

Report on the Struggle at Case-Western Reserve University, by Roger Rudenstein, June 7, 1969

It has often been pointed out that Case-Western Reserve University, conservative "Harvard of the Midwest", would be the last school to explode - if ever. In concert with its conservative temperament, the school has a super-liberal president who talks from both sides of his mouth, usually to great effect. In the last two weeks, however, CWRU went the route of campuses all over the country.

On May 13, members of the July 23rd Defense Committee, a Cleveland black group, peacefully took over a seminar on Civil Violence sponsored by the History Department and turned it into an Ahmed Evans defense meeting. Ahmed Evans is a black nationalist sentenced to death after a racist frame-up trial in Cleveland. As a result of the meeting takeover, 75 students met the next day and drew up four demands to present to President Morse.

Included in the demands was that President Morse request the immediate release of the Masotti Report, a report prepared by CWRU Professor Louis H. Massotti, which contains, according to Newsweek, "a scalding indictment of the police" involved in the Glenville incident which resulted in Evans' frame-up. The group of students, a very loose coalition of YSA, SDS, Youth Against War and Fascism, liberals, and independent radical students, called for a rally and march to present Morse with the demands.

The rally on Thursday was larger than anyone expected - over 200 people. The students then marched to the administration building to see President Morse. However, when we got there the one entrance to the building was blocked by about 30 fraternity men. After fruitlessly trying the push through these people, the students demanded that Morse come down and answer the demands. Morse agreed and addressed the students, answering "no" to each demand in turn. The demonstrators then went over to a nearby auditorium to discuss the situation.

Ten minutes later Morse sent a messenger with a statement agreeing to the first demand - the immediate release of the Masotti Report. We then decided to add a new demand, that CWRU take a public stand for the release of Ahmed Evans. It was also decided to occupy Hayden Hall, the Political Science building, and use it as an organizing center.

At Hayden Hall, about 200 students discussed the demands and formulated them as follows: We demand 1) that the university publicly support the immediate release of Ahmed Evans and further demand that it use its resources to secure that release, 2) that the university shall not permit the military, the National Guard, or the Cleveland Police to come on campus for repressive purposes, 3) that the Civil Violence Research Center be investigated (this was later changed to "abolished"), and 4) that the university adopt a policy against participation in any form of research to be used for the suppression of the black movement or any similar social movement, and against all secret research not available for scrutiny by the community.

The discussion at Hayden Hall was a democratic one in which students spoke out against the complicity of the university with the racist suppression of Ahmed Evans and the black liberation struggle.

The fact that the Masotti Report was prepared using student and university facilities, the expansion of the University into the black community, and the billeting of the National Guard on campus during the Hough and Glenville rebellions were cited in this regard. A rally was held later that night at liberated Hayden, renamed "Ahmed Evans Hall." Over one thousand students, faculty, and community people came to discuss the demands. Some were hostile to the protest and expressed their opposition. After long discussion, several hundred stayed to plan a sit-in for the following day.

On Friday, May 16, 300 students marched to the administration building to hold a non-disruptive sit-in. As we marched to Morse's office, Morse, surrounded by body-guards and advisors, marched toward us. It was Morse's intention to come to Hayden Hall and confront the protestors, instead of vice-versa. However, his timing was off and so he only managed to capture some of the people at the end of the line who followed Morse back to Hayden. The main body continued to the administration building where the doors were open and no obstructions were in the way. When we got inside, we found that Morse's office was open, but blocked by several campus cops. We then sat on the floor and demanded that Morse come back so that we could speak to him.

Meanwhile, Morse was having his own rally at Hayden Hall. Several hundred people had gathered round him and were asking him questions about the issues. The sit-in sent a delegation to Morse inviting him back to his own office. Morse agreed and all the people followed him to the administration building where a large crowd of fraternity men and students had gathered. Morse's reply to the demands was the same as before. He claimed the University was neutral and so could take no public stands. He further claimed that the University had nothing to do with the Masotti Report since it was funded by the Eisenhower Commission.

After the meeting with Morse, the demonstrators met inside the administration building. A "Free Ahmed" rally had been called for downtown Public Square in conjunction with the Black Panthers. However, earlier in the day Mae Mallory had attacked the Panthers, comparing their nationalism with that of "Chiang Kai-chek" and condemning the downtown demonstration. Many of the students were overwhelmed by this evidence of political disputes in the black community and there was lengthy discussion. YAWF, which is close to Mae Mallory, told students that their struggle was on the campus, not in the community at large. Therefore, they urged defeat of the rally. However, the fact that the dispute with the Panthers was the real reason for this formulation became abundantly clear in the discussion. The overwhelming majority finally voted in favor of the rally. Hayden Hall was then re-occupied to serve again as an organizing center.

The Saturday rally was completely rained out. In spite of the rain, over 60 students waited downtown under a bus-stop for over an hour. To make matters worse, the Panthers had been strong-armed in the black community by cultural nationalists around Mae Mallory and the July 23rd Defense Committee. As a result, they never showed up at the rally. Claiming that protestors had broken into the files of the Civil Violence Center, housed there, the administration closed down Hayden Hall while the protestors were gone. When the people from downtown returned they found the building locked. A door was finally opened and the much-reduced group held a meeting until an administration spokesman threatened

then with trespass. The meeting was then moved to the Student Union.

Over the weekend those who were left - the political people on campus - debated questions of tactics and strategy. The most demoralized people kept demanding that there be "political analysis" behind the demands. Since the movement was made up of diverse tendencies, each with their own political analysis, the attempt to find a common analysis was doomed to become an exercise in futility. Questions such as "Should blacks shoot white cops on principle" were seriously raised and debated. There was also a great deal of soul-searching on the part of SDSers and the independent radicals. The YSA took the position that what was necessary was an agreement on further action and pushed for it consistently. Finally the Black Panthers came and demanded the movement get off its ass and do something. This had an effect on the SDSers and independents and it was decided to go into the classrooms and educate people to prepare for a Tuesday rally and another march on the administration building. Professor Zilsel and two others decided to sit in Morse's office until he said "yes" to the first demand.

All day Monday the movement went into classrooms patiently explaining the Ahmed Evans case and the University's complicity with it. A fact sheet was widely distributed, giving the facts about the frame-up of Ahmed Evans. A leaflet was distributed by the movement proving that the University directly paid Masotti for work on his report in addition to what he received from the Eisenhower Commission. The leaflet urged students to attend a rally and take further action.

At this point, when there was a general ebb in the struggle, two groups tried to take over the leadership. SDS handed out its own leaflet claiming that the movement was "chickenshit" and that all those who wanted militant action should follow SDS. The trouble was that the CWRU SDS chapter had dissolved long ago and the leaflet was issued by just a handful of SDSers. Another group, the Maoists, who played virtually no role in the previous week's events, put out a paper purporting to speak in the name of the "CWRU Student Movement", calling for a "mass rally" on Wednesday.

In spite of these confusing notes, over 300 people came to the Tuesday rally and proceeded to march to the administration building. About 100 went inside to witness Professor Zilsel's protest. Some of the SDSers tried to break in the door to Morse's office, which was locked, but were prevented by administration finks and "frat" boys. Finally Provost Stein's office was unlocked and the sit-iners entered. Tired of "militant action," the few SDSers retired to the side-lines, one of them going inside the office with Professor Zilsel.

The University's reaction was to issue a "temporary restraining order" against "Professor Zilsel et al", threatening anyone who "disrupted the normal function of the University" with contempt of court. Sheriff Krieger and six county cops came onto campus to serve the injunction. In a leaflet the students stated: "This injunction was petitioned for by President Morse on Monday, May 19, that is, prior to the action of the movement, not in response to the actions taken. Morse has stated 'This University has not and will not invite anyone on campus for repressive purposes.' He has quite clearly and publicly lied to the University." A group of Concerned Faculty, disturbed by Morse's actions met and issued the following: "... (we) urge that the

injunction of May 20, 1969 be rescinded as an unwise response to little provocation...three-fourths of those asked supported all 4 demands, the remainder support the last three without exception." The effect of the injunction on the students was to unite the student body against the administration.

Upon being faced with threat of arrest, students left the administration building. The three sit-iners also decided to leave upon being promised a negotiating meeting with the administration. The administration also promised to convene a University-wide meeting to discuss the issues.

At a subsequent planning meeting the movement discussed its next move. A proposal was made by the YSA for a demonstration in support of Ahmed Evans to be built out of the University-wide meeting. An SDS leader proposed, instead, that a "People's Army" be organized to go into the university meeting squirting water pistols. The former proposal was adopted, whereupon the SDSers and the YAWFers walked out, threatening to call a "militant action." As it turned out, the only concrete thing they did was to issue another SDS leaflet the next day entitled "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," which attempted to explain why they were dropping out of the movement.

Meanwhile the administration called together a hand-picked planning committee for the University-wide meeting. On it were student government leaders, the Dean of the Law School, pro-Morse faculty, and one protestor. The administration's planning committee decided on a tight structure for the meeting, in which there would be speakers for and against the demands and tactics. Questions and discussion, however, were not to be allowed. Speakers would have strict time limits -being reminded first by a horn, then by a bell, when time was up.

In response to this move, the movement drew up a petition demanding a free and open meeting. Over a thousand signatures were collected in one night. Signatures included faculty, staff, and numbers of fraternity men who wanted an open meeting.

Over 2,000 people came to the University-wide meeting in Emerson Gymnasium on Friday, May 23. After a speech by President Morse, the first speaker, a movement professor, proposed that discussion and questions be allowed. He was ignored by the administration-picked "neutral" moderator. The next speaker re-iterated the proposal and another presented the petitions which were like-wise ignored. Finally one of the movement speakers managed to take a vote on the proposal. The moderator cut off his mike before the "nay" vote could be taken. Since the administration would not even allow a democratic discussion on procedure, a walk-out was called and over half the audience rose and walked out. It was announced that the movement had an open mike in front of the administration building for those interested in discussing the issues. Half an hour later the gym was deserted except for some pro-Morse faculty who were left talking to themselves. By contrast the open meeting was large and successful.

After the demonstration on Saturday, in which a hundred people marched to "Free Ahmed Evans," the movement reached its natural ebb with the arrival of finals week and the end of school. The struggle for the freeing of Ahmed Evans will go on in the summer in the community as

a whole to be taken up on campus when school begins again in the fall.

One of the important lessons of this struggle is that the movement always kept in mind its limitations. In order to win we knew it was necessary to educate the average student to the facts of the Ahmed Evans case and University complicity. When Morse behaved, at the beginning, in a super-liberal manner - letting us sit-in in the administration building, ignoring our existence - we weren't fooled into committing an act of desperation. We patiently explained that Morse was lying about University neutralism and the Masotti Report. Thus, when Morse pulled out his injunction, people were horrified and amazed, and the movement gained support. Similarly, when Morse planned an undemocratic "open" meeting, we educated people to that and championed a democratic meeting. This action gave us general campus sympathy. Although final exams cut short our efforts, we anticipate a new upsurge in the fall which will start on the basis of this past struggle.

Role of the YSA in the Struggle

The YSA played a leadership role in the struggle at CWRU. In the course of events we had the opportunity to counterpose our perspective against that of SDS, YAWF, the Maoists, etc. In every case, we won because the other tendencies either elevated tactics (such as sitting-in) into principles or they simply dropped out of activity when things didn't seem to be going just right. Thus the YSAers were the consistent, rational, political leaders of the struggle. As such we won the respect of the active independents who consulted with us on all aspects of the movement.

One thing we insisted upon was that all major decisions be made democratically by mass meetings. Planning sessions were open-ended, and no one was excluded from being in the leadership.

The main problem for the YSA was the fact that the revolt at CWRU took place in the middle of our petitioning for the SWP campaign and the building for a city-wide May 31st antiwar march. This put a limit on the amount of forces we were able to throw into the Ahmed Evans movement. Of a campus fraction of 13 at CWRU, only 3 could be spared to play a leadership role. The other comrades attended some of the mass meetings but were mainly assigned to do antiwar work and petitioning. As a result we were not able to project the YSA in as big a manner as we wanted (constant literature tables, huge YS and Militant sales, etc.) Another problem was that with people leaving immediately and with finals, it was difficult to get new recruits in spite of the upshift in sympathy for the YSA.

The concrete gains for the YSA from the struggle are: 1) the YSA was shown to hundreds of independent activists as the most effective radical campus group, and 2) the possibility in the fall to revitalize the struggle and recruit a huge campus YSA at CWRU.