

# Equal Justice—A Joke in Detroit

Fifth Estate Collective

1967

Justice was stood on its head at Detroit's Records' Court as an anti war activist was convicted of Disturbing the Peace for trying to keep order at a teach-in last November (see *Fifth Estate*, Nov. 15–30, 1966) and a member of the right-wing organization Breakthrough, who assaulted the usher in full view of hundreds was found innocent.

James Griffin, a member of the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam, was arrested after he attempted to quell a disturbance created by several members of Breakthrough at Community Arts Auditorium on the WSU campus. He was found guilty by a jury in Records' Court after a vicious red-baiting attack by the prosecutor and sentenced by Judge Robert Colombo to two years probation and \$400 "court costs."

The harsh penalty is particularly severe in light of the fact that the maximum sentence for the crime is 90 days in jail and \$100 fine.

On the other hand, when the Breakthrough members were brought to trial they received much different treatment. One right-winger was charged with Disturbing the Peace and the other, Richard Campbell, was charged with assaulting Griffin as the usher was being held by WSU Security Police. Campbell's assault on Griffin was witnessed by about 100 persons including the News Editor and one of the Co-Editors of this newspaper.

The two right-wing defendants waived a trial by jury and asked that Judge Colombo try them on the basis of testimony presented at the Griffin trial. On May 2 Colombo found both Breakthrough members innocent of the charges against them. He based his decision on the fact that Griffin's conviction meant that Griffin and the other ushers had caused the disturbance and that Breakthrough was the victim of the disturbance.

Several members of the teach in audience waited at the Court for several days at the request of the prosecution, but, were never called to testify.

The real blame does not lie with Griffin and the other ushers who were reasonably trying to protect the right of their group to hold a peaceful meeting. Instead, it lies with the WSU administration that demanded that the teach-in sponsors permit Breakthrough members to attend the gathering knowing full well that the only purpose the right-wingers had in attending would be to disrupt the meeting.

Further blame can be placed at the feet of Don Stevens, Director of the Campus Police, and his fledgling cops who completely mishandled the situation from the beginning, allowed the disruption to occur, arrested Breakthrough members only after insistence from the crowd, and finally allowed Griffin to be assaulted while in their custody.

Griffin's case is presently in the process of being appealed to a higher court. If his conviction is allowed to stand it could be a precedent that will be used again to prohibit groups from protecting their meetings from disruptions. Efforts are underway to organize a broad defense committee. For further information call 831-6135.



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