

THE BRUCE FRANKLIN AFFAIR

RACHELLE MARSHALL

Last January 22, after a year of delays and deliberations, Stanford University fired H. Bruce Franklin from his job as associate professor of English. Franklin, who is known as an outstanding Herman Melville scholar, is the first tenured faculty member to be fired from a major university since the 1950s. The Stanford administration, several hundred faculty members, forty-five per cent of the students who voted in a campus referendum, and numerous newspaper editors across the country justify Franklin's firing on grounds that he incited illegal acts, including acts of violence, and was a threat to the continued existence of the University. The Northern California affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union disagrees, and has decided to represent Franklin in a court appeal. "If this decision is allowed to stand," according to Robert Meyers of ACLU, "it is likely to become the standard of speech in all private universities and even in public universities. We just could not ignore our responsibility to see to it that a standard like this does not exist."

Whatever the eventual outcome, the Franklin case will go down as one of the sadder episodes in Stanford's history. Many of those who watched it unfold see it as an affair that will never quite be duplicated anywhere else—an affair filled with ambiguities to which otherwise impressive men responded with fear rather than courage, and with caution rather than wisdom.

Franklin, thirty-seven, has been an avowed, outspoken Maoist for six years. The Stanford administration insists that it was his acts, not his beliefs, that were at issue in the decision to fire him. These acts took place on two separate days during January and February, 1971. On January 11, Henry Cabot Lodge was unable to give a scheduled speech on campus because of sustained clapping, shouting, and chanting from the audience. The next day President Richard

Lyman charged Franklin with having led the disruption and ordered him to be tried before a faculty board. Franklin denied the charge but insisted at a press conference that he considered disruption too mild a treatment for Lodge, whom he regarded as a war criminal deserving of imprisonment.

Before the case could be heard, the invasion of Laos took place. On February 10, Franklin was the final speaker at a campus rally to protest the invasion. Several previous speakers had urged that the group march to the Computation Center, where a Palo Alto research organization was conducting a project called Gamut-H, which was known to involve plans for carrying out an amphibious invasion, possibly of North Vietnam. Franklin endorsed the proposed demonstration, urged a "strike" at the Computation Center, and ended his speech by saying, "Shut it down." When the group arrived at the Computation Center, Franklin remained outside on the lawn while about 150 students milled about inside. In mid-afternoon the police arrived, the demonstrators left the building (having done no major damage), and the police ordered the lawn area cleared, declaring the demonstrators to be an illegal assembly. Franklin protested loudly to the police lieutenant that the assembly was not illegal, urged other faculty members who were there as observers to remain, and refused to leave. The police charged, clubbed, and arrested a few stragglers (no charges were ever brought), and the group agreed to meet again that night.

At the evening rally Franklin spoke in protest against the continued presence of police on the campus and in effect urged that they be kept busy. He suggested a "people's war," specifically that students go back and speak to their dormitory mates, play touch football (a tactic that had annoyed the police on earlier occasions), and generally do "whatever, as late into the night as possible." Immediately after the rally a fight broke out between members of Venceremos, a radical organization to which Franklin belongs, and members of the right wing Free Campus Movement (FCM). A

Rachelle Marshall is a Stanford faculty wife of nineteen years' standing. Her article, "Christmas in Jail," appeared in the January, 1969, issue.