

Columbia University in the City of New York | New York 27, N.Y.

Memorandum to The University Community

From: The President

Subject: Statement Concerning the Demonstration at Low Library

It is important that the faculty and staff of the University have a clear understanding of the events involved in the demonstration Friday, May 7, which resulted in postponement of the U. S. Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps awards ceremony and military review, a regularly scheduled academic affair. The following facts are presented so that full understanding may be achieved.

A street meeting was scheduled by "Columbia University Independent Committee on Viet Nam" to take place from noon to 4:00 p.m., Friday, May 7, at 116th Street and Claremont Avenue. Scheduled to address the rally, according to mimeographed leaflets, were: a professor of history from Yale University; a professor of sociology from Adelphi University; an instructor in the French Department, Columbia University; student leaders.

Evidently because of rain, the leaders at the rally organized a march to Ferris Booth Hall, where the participants entered Hewitt Lounge and proceeded with the affair. Permission to hold the rally in Hewitt was sought and received after the participants were already in the lounge. The time was approximately 12:30. A sound truck was stationed across 116th Street from the original rally site, and a student spokesman kept repeating over the loudspeaker the fact that the rally was moved to Ferris Booth.

During the course of the speeches at the rally, one student leader warned that procedures would have to be speeded up, "because there is something going on at Low Library that we want to 'observe.'"

Shortly after 2 p.m., a mass of perhaps 75 students surged from the direction of Ferris Booth and Furnald Halls, converged on Low Library and ran up onto the porch. A number of persons from other universities and from other off-campus points were seen. Many were carrying signs demanding that the United States cease military operations in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. The crowd heeded shouted demands by its leaders to rush the front door of Low Library. Chants condemning the NROTC alternated with chants condemning the American presence in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. In each case, the chants were begun by a few individual voices and picked up by the crowd, which at its height numbered around 200. The behavior of the crowd was characterized by observers as hysterical.

Members of a Navy band and a group of NROTC midshipmen were prevented by the demonstrators from entering Low Library. Most of the midshipmen stayed in Hartley Hall and did not attempt to get through the crowd. The ceremonies originally were scheduled for College Walk, but were rescheduled for the Rotunda of Low Library because of the rain. Demonstrators

blocked both the front entrance and the southeast entrance to Low Library. The rest of the building was sealed off by University security. Civilian guests who had entered Low Library for the academic function were escorted out by city police without incident.

Columbia's own campus guards under Captain Adam DeNisco confined their activities to holding fast against the doors to protect civilian guests and University personnel inside the building. The surging pressure on the front doors was so great that the glass in the lower part of the left door to the main entrance of Low Library was smashed. At this point, about 2:20, Captain De Nisco estimated that the danger of violence was greater than the combined strength of his men, so he had city police called. The precinct responded with a detail of 20 men and 5 officers. This contingent conducted itself in an extremely quiet and matter-of-fact way. The only actual physical contact between any of them and the crowd was a pushing response to repulse the shoving by the crowd and attempts to clear the pressures on the front doors, during which a few demonstrators were pulled away from the doors. At no time were clubs, or arms of any kind, used or threatened or even exhibited. When it became evident that the size of the police detachment was inadequate, the police withdrew into the foyer. Their only subsequent action was to act as escort as mentioned above.

Dr. Lawrence H. Chamberlain, vice president of the University, tried to speak from the porch of Low Library, but constant interruptions from the shouting, jeering group made communication impossible. Dr. Grayson Kirk, president of the University, then tried to speak. He succeeded in getting across a statement that the demonstration directly violated the statement against the type of picketing which disrupts normal University functions, and that Columbia students participating in the demonstration were opening themselves to disciplinary action. No noticeable diminution of either the shouting or the pushing seemed to follow the president's remarks. An attempt by a police captain to address the crowd failed completely.

At this point a decision had to be made as to the next step. Alternatives were: (1) to announce postponement of the review and hope that the crowd would disperse, or (2) to call in police reinforcements and break up the demonstration. The latter measure would have required an additional 100 policemen and would have carried the danger of extreme violence, serious injury, and mass arrests. Dr. Kirk and Dr. Chamberlain decided to postpone the review and to announce that fact to the crowd outside. The Navy was completely cooperative and agreed to the postponement. Several persons in the front of the crowd shouted demands that they be allowed into the building to verify that none of their followers was being held by authorities and that the ceremony would not be held. A representative was allowed in. He left, apparently satisfied.

Shouting and chanting continued for a considerable length of time, but the crowd gradually began breaking up and by about 4 p.m., the affair was ended.

It should be emphasized that the award ceremony and review was a regularly scheduled academic function of the University, and that the demonstration was of such magnitude as to force the University to postpone the function. It also should be pointed out that President Kirk had warned in February and again two days before the demonstration that interference with normal procedures of the University could not be tolerated. Moreover, a letter containing similar warning had been mailed as long ago as last November by Dr. Chamberlain to several of the students observed taking part in Friday's demonstration.

On Saturday morning, May 8, a meeting of members of several of the deans' offices met together with other administration and security representatives at Dr. Kirk's request to determine investigatory and disciplinary procedures. As a result of this meeting written notices were sent to Columbia students identified by name as having taken part in the disturbance, directing them to appear personally before their respective dean's office representative. Each student will have the opportunity to present his case in accordance with traditional University procedures and due process before appropriate officials.

At the conclusion of these hearings, the testimony will be turned over to President Kirk, together with recommendation as to appropriate disciplinary action.

It was apparent that some of the demonstrators came with the idea of peaceful protest only, but it also was apparent that a small number of others were part of the planning and organization which prepared the demonstration. It was impossible to differentiate on the scene between the two.

May 11, 1965