

# Roll On, Columbia!

Tom Hamilton

1968

New York, May 22, (LNS-NY) Round two of what has now turned into a naked fight for power between the striking students of Columbia and the Administration's proxy, the New York Police, turned to European tactics in the hours before dawn May 22.

The night before, after a confrontation forced by the second student occupation of Hamilton Hall in four weeks, the University upped the ante to immediate suspension for anyone caught outside the dormitories. The students replied with bricks and flaming barricades.

The showdown began the afternoon of May 21 when Mark Rudd, SDS and student Strike Committee leader, and three other students were ordered to appear before Columbia disciplinary Dean Platt. "Failure to appear", the summons read, "will result in immediate suspension."

The Strike Committee called a solidarity rally at 3:45. Even Dean Platt attended and gave his definitive views on the Gym Crow issue: "I'm not in a position to have a valid opinion because I don't know all the facts". Then ten minutes before the five o'clock suspension deadline, the nearly 1,000 people at the rally marched into Hamilton Hall and camped in front of Platt's office while he conferred with the lawyers and parents of the students involved.

Rudd's lawyer claimed the University was putting the Students in double jeopardy since their civil cases were still pending and that the newly set-up joint disciplinary committee had exclusive powers to suspend the students.

Platt didn't accept these arguments and announced the suspensions. Hearing the news, Rudd came before the crowd and shouted, "I hope I speak for everybody. STRIKE!"

Five minutes of loud chants: "Strike, Strike" proved Rudd did speak for them.

But there was a grave split on tactics and a long, often bitter, debate conducted by the loose rules of participatory democracy began.

The first decision was to exclude reporters from CBS and *The New York Times*, both headed by trustees of Columbia.

There was a scuffle when a CBS cameraman tried to film this vote. He and later a plainclothesman were shoved out of the building.



New York riot policemen in Columbia's Hamilton Hall keep close watch over dangerous singing students.

Photo by Juan Caicido (LNS)

At 7:30, the acting dean of the college gave everyone ten minutes to clear the building. His announcement was treated with repeated shouts of “Up against the wall, motherfucker!” Ten minutes later he came back and announced that everyone who did not leave would be busted and suspended. This suspension threat was soon extended to anyone arrested anywhere on campus.

The debate continued on whether more arrests would further the strike demands while a crowd was — massing outside. A group of jocks, the campus conservatives, began lobbing eggs at the front of the hall. A line of community sympathizers bore the brunt of the egg attack on their picket signs.

Outside Hamilton Hall, forty students rushed a minor building, but a dean blocked their way. “All right,” one student shouted, “we’ll go where we are loved,” and they marched to Grayson Kirk’s office chanting “From Ike to Kirk we went from jerk to jerk.” Kirk was seen pulling the blinds down on the windows, a few of which were soon shattered by rock throwing students.

At 2:00 AM the cops were spotted near campus. About 500 students rushed to the only two campus entrances left unlocked and constructed barricades. One was built of police barricades reinforced with pieces of campus fences and a fire hose, the other of fences and trash barrels.

After some hesitation the cops snuck into Hamilton Hall through a tunnel normally used for taking out garbage. Inside were 131 students. The ‘cops tried to take them out the front door, but those on the outside held the doors, forcing the cops to leave the way they came.

By now there were about 2,000 students running all over campus. One with a bullhorn urged a crowd of 250 to “get” two plainclothesmen. The plainclothesmen grabbed him, and the crowd went after them. They escaped only when uniformed cops came to their aid. Fires were set in two campus buildings.

At this point, Columbia President Grayson Kirk ordered the police to clear the campus of all students. Dean Platt, relaying this announcement at the sundial in the middle of the campus, was cursed and his bullhorn was yanked away from him and used by leaders to urge students to return to the barricades.

At one of the barricades students tore bricks out of the pavement and heaved them at cops. The cops soon dismantled the other barricade, however, and a phalanx of two hundred riot police charged onto campus swinging clubs, scattering everyone in sight.

It took over 30 minutes of such charges by the cops to clear most of the students off their campus. Even then, whenever the cops pulled back from the entrance of a dorm, the students would pour out of their buildings, hundreds screaming the Algerian guerrilla war yell made famous here by the film *Battle of Algiers*.

At one point, the police charged into one of the dorms, Furnald Hall. Most of the students in the lobby made it to the second floor balcony which overlooked the lobby below. Capturing one student in the lobby, five cops began kicking and beating him. The enraged students threw potted plants, lamps, ashtrays at the cops below. The cops charged up the stairs into the second floor balcony, where two plainclothesmen captured at least one student, LNS reporter, Norman Jenks, and beat him with handcuffs.

For over two hours the campus resembled an occupied but unsubdued rioting ghetto. Several times during the night students attacked the police. Sixteen policemen were injured.

Over forty students were also injured. Within minutes of the first police charge, stretcher bearers could be seen scurrying across campus with the wounded. At least one student suffered a fractured skull; a girl was seen badly bleeding after she was pushed by the rushing cops through a window of the student union building.

Strike leader Dino Pabon, a black, was beaten in front of the student union building by two black plainclothesmen while a third held a gun on the watching crowd.

Two other strike leaders were charged with multiple felonies—Marty Kenner of SDS and Ray Brown of the Student Afro-American Society. There were also reports of plainclothesmen pulling strike leaders out of crowds by name and then beating or arresting them.

Police announced they had netted 174 arrests, but this may not include people taken to remote precincts. The campus is once again a garrison university. Grayson Kirk says graduation will be conducted as usual on June 4. No one believes it.

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #55, June 4-18, 1968

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