

GIs Demand Rights

Fifth Estate Collective

1969

FT. JACKSON, S.C.—Anti-war GIs here are circulating a petition addressed to their commanding officer calling on him to have a meeting on the post to discuss the war in Vietnam.

[See Ft. Jackson Leaflet in this issue.]

They also want to discuss whether their rights as citizens and soldiers are being violated by post authorities. The answer seems obvious. Since the soldiers calling themselves GIs United Against the War in Vietnam began their petition drive there has been a steady stream of harassment and attempted intimidation of their group by Army officials.

The Brass has been getting more upset as over 400 petitions have gone out across the base getting over 200 signatures in two days.

Army authorities directed their initial attacks against a group of black GIs in “B” Company, 14th Battalion, 4th Combat Support Training Brigade, stationed at Ft. Jackson. The black soldiers, numbering up to 30, had gathered several evenings in the barracks to hear taped speeches of Malcolm X and to discuss the war in Vietnam as it relates to black soldiers.

The brass, apparently afraid to see any GIs get together to discuss the war, and especially concerned if the GIs happen to be black, responded in two ways. First they informed the company that this was the “upper respiratory infection season,” and therefore no more than eight soldiers at a time could congregate in the barracks rooms. These rooms, which have eight bunks, had been where the men were holding their meetings.

Secondly, the officers launched a campaign to intimidate the GIs by arresting three black soldiers, Pvt. Davis, Madison and Toomer and preparing court-martials against them on trumped-up “assault” charges. A fourth GI, Pvt. Hart, who was not arrested, also faces a court-martial.

Another Afro-American leader of the group, Pvt. Pully, is being tried for allegedly refusing to go to bed. Moreover, rumors of further arrests on serious charges are rampant at the base.

There have been attempts to stir up racist fears and hostility against the antiwar soldiers with tales of “Mau Mau” and “Black Panther” conspiracies. They have not been successful: the number of GIs involved has grown, white soldiers have joined the blacks and Puerto Ricans initially involved, and GIs from four different battalions have become active in the group.

The GIs protested most strongly the punitive transfer of Pvt. Joe Miles, a leading spokesman for the group. In a highly unusual move, Pvt. Miles was given three hours to clear post on Friday, Feb. 14, and to report to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

Related

See *Fifth Estate's* Vietnam Resource Page.

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