

May, 1970: A Peaceful Protest Against the Vietnam War

*Moderate medical students and faculty
take up political action in response to the War
and destructive acts on Stanford campus.*

ONE AFTERNOON shortly after the Cambodian incursion last April, Jeff Brown, then president of the Stanford medical student government, called an unprecedented meeting of faculty, students, and administrators at the Medical School. The purpose of the gathering was to discuss steps the medical community might take in the face of a strike, demonstrations, and other antiwar activities which had been contemplated by various groups on the Stanford campus for the week of May 4.

The 24-year-old medical student considers himself an activist, he is against the war, but he is still determined to end it by working within the system. He had an air of earnestness that Sunday afternoon, the self-conscious candor of a man trying to handle a very delicate situation. Near the podium was Richard Atkins, a young second-year medical student with a ready smile, who had been involved in the organization of the campus events as a senate member of the Associated Students of Stanford University. Although Brown was unusually poised for his age, he fidgeted uneasily before the group, looking uncomfortable over what he had to say. For one of the reasons he had called the meeting was to warn that tensions among faculty and students over the war issue were high; that the Medical School, which had been spared when Stanford had experienced two of the worst nights of violence in its history, could be next if it failed to allow moderates to "cool" the situation.

Atkins, speaking for the ASSU, rose and began to relate in a soft voice that some faculty members of the German Department had voted to go on strike. He urged the medical students and faculty to join. Brown enumerated various activities that campus organizations had planned for the following week, and said he would entertain suggestions about actions the medical community might take. A proposal that medical students consider a class boycott got some unfavorable response. Richard A. Ilka, a first-year medical student, took issue with the assumption that everybody was opposed to President Nixon's decision to send troops to Cambodia. He said some students, including himself, agreed with the President and thought the action would speed up U.S. troop withdrawal from Vietnam. Secondly, he said no individual or group had the right

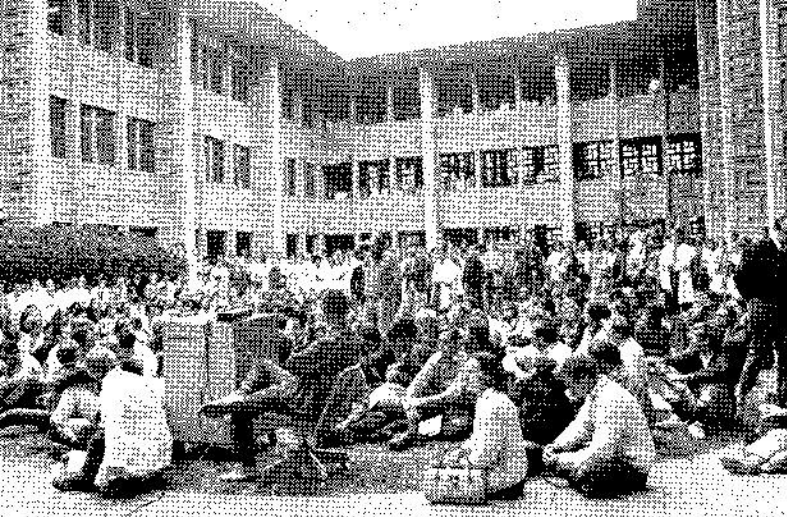
to impose its political solutions on others or to prevent students from attending classes if they wished to go.

At this point, Brown asked Dr. John L. Wilson, who had just returned from an emergency meeting on the campus, to discuss the University's posture on the "strike." The associate dean said the University administration did not question the impact of the Cambodian action on faculty and student opinion. But the University as an institution could not give official sanction to any political activity. "The general understanding," he said, "was that those who wished to engage in political actions as individuals would be given the opportunity, but those who preferred to continue with academic work would not be prevented from doing so." He emphasized that the business of the Medical School was to continue as usual.

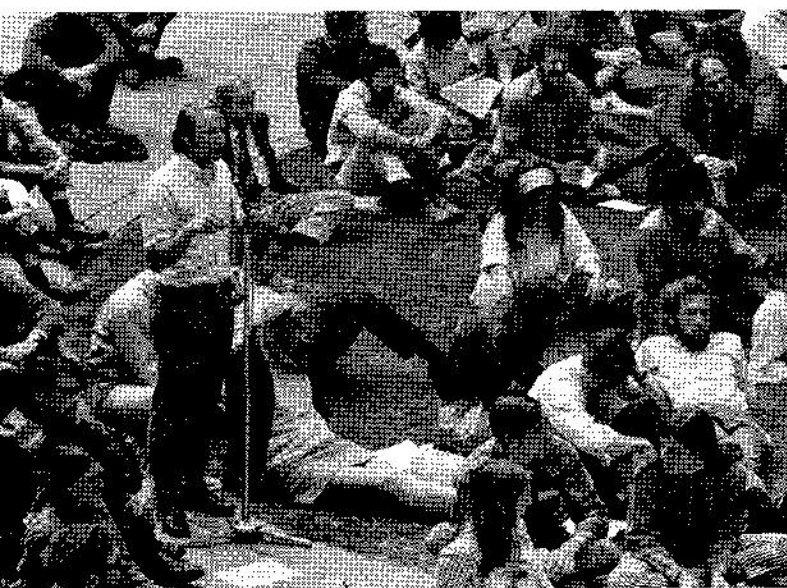
The meeting ended a little before three o'clock to allow medical student representatives to participate at a University-wide student rally in White Plaza that afternoon. Before adjourning, however, the ad hoc group decided to hold a convocation at the Medical Center the following Monday to discuss the war issue, and organize action groups to demand peace in Southeast Asia. The convocation was to be held at 5:30 p.m., a time picked to assure maximum attendance and to prevent interference with patient care at the Medical Center. Organizational details for the meeting were left to a committee of students and faculty which included Dr. Henry S. Kaplan, professor and chairman of the Department of Radiology.

The very fact of Dr. Kaplan's selection to the committee as well as his presence at the meeting (he was one of two members of the Medical School's executive committee who could be reached by telephone that afternoon) was in itself significant; for those who know him well, or even slightly, share the impression that he is a reserved scholar, deeply absorbed in his research and clinical work, and though widely honored and influential in scientific circles, he is not addicted to the political games some physicians and scientists endlessly play. Dr. Kaplan has tended to picture himself, like most physicians, as relatively apolitical.

Nevertheless, over the previous year or so, he had become considerably concerned about the effects of increasing violence on the Stanford campus, political

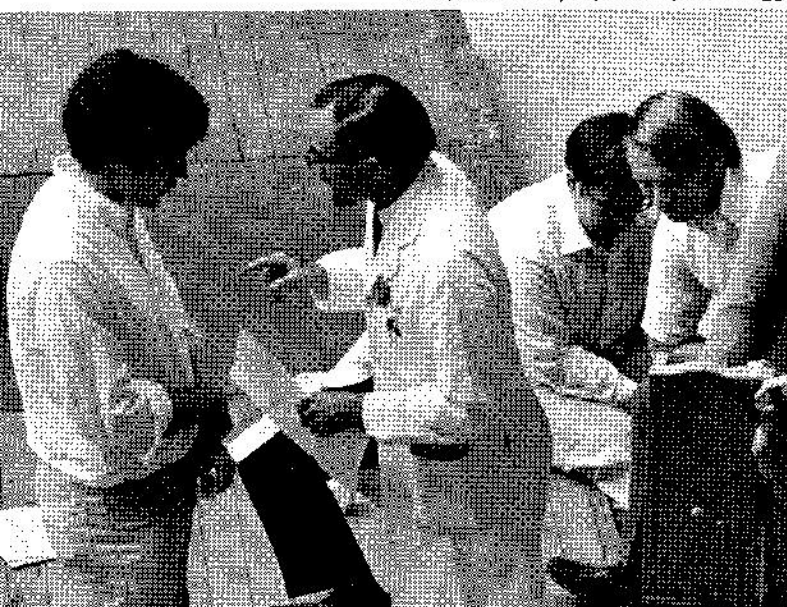


At time of Cambodian incursion, pro and con discussions reached a peak during noon and evening meetings organized by Stanford Medical Community for Peace.



Medical student Daniel Anzia makes a point before open mike session in Medical School courtyard.

Perhaps the most subtle effect of the May activities in the Medical School was in getting faculty and students talking together. Here Rick Atkins listens to Dr. Leslie M. Zatz, associate professor of radiology.



polarization, and mounting distrust of students and fellow faculty members for the nation's leaders. Cambodia appeared to have been the strongest catalyst in bringing large numbers of faculty such as Professor Kaplan to take active antiwar positions.

THE CONVOCATION in the Medical School courtyard on Monday afternoon was peaceful. Dr. Kaplan, one of the keynote speakers, described his dilemma in these words: "I can't hope to save as many people in a lifetime as are killed in a month in Vietnam. . . . We, as doctors, have been concerned with saving lives. Increasingly we are being forced to wonder whether our actions in so doing are not actually becoming antisocial. This is an ironic twist indeed. . . . We feel increasingly that our lives are being made meaningless by all that is transpiring around us, and it is for this reason we need to take a serious, continuing, and meaningful interest in political and social questions, because without political involvement our entire lives today are in danger of becoming a mere mockery."

Dr. Kaplan pointed out the context in which a faculty should express its views by saying, "It is utterly inappropriate for us to take action in the name of the entire faculty, or in the name of the entire University." He cautioned that society would become increasingly reluctant to support universities which it regards as political rather than academic enclaves. "One of the hallmarks of the university that we have honored and respected through time is its ability to provide a sanctuary within which men of every political and intellectual persuasion could freely pursue their interests and their research as they saw fit," he said. "Indeed, it has been the university throughout the years that has remained one of the bastions of free thought. It has been so only because the university as a corporate body stood apart from the individuals within it."

There are appropriate statements faculty members as a group can make, Dr. Kaplan insisted, but the fundamental distinction is in wording. There is a difference between saying, "The Academic Council of Stanford University resolves," and saying "We, the members of the Academic Council, resolve or demand or deplore."

"Such emphasis in wording could make a difference," he warned, "between preserving the independence of scholarship and research in this University, and compromising our position to the point of becoming fair game for political intervention."

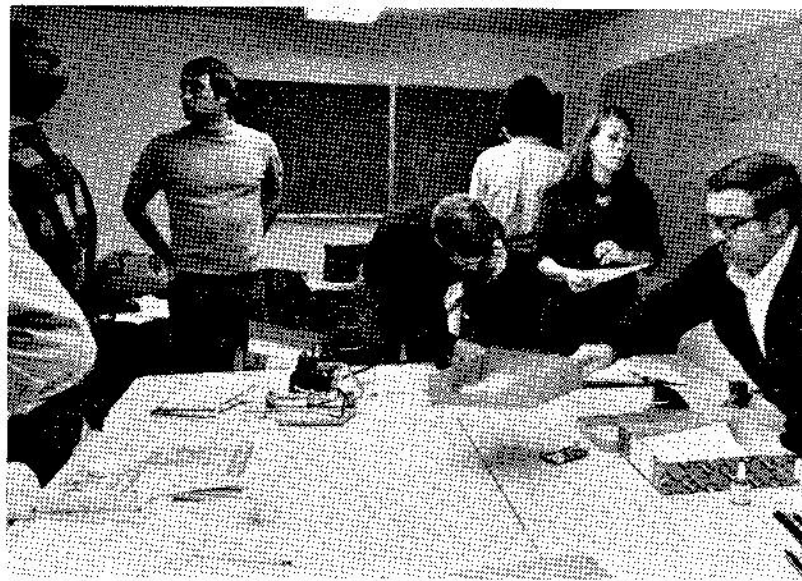
The next individuals who settled before the microphones were Robert B. Textor, a professor anthropology and education, who had lived in Southeast Asia for several years; Banning Garrett, a political science student from Brandeis University; and Alan Strain, a senior counselor in the office of the Dean of Students. All of them had a pronounced taste for political analysis and they had the weighty self-assurance of men who were veterans rather than newcomers in the business of demanding peace. They expounded their beliefs as from a pulpit or a union meeting platform. "Four years ago I held my first Stanford 'teach-in' on Vietnam," Professor Textor proclaimed in a powerful

voice. "At that point we thought we could win. There was light at the end of the tunnel. The years went by, the bombs were dropped, and today there is no more hope of winning a military solution than there was then."

There has been criticism about the convocation speakers because they, without exception, represented antiwar positions. But as Brown later told *Stanford M.D.*, this was unintentional. The convocation committee did invite two members of the Hoover Institution who support U.S. involvement in Vietnam to present their views. One declined because of a previous speaking commitment, the other who accepted could not attend because of illness. During the following week, however, faculty members with different views were invited to speak before medical students and faculty.

After the main speakers at the convocation had left the rostrum, an ad hoc group of students, faculty, and staff formed "The Stanford Medical Community for Peace," and vowed to work through democratic means to express their concern over the war in Southeast Asia. Patient care in the Hospital and Clinics would not be affected, the group decided. Its efforts would be essentially educational to reach the public and members of the government.

Next day, action committees concerned with communications and plans for a possible nationwide protest "strike" began to emerge. Student liaisons kept tabs on developments on the main campus in which some classes were cancelled or held with low attendance. Brown; Dr. Paul Berg, chairman of the department of biochemistry; and Dr. Herant Katchadourian, assistant professor of psychiatry, went to Washington as members of the University's delegation to meet with government officials and members of Congress. A speaker's bureau was established and students, working from the student lounge as a "nerve center," pub-

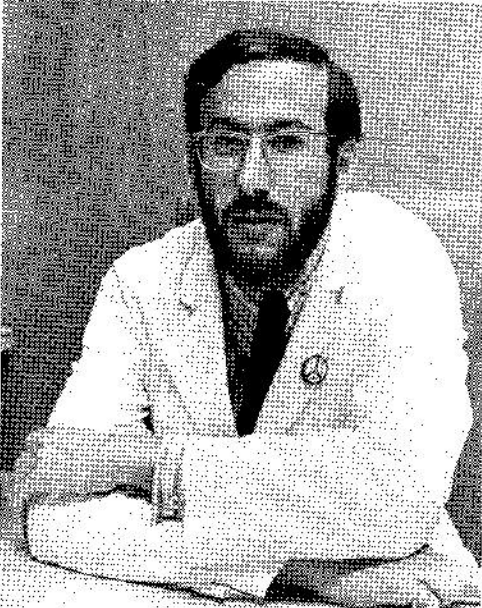


Calling individual citizens in support of political candidates was one of the activities carried out by members of the Stanford Medical Community for Peace. Medical students used the student lounge as their "nerve center" to provide information, process petitions, and to make contact with peace candidates.

Medical Center personnel listens to speakers asking Stanford University Hospital to grant employees time off to participate in peace activities. The Hospital decided to accommodate employees who wished to participate, as long as their absence did not compromise patient care activities.



Jeff Brown



lished "The Axon," a daily news bulletin which carried schedules of meetings, reports of committees, and editorials. The Faculty Senate of the Medical School issued a statement deploring the war escalation in Indochina, and the use of violence to register protest on campus. By the end of the week issues in addition to the war became matters of concern. In particular, violence on other campuses and the deaths of students at Kent State and Jackson received great attention.

There were, of course, pro-Nixon feelings also expressed by various segments of the Medical Center. Ken Marich, a senior research assistant in pathology, and Dr. William Trytl of the Department of Pathology collected more than 300 signatures in support of the President from students, faculty, and staff. Insisting that "we are not a prowar group," Marich said the people who signed his petition felt the President was earnestly acting in good faith to bring "the unfortunate situation in Southeast Asia to a swift and honorable end."

Antiwar sentiment was by no means limited to the campus. More than 450 practicing physicians from the Midpeninsula added their voice to the number of those protesting the war. And in an unprecedented action, the Santa Clara County Medical Society's governing board passed a resolution endorsing the students for working to present their antiwar sentiment through established political institutions. "We urge others to support their approach since they represent the previously uncommitted nonviolent majority of medical students who now hope to take and hold leadership from the militants and to pursue a constructive course," the statement said.

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT to assess in precise terms the effects of the May activities on national policy or the Medical School, but some generalizations can be made. At the Medical Center the surge in nonviolent political action came at the time when destructive acts against campus facilities by a small group of dissident students and nonstudents were increasing. Many of the students and faculty were impelled to take up nonviolent political action in part, at least, in response to the escalation of violence and destruction on campus during which police had used tear gas for the first time at Stanford. Opposition from moderates against campus militants was far more important than the few class cancellations that occurred at the Medical School. There is no evidence that there was coercion and that academic freedom was infringed. Most of the activities involved faculty and students during off class hours in seminar-type gatherings dealing directly in research on social and political problems designed to produce viable solutions. For example, one recent meeting, which brought together Bay Area union leaders, faculty, and students, dealt with the effects of the war on organized labor, the University, and the economy. One aspect of the seminar examined the impact of the war on health care services at a time when the nation is suffering from serious shortages of doctors, dentists, and paramedical personnel. Some emphasis seems to have been placed on antiwar work in the community, of a fairly general

character and aimed at establishing contacts outside the campus. Other efforts supported Congressmen on issues or specific peace efforts.

Perhaps the most subtle effect of the May activities was in getting faculty and students talking together. Dr. Leon Cohen, associate professor of medicine, and chairman of the faculty senate, put it this way: "Patient care went on unimpaired. There has been an opportunity for those who may have fretted privately to discover ways to work in support of their opinions. Meaningful exchanges have taken place with individuals and groups outside the Medical Center, as well as among professors and students. This is healthy and will be of value in the future if we can keep the newly developed lines of communication open."

How effective these lines of communication will be remains to be seen. For many campus radicals, which the nonviolent political activists sought to isolate last spring, the University is simply an extension of the establishment they would like to topple and a source of recruits to their ranks. As a target, Stanford is an easy mark. Among the many tasks the University faces in defending itself is that of moving for the prosecution in the civil or criminal courts, or through campus judicial machinery, of those accused of causing disturbances or damage. Unfortunately, radicals often gain impact on campus with charges of prosecution.

In a recent issue of *Science*, reporter John Walsh, who visited the Medical School in the spring, has raised another more ominous issue: "Of the new cadres of nonviolent political activists one must ask whether their present ardor will endure through all the slogging in the precincts and through the probable disappointments of the next election and the next," he wrote. "It should also be noted that perhaps a majority of these activists are not interested in what one calls 'trivial change.' Their disenchantment with Congress as it operates, for example, is thorough. Perhaps most significantly, many of those who have decided to work within the system to change it hope, but only half-believe, it can be done that way."

If some nonviolent protesters are doubtful about the effectiveness of their efforts, why do they bother at all? Randolph H. Chase, a first-year medical student, gave this answer: "Regardless of the effect our work might have on the elections in November, we feel strongly that our summer efforts have been worthwhile. The very exchange of ideas and views with labor unions and service organizations has helped, we feel, to diminish the polarization which has already reached too high a level in the community, in the Bay Area, and in the nation."

For faculty and students, the most significant aspect of contact with the community this summer may well be the realization that the strong reaction by alumni, physicians, and other citizens to the campus violence has made communication difficult. Those who believe in nonviolence feel they must get the community on their side. As Chase put it, "We want to show that the University is not a place where rock throwing is condoned as a method of solving problems."

—SPYROS ANDREPOULOS