much less importance. Dr. Herzenberg added that faculty were making up their minds about crucial issues over the weekend, and should have a chance to learn the voting results. Beyers suggested that a note in Wednesday's Campus Report would be enough. Dr. Herzenberg questioned Beyers' fairness. The conversation ended.

At 1 o'clock, Beyers was on the phone to the Daily to get the vote results from Mr. Tom Dawson. But Beyers took no hasty action. Instead he spent the balance of the afternoon "checking out," as he put it, the story. For example:

## Calls Hayes

Beyers called up Dents Hayes and asked him what he knew about rumors that a mob of radicals had roughed up some student police outside Frost Amphitheater and stolen a stack of blank ballots. Hayes was skeptical.

"About an hour later," says Hayes, "he called back and indicated he had talked to a couple of people who had seen some ballots taken." Whereupon, according to Beyers, "Hayes told me he was 'terribly depressed' about the incident outside the amphitheater." Beyers wrote down these newly found facts for future use.

Meanwhile, the afternoon had slipped by and the Palo Alto Times had appeared, without any report of the voting. By late afternoon, students at the April 3rd Movement began to suspect that the Stanford News Service had somehow failed us. We called up The Daily and persuaded Executive Editor Marshall

Schwartz to telephone the results to the key news media.

## 'Time Not Urgent'

First Schwartz called Beyers and asked him when he was going to put out a release. Beyers said he was thinking of Sunday night. As Beyers commented later, "To me, the time factor did not seem that urgent." Whereupon Schwartz told Beyers that he was going to give the story to the newspapers immediately.

Thus, at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, the first news leaked to the outside press.

Beyers made a quick reassessment of his news policy. He called the Associated Press just minutes ahead of Schwartz. Beyers, providently, had prepared a story about the voting results, with a few carefully composed paragraphs to enhance objectivity:

"When a group of about 50 students from the sit-in came toward the amphitheater, they took some ballots away from a student checking identification there, according to two student witnesses. Less than 100 ballots were believed involved.

"Hayes, who had suggested that the ballots be given only to students showing identification, said he was 'terribly depressed' about the incident outside the amphitheater."

The Associated Press did not share Beyers' judgment that these two paragraphs were newsworthy. They did not appear in the AP dispatch.

Beyers' release to AP had another quirk which we found interesting. He told AP, "the results were disclosed Saturday." Actually they were announced Friday. When we questioned Beyers on this point, he replied, "If I had said that the results were disclosed Friday, everybody would have said the hell with it, since it was old news."

We suggested to Beyers that his dedication to the University, as he conceives it, may be messing up his work. He replied:

"I consider my position that of a general assignment reporter in looking at activities that go on in the University. I think that my job is best performed by trying to act on that belief, and view things in that perspective, rather than in the conventional public relations perspective that you are just backing one side or the other."

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