

NYC March Biggest Ever

Fifth Estate Collective

1967

On Saturday, April 15 between 400,000 and 500,000 people marched in New York City and in a single voice demanded the end to mass murder in Vietnam.

The Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam described the demonstration as “the largest of any kind ever held in the history of the U.S. for any reason.” In San Francisco another 40,000 marched the same day.

The Mobilization Committee, which coordinated the protests, were overwhelmed by the turnout. They had originally expected about 100,000. The Committee estimated about a quarter of the participants came from outside of the New York area including over 1,000 persons from the Detroit area who made the trek on 9 buses and a special train.

The distorted crowd figure of 125,000 marchers began when the NEW YORK TIMES estimated the crowd assembled at the United Nations Plaza at 1:00 p.m. to hear the speakers at 125,000. This was accurate at the time, but marchers poured into the plaza for another four hours even after a driving rain had begun. The parade route was jammed from the start at Sheep Meadow in Central Park at 72nd and Central Park West to the UN Plaza at 46th and 1st Ave. and from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. the stream was unbroken.

The daily press account characterized the march by the most extreme behavior exhibited by the participants. Certainly, there were hundreds carrying Viet Cong flags and signs expressing solidarity with anti-imperialist movements; there were thousands of hippies with long hair bedecked in flowers, bells, balloons, carrying huge plastic bananas and signs saying LOVE; there were 200 courageous men including, a Green Beret who burned their draft cards and 100 Sioux from South Dakota, who said they were “on the warpath” in their opposition to the war, who led the march.

But for all the beauty and power and courage these people brought to the demonstration the average marcher was indistinguishable from an average citizen. Most were just plain Americans who were revolted by their country's participation in this brutal war against the people of Vietnam.

The most significant political development of the march was the uniting of the peace and civil rights movements in common cause. Dr. Martin Luther King, one of the featured speakers said, “the U.S. has become the principal purveyor of violence in the world today.” Stokely Carmichael of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee said that the U.S. had become “a rapist of the colored peoples on this earth—a rapist today of Vietnamese freedom.”

He drew thunderous applause when he shouted “Let's show the world that we won't be taken in by the racist McNamara, the fool Rusk, or the buffoon Johnson.” He led the crowd in chanting, “Hell no, we won't go!” in reference to the draft.

Things are not going to stop with the trains returning home to Detroit and other points west, but rather increased anti-war activity is expected. The Mobilization Committee is sending a representative delegation to Washington, D.C. to see President Johnson on May 17th to seek answers to questions raised in a telegram sent to the Chief Executive. It is not known whether his lordship will grant the Committee an audience.

The Student Mobilization Committee, the group which coordinated Vietnam Week proceeding the New York demonstration, has announced a full summer program of anti-war activities. At a national meeting in Chicago May 13 and 14 plans will be formalized for extensive community work, anti-napalm activity, leafleting and organizing among U.S. troops, and encouraging resistance to the draft.

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