

Midland Anti-Napalm March

Ron Halstead

1966

On August 7 and 8 about 100 persons from cities in Michigan and Ohio gathered at Midland, Michigan, national headquarters of Dow Chemical Corp., to protest Dow's participation in the manufacture of napalm.

On Sunday, groups of protesters distributed leaflets to churchgoers, calling on the people of Midland to be aware of their involvement in the deaths of people in Vietnam. In the early afternoon a rally was held in Central Park. This soon became an open forum as people from Midland came forward to voice their opposition to the making of napalm or to voice their support of its manufacture. Lane Vanderslice and Peter Steinberger of Ann Arbor Students for a Democratic Society fielded questions from the audience. One resident of Midland challenged the assertion that Dow is profiting from napalm and suggested that it may be losing money instead, to which Barbara Burris, of Detroit SDS, replied that Chemical and Engineering News of March 14, 1966, reported that Dow raised the price of its polystyrene shortly after they began using it in their new napalm.

On Monday morning the protesters met the workers as they entered the Dow plant. Some leaflets read in part: "We are not trying to be holier than thou. You make the compound which makes napalm stick to the skin of its victims—the men, women and children of Vietnam. You have to share the guilt for this."

There was little response from the workers. One worker gave the picketers a copy of a company memo which had been posted on bulletin boards. Addressed to "all Dow employees" it explained that polystyrene was made in Midland and sent to the Dow plant in Torrance, California, there to be used in the manufacture of napalm. However, the company disclaimed any responsibility for its use and asked that the emotional protests of a few people be ignored.

During the picketing of the Dow offices which followed, a group representing the protesters met with Mr. David Coslett, manager of news and information services for Dow Public Relations. He took a statement which the management of Dow was asked to sign. It read: "We of Dow Chemical Company pledge to stop our company from producing napalm, components of napalm to be supplied to other napalm manufacturers, and any other weapons of war and of the destruction of human lives." Mr. Coslett was of the opinion that this would not be so signed. From this meeting came an appointment for August 22 with Herbert Doan, president of Dow Chemical. As the protest is a nation-wide action, it is hoped that New York will send a representative to that meeting.

A march down Main Street followed. Marchers carried signs reading "Dow shalt not kill" and "If you liked gas ovens, you'll love napalm." They chanted "Napalm burns, Dow earns" and sang "no more napalm." Most of the townspeople seemed simply puzzled and curious, but the presence of the protesters had enabled a few Midlanders to participate in the protest. Following the march people met at a park at the edge of the town to plan a continuing protest aimed at stopping the manufacture of napalm.

Related

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