

LYTTON PLAZA: WHAT HAPPENED

by fred nelson



First, the antecedents. Past issues of The Free You have given detailed coverage to the community center search, and the first-refusal agreement with Warren Thoits, whose subsequent withdrawal, for suspected political reasons, is the focus of the current controversy. The Peninsula Observer and, in a more elliptical way, the Palo Alto Times have covered the street action. This article is intended to give the general membership a sequential summary of events.

(THE PLANNERS)

The initial demonstration, held in Lytton plaza at noon, August 30, was planned by the Ad Hoc Committee to Liberate Downtown Palo Alto, which was assembled by Bob Cullenbine, community center coordinator, to provide a broad base of community involvement in the event. The AHC consisted of members of the following groups: the MFU, the Peninsula Observer, Peace and Freedom movements of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, the Resistance, Whites Against Racism, the War Resisters League, Human Institute, Esalen at Stanford, Concerned Citizens of Palo Alto, the Red Guard and the SDS. The demonstration was planned to dramatize the community center-Warren Thoits-monopoly landlord problem to the people of Palo Alto. The planned demonstration included an audience-involvement sociodrama, music and speeches. It was expected that the participants would then move on to the Palo Alto Office Center plaza, where a further discussion would be held. The AHC clearly agreed that the right and responsibility to make further decisions, or changes in original plans, would belong to the people on the street. The MFU coordinating committee endorsed these plans. It was noted at the time that the planning was going beyond the confines of the MFU because the issues were broader than the simple MFU community center question.

(THE FIRST DAY)

The plaza demonstration and march to the tower went as planned. There, with little discussion, the crowd spontaneously surged into the tower, occupying a large, unfinished area next to the office of Mr. Thoits, who was out of town. Open-mike debate continued all afternoon; among the participants were the Tower manager and police chief William Hydie. The crowd voted to stay in the tower until asked to leave under threat of arrest for trespass. This happened at 6:15PM. The crowd then moved to the Hamilton and Emerson building - the planned community center - which was then partially occupied, the MFU claims illegally, by rare book dealer William Wreden. A key was produced, the building was entered and held until midnight, when Hydie announced that Wreden would sign a trespass complaint if the building was not vacated. The evening featured a Hussain Chung psychodrama, Walt Reynolds bread and music by the Douglas Highchair. Care was taken to protect Wreden's books.

(THE LIBERATION FESTIVALS)

The participants then decided to move to Lytton plaza the following night for the first "Liberation Festival," featuring rock music and more free bread. The plaza was chosen "because it was there," and because of prior harrassment of young people who had gathered on the plaza in small groups during the summer. The format was continued the following two weekends, and a brief effort was made to start a "coffee house of the streets" during the week. The MFU voted funds for printing and sound equipment. At its September 5 meeting, the MFU declined to vote on a motion to assume full leadership and responsibility for any damages, but after damage to the plaza occurred, the MFU voted to pay for it. A continuous effort was made to keep the plaza clean. The MFU also voted to ask its officers to point out in any discussions that its prior stands and philosophy have been non-violent. The festivals continued through September 20, when the MFU withdrew from active participation due to be-in planning pressures. The United Student Movement continued the festivals, with continued AHC and MFU support (see MFU policy statement on page 2.)

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AN APPEAL TO PASSION

by vic lovell

Mark Jensen dislikes confrontation politics. The present state of the movement in Berkeley depresses Mark. I, on the other hand, am inspired. There is no accounting for tastes.

When Mark asserts that I, or other principle spokesmen for the tactics we have used in Palo Alto am paranoid, or psychotic, or have some other form of mental illness or emotional conflict, he may be right and he may be wrong, but in any case he is irrelevant. When he asserts that our tactics are ineffective, he is relevant, but the facts prove him wrong.

We tried patience and goodwill, and nobody would rent us a building. Since we have caused all this trouble, everybody who is anybody in the middle levels of local power has wanted to talk to us. All sorts of tentative offers have been made, both in the direction of making public property available and in the direction of making private property available. We have been winning even with Stanford students, who constitute almost half our constituency, gone for the summer. In addition, we have brought together before, made a great many people aware of the Free University, and educated ourselves and others regarding the nature of the Palo Alto power structure.

Mark is right when he indicates that we have been disingenuous in talking about dope, and about getting kids off the streets. We would, of course, like to liberate the young from establishment pharmacology - alcohol, barbiturates, tranquilizers - and discourage them from using opiates or speed, but most of us intend no more with regard to marijuana or LSD than to provide a word of caution and a good setting to be high in. Our intent is not, as we have sometimes implied, to work with the establishment for more effective pacification. This "dishonesty," is not, as Mark claims, a result of confrontation tactics, but rather just the opposite: a hangover from the candy-ass liberal line which we were taking before we adopted these tactics.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

(Due to several deft and complex editorial efforts the piece by Mark Jensen to which this article refers, which normally, and in all justice, would appear before this article, appears, instead, after; specifically on page 6, to which you are earnestly referred.)

(from p. 3)

(COMMUNITY MEETINGS)

Meanwhile, several meetings were held to discuss all this. James Kemp of Lytton Savings initiated an information exchange meeting with AHC members, where he stated that such use of the plaza "can't go on indefinitely." Lytton then obtained a permit to fence off the plaza, when and if it should feel this necessary. A subsequent letter from Kemp, on September 20, flatly forbid use of the plaza for certain festival activities, and gave notice of possible legal action if these restrictions were violated (Lytton plaza, while designed for the "use and enjoyment" of the citizenry, is privately owned, by Lytton Savings.) Kemp also initiated a private meeting with city officials and member-merchants of Downtown Palo Alto, Inc., from which we have only vague reports. The AHC also met with George Morgan, PA city manager, who insinuated that the AHC was being "subverted," and who referred the AHC to Ken Wilson, city recreation manager. Wilson offered city facilities for classroom use, and attended other AHC and MFU meetings. The AHC also met with Frank Crist, Jr., President of DPA Inc., for an informational exchange, and Crist agreed to "look into the matter" of downtown space, and to discuss the problem with other DPI members. The AHC then met with and obtained support from a professional group, members of the Palo Alto Family Service agency, Miramonte drop-in center, MD's of the Haight Clinic, Santa Clara County Public Health Department and Adult and Juvenile Probation departments, the Palo Alto Human Relations Council and the Mental Research Institute. This group suggested that trained social workers be in the community center, which fit perfectly with MFU plans.

Police Chief Hyde made several personal efforts to stay in touch with the AHC.

(MFU VANDALIZED)

The MFU store was vandalized and robbed on Sept. 3, we suspect in reaction to a sequence of Palo Alto Times articles which gave extensive play to a Viet Cong flag displayed at the Tower demonstration, and which did a generally heavy job of red-baiting. Menlo Park police investigated, but have reported no arrests. (The Coro Foundation, in a recent study of "what makes Palo Alto tick," which included the demonstrations, reported that many Palo Altans blindly tend to equate any efforts for change with "communism.")

(WHAT ARE THE INTERNAL QUESTIONS?)

MFU participants are divided on philosophy and tactics but agree unanimously that we need a center and that we are on the right side of several large questions of legal and social justice. On a tactical level, the large majority of participating members have supported the directions the protest has taken, although there has been some divergence as issues have become more complex. Internal critics have argued, variously, that confrontations are a poor means to our common end; that AHC meetings are held without sufficient notice to MFU members; that aggravation is emphasized to the exclusion of love and nonviolence; that the festivals are a poor reflection of what the community center would be; that they have too many idle onlookers, not enough participants; and that the MFU has forfeited responsibility for the community center to a disinterested street crowd. (The latter argument has been answered by the assertion that the festivals are wholly separate from the community center per se; that the downtown issue in general is broader, and concerns more people; and that these people are doing the planning and work.)

(WHERE FROM HERE?)

This matter concerns all MFU members, not just those present and voting. What happens depends on who comes and votes at the regular meetings, and all members are invited to invoke this right. Further actions will be discussed after the be-in.