

Campus protests

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD

UNC-CH Student Government press release, c. May 9, 1970. From the Records of Student Government (#40169), University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

As you read...

Throughout the 1960s, college students staged demonstrations on campus denouncing the Vietnam War. Students wanted an end to the war and an end to the draft. One reason students were actively involved in the peace movement was that the men who were drafted into the armed forces were college-aged. Students believed that the unjust war was being fought at the expense of their generation.

This is an announcement released by the Student Government at UNC informing students about activities on campus during the student strike of May 1970. Strikes had been organized at hundreds of college campuses across the United States to protest the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the deaths of student protesters at Kent State University in Ohio at the hands of National Guardsmen.

ESCALATION OF THE WAR

During his first year in office, President Nixon had committed to reducing the number of troops in Vietnam and to hand over day-to-day operations to South Vietnamese troops. On April 30, 1970, Nixon made an announcement that surprised and disheartened many Americans: He was expanding the war to include Cambodia, which bordered Vietnam.

North Vietnamese communists were running supply lines through Cambodia, and Nixon believed that it was necessary to destroy these lines if the U.S. was to secure victory in Vietnam. Unbeknown to the American public, the United States had been secretly bombing Cambodia for over a year.

Anti-war protestors were enraged. They had believed that Nixon would bring an end to the war, not escalate it. Faced with the possibility of an even longer war and more casualties, students staged protests on American campuses across the United States. At Kent State, the student protest turned tragic. On May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on the protesters, killing four and wounding nine. Americans were shocked and students were outraged.

STUDENT STRIKES

Over the next few weeks, an estimated four million students across the United States went on strike. Students staged protests, took over administrative buildings, refused to attend classes, organized protest marches, attended lectures about the war, and circulated petitions calling upon Congress to end the war. Thousands of students marched on Washington to denounce the war and protest the violence at Kent State.

Although most of the protests were peaceful, violence erupted on many campuses. At several universities, the Reserve Officer Training Corps offices (a program that trains university students to become

officers in the military) were set on fire. Other instances of vandalism and arson were reported at various campuses.

The response by university administrators faced with striking students varied. At some universities, police and state troops were called in to disperse the strike, which usually only escalated the unrest. At other universities, such as UNC, faculty and administrators were encouraged to be patient with students who decided to go on strike and to not penalize those who participated in the strike.

On May 12, 1970, thousands of students from college campuses all across the country descended on Washington D.C. in one of the largest peace rallies of the era. In response to massive unrest, President Nixon organized the President's Commission on Campus Unrest. In their report, the commission denounced the shooting at Kent State as unjustified.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. According to this press release, why were students at UNC on strike?
2. What percentage of students joined the strike?
3. What types of activities were students asked to participate in?
4. Which activities would you have participated in and why?

The strike continues...

The massive rallies, marches, and convocations of the last week effectively aroused awareness and organized concerned students. However, we must now channel our efforts toward more constructive action. Rallies alone will not end the war in Southeast Asia or prevent arbitrary repression in the United States. They must be supplemented by every possible means of political influence even if it means talking to every voter in this town, in this state, in this nation.

— Tommy Bello, President of the Student Body

Concerns over Nixon's expansion of the war and the deaths at Kent State mobilized UNC students, both undergraduates and graduates, last week more rapidly and extensively than any comparable event or issue since the 1963 Speaker Ban Law. An informal poll conducted by several professors estimated that by Thursday about half of the student body was striking. That estimate has increased considerably since the Faculty Council passed the Amnesty Resolution and Faculty Council Chairman Dr. Okun released his supplementary statement to all faculty Friday afternoon¹.

The extreme concern and unprecedented political consciousness are certainly impressive. Yet they are useless unless they serve to facilitate some concrete action, to reach some goal. The purpose of the strike is to express and to voice our dissatisfaction with American participation in the Indochina war. But more importantly, the strike frees students from normal academic commitments so that they can use this time for constructive action. Many such actions are being organized and deserve widespread support: canvassing, letter writing, raps², and making appointments where possible with Congressmen in Washington.

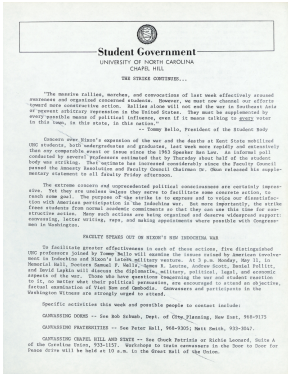


Figure 1.

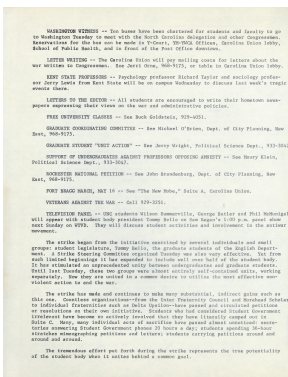


Figure 2.

Page 1 (top) and 2 of the press release.

Faculty speaks out on Nixon's new Indochina war

To facilitate greater effectiveness in each of these actions, five distinguished UNC professors joined by Tommy Bello will examine the issues raised by American involvement in Indochina and Nixon's latest military venture. At 3 p.m. Monday, May 11, in Memorial Hall, Doctors Samuel F. Wells, James R. Leutze, Andrew Scott, Daniel Pollitt, and David Lapkin will discuss the diplomatic, military, political, legal, and economic aspects of the war. Those who have questions concerning the war and student reaction to it, no matter what their political persuasion, are encouraged to attend an objective, factual examination of Viet Nam and Cambodia. Canvassers and participants in the Washington Witness are strongly urged to attend.

Specific activities this week and possible people to contact include:

CANVASSING DORMS – See Bob Schwab, Dept. of City planning, New East, 968-9175

CANVASSING FRATERNITIES – See Peter Hall, 968-9305; Matt Smith, 933-3047.

CANVASSING CHAPEL HILL AND STATE – See Chuck Patrizia or Richie Leonard, Suite A of the Carolina Union, 933-1157. Workshops to train canvassers in the Door to Door for Peace drive will be held at 10 a.m. in the Great Hall of the Union.

WASHINGTON WITNESS — Ten buses have been chartered for students and faculty to go to Washington Tuesday to meet with the North Carolina delegation and other Congressmen. Reservations for the bus can be made in Y-Court, YM-YWCA offices, Carolina Union lobby, School of Public Health, and in front of the Post Office downtown.

LETTER WRITING – The Carolina Union will pay mailing costs for letters about the war written to Congressmen. See Jerri Orne, 968-9175 or table in the Carolina Union lobby.

KENT STATE PROFESSORS – Psychology professor Richard Taylor and sociology professor Jerry Lewis from Kent State will be on campus Wednesday to discuss last week's tragic events there.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR – All students are encouraged to contact their hometown newspapers expressing their views on the war and administrative policies.

FREE UNIVERSITY CLASSES – See Buck Goldstein, 929-4051.

GRADUATE COORDINATING COMMITTEE – See Michael O'Brien, Dept. of City Planning, New East, 968-9175.

GRADUATE STUDENT "UNIT ACTION" – See Jerry Wright, Political Science Dept. 933-3047

SUPPORT OF UNDERGRADUATES AGAINST PROFESSORS OPPOSING AMNESTY– See Maury Klein, Political Science Dept., 933-3047.

ROCHESTER NATIONAL PETITION – See John Brandenburg, Dept. of City Planning, New East, 968-9175.

FORT BRAGG MARCH, May 16 – See “The New Mobe,” Suite A, Carolina Union.

VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR – Call 929-3251.

TELEVISION PANEL – UNC students Wilson Summerville, George Butler, and Phil McMunigal will appear with student body president Tommy Bello on Sam Ragan’s 1:00 p.m. panel show next Sunday on WTVD. They will discuss student activities and involvement in the antiwar movement.

The strike began from the initiative exercised by several individuals and small groups: student legislature, Tommy Bello, the graduate students from the English Department. A Strike Steering Committee organized Tuesday was also very effective. Yet from such limited beginnings it has expanded to include well over half of the student body. It has stimulated an unprecedented unity between undergraduate and graduate students. Until last Tuesday, these two groups were almost entirely self-contained units, working separately. Now they are united in a common desire to utilize the most effective non-violent action to end the war.

The strike has made, and continues to make many substantial, indirect gains such as this one. Countless organizations – from the Inter Fraternity Council and Morehead Scholars to individual fraternities such as Delta Upsilon – have passed and circulated petitions or resolutions on their own initiative. Students who had considered Student Government irrelevant have become so actively involved that they literally camped out in Suite C. Many, many individual acts of sacrifice have passed almost unnoticed: secretaries answering Student Government phones 20 hours a day; students spending 36-hour stretches mimeographing petitions and letters; students carrying petitions around and around and around.

The tremendous effort put forth during the strike represents the true potentiality of the student body when it unites behind a common goal.

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Notes

1. UNC’s Faculty Council voted on a proposal to allow students to obtain credit for the spring semester, even though classes and final exams had been disrupted by the student strike. If a student was on strike, he or she could ask the instructor to either assign a grade based on work completed by May 6, the day the strike began, or to allow the student to complete their work and write the final exam after the strike ended.

2. Raps in this context means informal conversations.

About the author

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Figure 2 (page 2)

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