

STANFORD PROVIDES Political Context

By Bill Evers

The recent sit-in at the Applied Electronics Laboratory provides a context in which the current state of politics at Stanford may be considered.

ASSU president Denis Hayes saw the sit-in as a way to speed matters through their proper channels. He had hoped that those sitting-in would declare on Wednesday night, April 9, that they would leave at Friday noon, April 11. If this had happened, the sit-in could have been a weapon in Hayes's arsenal, to be used while negotiating with the administration, faculty representatives, and the trustees.

If the sit-in were recognized by everyone as an act of student concern which would be over by Friday, April 11, it would mean

that student government politicians and members of the University Advisory Committee (Denis Hayes, Michael Sweeney, & Patrick Shea) would be consulted on any top-level decisions and would wield influence with regard to the content of those decisions. These important students would be the touchstones of legitimacy. Trustees, administrators, and faculty leaders would use these students to provide student authorization of whatever compromise could be worked out.

The energy which went into the sit-in bubbled up from below, rather than filtering down from the top. The student politicians hoped that the sit-in would be no act of lese majesty. The best thing these students thought that could

be done with the energy of the sit-in was to use it in institutional channels.

Lent Names

For the student politicians the sit-in had no inherent virtue in its very existence as a counter-community. They lent their names to the April 3 Movement; and they hoped that in the ensuing crisis trustees, administrators, and faculty leaders would defer to them as student constituency representatives.

It is in this light that one can best understand Denis Hayes's speeches urging that the sit-in come to a close, his April 17 letter of resignation from the April 3 Movement (a letter which was hastily withdrawn and remains

unpublished), and his call for the student body to meet together the afternoon of Friday, April 18. That convocation might well have created a situation in which community support would have withdrawn from the sit-in.

Calling a general meeting of the student body was a move reminiscent of Charles DeGaulle's ploy of calling a general election as a way of ending France's May 1968 rebellion. With the groundwork already laid for DeGaulle by France's trade union leadership, all the French students' potential allies were integrated back into the system through the election.

Federal Fear

ASSU president Hayes and university president Kenneth Pitzer were worried throughout the sit-in about the possibility of intervention by federal authorities. To avoid this intervention, the Stanford Judicial Council recommended that Pitzer assume emergency powers, powers which Pitzer described to the faculty as amounting to "internal martial law."

If the federal authorities had intervened, it would not mean that the university was unable to govern itself. Indeed the existence of a threat of outside intervention meant that the university does not truly govern its own destiny. The existing structure's delegated authority lasts as long as it acts in line with the system's national goals. When the university president fails, outside forces move in, as the Soviets did in Czechoslovakia.

President Pitzer was disturbed that students refused to give their names to certain specially deputized faculty members. These faculty members were not standing up for university self-determination. The question is not whether the faculty members had good intentions; the question is what did they do with their power. The fact is that they

were acting simply in lieu of outside forces.

Threat to Feds

The federal authorities saw the sit-in as a threat to the security of their secret files. It was not that the sit-in threatened the people who make up human society. But rather the sit-in threatened the authority of the federal government and, in this case, the authority of their designated surrogates—the university's administration and its federally-employed researchers. To understand the nature of the case, remember that Lenin had struck a blow against the Great Powers of the world by publishing the secret treaties relating to World War I.

The faculty members who came around asking names were then acting as the internal administrators of a system that many of those sitting-in regarded as illegitimate. So the students did not give their names.

Even the CBS television network polices itself internally (Joan Baez & Smothers Bros.) believing it can do so more efficiently than the higher authorities (the FCC or crusading senator John Pastore of Rhode Island). It is part of the theory and practice of benevolent despotism.

Channeling and social control functions are an integral part of universities like Stanford. Fortune magazine devoted much of its January issue to the public service functions of modern universities, as the proving grounds of federally-sponsored research and the training grounds for the executive suites of big businesses. American universities are part of the American system, and the system takes care of its own, if necessary with federal marshals or the U.S. Army.

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Guest Column