Memorial Day Count-Down

Fifth Estate Collective

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On Moratorium Day, October 15, 1969, over 20,000 Detroiters marched to Kennedy Square to demand the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

On April 15, 10,000 marched along the same route.

On May 8, 6,000 persons protested the invasion of Cambodia and the Kent State massacre.

On Memorial Day, 750 people again made the Woodward Avenue trek to Kennedy Square to hear speeches before going to Selfridge Air. Force Base for a peace picnic called by the GIs stationed there.

Jim Lafferty, co-chairman of the Detroit Coalition to End the War in Vietnam, is not particularly disturbed by the decreasing turnouts for the demonstrations his organization planned. "We didn't expect a large turnout on Memorial Day," he told the Fifth Estate. "We knew most people would be off on a holiday, but we didn't want an opportunity to pass where Memorial Day was celebrated in the right way. Most celebrations glorify war, we wanted to show our solidarity with GIs and demand an end to war," he said.

After the Kennedy Square rally people piled into buses provided by the Coalition, including an English double decker model, and drove the 25 miles to Selfridge Air Force Base. The peace picnic was a quiet afternoon affair with raps from the American Serviceman's Union spokesmen, a few guitars, some fried chicken and a guerrilla theatre skit. The ASU felt that the low-key affair significantly helped their organizing efforts on the quiet base.

Lafferty feels that the anti-war movement has periodic lulls and sees a time of newly generated activity approaching. Specifically he mentioned the demonstration against Spiro Agnew on June 15 at Cobo Hall and the Emergency Anti-war Conference in Cleveland on June 19–20.

"The Agnew demonstration is involving a lot of groups that are not primarily concerned with peace, such as labor and human rights organizations," Lafferty said. He expects a large turnout at the 7:15 P.M. picket line and the 8:30 rally at the foot of Woodward.

Preparing for the "Emergency National Conference" against the Southeast Asian war is now a major part of the activities of the Coalition. "The main purpose of the conference is to bring together the new forces that have entered the anti-war movement and to forge a program," Lafferty said. "It's basically to decide where to go from here." The new forces Lafferty is talking about is the sudden entrance of significant sections of the labor bureaucracy into the anti-war movement.

The meeting has the endorsement of Gus Scholle, President of the Michigan AFL-CIO, Tom Turner, President of the Detroit AFL-CIO and many other labor officials from across the country including teamsters, electrical workers, meatcutters and the farm-workers. Information on travel to Cleveland and further details may be obtained by calling the Coalition at 873–4322.

Others are not as optimistic about the anti-war movement and particularly about the perspective put forth by Lafferty and the Coalition.

Frank Joyce, recently returned from North Vietnam, feels that new directions are needed for the anti-war movement if the number of participants is to stop its decline. "The time is past when coalitions can be

sustained around a single tactic such as the peaceful, legal mass mobilizations," he said. "For that matter a coalition is needed which can move not only around the issue of the war in Indochina, but the deepening domestic crisis as well," he added.

Joyce feels that the base of the anti-war movement has grown so fast that a realignment is necessary to include new sectors which are in motion. This means locally and nationally the formation of alternatives to the existing coalitions. To this purpose a national convention has been called for June 27 and 28 in Milwaukee to discuss new strategies for a summer program.

The Strategy-Action Conference, as it is being called, will coincide in time and place with a summer planning meeting of the Student Strike Committee, which was organized out of the Yale strike last month.

Those calling the meeting include representatives of the black movement such as David Hilliard of the Black Panther Party, Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and George Wiley of the National Welfare Rights Organization, as well as many white groups.

At Fifth Estate press time complete details of the Milwaukee conference are not available. Those interested in attending should call People Against Racism at 871–2222 or this paper at 831–6800 for further details.

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