

Witnesses report

Facts about PL attack on SMC meeting



Boston national steering committee meeting of SMC, May 24

Photo by Dave Wulp

Some 55 to 60 people from the Progressive Labor Party and SDS, organized in a body, attacked and attempted to storm into a national steering committee meeting of the Student Mobilization Committee in Boston on Sunday May 24 (see *The Militant*, June 5). This violent assault was repulsed and the SMC meeting continued with its business.

The following fact sheet detailing the events was compiled from individual eyewitness reports, a tape recording of the proceedings of the meeting, and from information on the registration forms that had been filled out by the participants in the meeting. It was released by the Student Mobilization Committee.

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The expanded national steering committee meeting of the SMC on May 24 had been called to discuss the May student strike upsurge and to chart the plans of the SMC for the coming months.

The SMC national steering committee is composed of one representative from each SMC chapter and one representative from each national organization working with the SMC. The May 24 meeting was expanded to include invited representatives of student strike committees. Two hundred thirty-six people registered as delegated representatives and observers from local and regional SMC chapters, student strike committees and other antiwar organizations from every part of the country.

Nine of the people who registered identified themselves as members of SDS or Progressive Labor Party. All

were admitted into the meeting, although none were delegated representatives from SMC chapters or strike committees. Although both SDS and PLP are politically hostile to the SMC and the two national organizations do not work with the SMC, one each from the two organizations was admitted as a delegated representative. The others were admitted into the meeting as observers.

John Pennington, national secretary of SDS, complained about the registration procedure and the presence of SMC ushers, stating to the registrars that "this is the way that fights start."

At the meeting that was just getting underway Nat Goodman, who is a member of SDS and a candidate member of PLP, approached the door and attempted to enter. He was asked to fill out a registration form first, as everyone else had done. He refused and attempted to push his way into the meeting. He was pushed back by the ushers at the door, but was not hit.

At that point, those members of SDS and PLP who had already been admitted into the meeting room rushed out. They demanded that Goodman be admitted without registering although they were familiar with the registration process and knew he would be admitted if he registered. They began a scuffle with the SMC ushers in the hallway in an attempt to force their way in. They were quickly rebuffed and restrained.

When the scuffle was over, those who had left the meeting requested to be let back inside. A discussion took place inside the meeting. The

incident in the hallway was described and a history of PL and SDS assaults on the antiwar movement was reviewed. Most recently this included assaults on an antiwar meeting at Columbia during the strike and two assaults in the Boston area: 1) At the April 15 antiwar rally in Boston, a large PLP and SDS group attacked the speakers platform; 2) On May 3, after threats had been made against him for days, eight members of PLP and SDS attacked and beat Bob Bresnahan, an SMC activist, who had been a marshal captain on April 15.

Despite the scuffle in the hallway, the meeting decided to let the two delegated representatives from SDS and PLP back in. This would enable them to express their point of view, but would guard against the now-apparent danger of disruption of the sessions. This offer was not accepted. The SDS and PLP group withdrew to the main hall, held a discussion, and threatened to return in force.

After the lunch recess, fearing a renewed attempt to disrupt or break up the meeting, many of the people in attendance joined together to set up a defense. Cooperating in this effort were individuals from SMC, Beacon Hill Support Group, Socialist Workers Party, Citizens for Participation Politics, Draft Information Center, Workers League, National Organization for Women, Female Liberation, Vietnam Referendum '70, Young Socialist Alliance, International Socialists, and others.

These precautions proved necessary when, after meeting at the PLP headquarters, a large SDS and PL group returned, to storm the meeting. About 55-60 were observed coming in an organized group. They were met in the hallway outside by the united defense and the two groups stood facing each other. John Pennington and Neil Goldstein of the SDS and PLP group were admitted to the meeting.

Pennington addressed the meeting. He gave his version of the earlier incident and demanded that all the people in the hallway be admitted. He finished his statement by saying that his group was coming in anyway, and that "if people attack us on the way in, we intend to defend ourselves." He passed out a leaflet to the meeting which referred to the earlier incident and which stated, "The SMC leaders are bootlickers of the ruling class who back the liberal politicians by using force against the radicals and communists. Today's attack will not go unanswered."

Pennington left the meeting room, came out into the hallway and called out to his group to come in. The united defense would not let them through. The PLP and SDS group pushed forward, and started fighting in an attempt to force its way in. A pitched battle ensued. Several people were injured. John McCann, the Massachusetts statewide coordinator of Vietnam

Referendum '70 and a member of the SMC defense team, was pulled into the other line and severely beaten by six to eight people. His head and hands were badly bruised, his nose was broken, and an eye injured seriously.

Nevertheless, the defenders were determined not to let their meeting be broken up, and they successfully kept the attackers from accomplishing their purpose. When it became quite clear that they would be unable to force their way through, the PL and SDS group retreated. The SMC meeting then continued with its business. Despite the disruption, discussion of the student strike upsurge continued and plans were laid to build antiwar demonstrations on May 30 and the national antiwar conference in Cleveland on June 19-20.

The first order of business when the steering committee reconvened was a discussion of the attack and the response to it. Two motions were passed:

1) The national steering committee calls for a nationwide campaign against the use of violence within the movement and for the right of all groups to hold meetings without disruption. This motion passed unanimously.

2) The SMC also calls upon members of SDS and PLP to repudiate the attack made upon the SMC national steering committee by SDS and PLP. This motion passed with one dissenting vote.

We, the undersigned, were present at the SMC steering committee in Cambridge, Mass., on May 24, 1970. Although each individual did not witness every event described in the account, our observations coincide with this report, and collectively, we witnessed everything which took place. Signed by: Frank H. Adams, Draft Information Center; Pat Connolly, Workers League; Gus Horowitz, Socialist Workers Party; Mike Kelly, Boston SMC; Jean Lafferty, Boston Female Liberation; Carol Lipman, SMC; Caroline Lund, Young Socialist Alliance; John McCann, Vietnam Referendum '70; Katherine Page, Beacon Hill Support Group; Susan Steward, National Organization for Women; David Tedesco, Citizens for Participation Politics; Mike Urquhart, International Socialists; Tommye Weise, SMC.

Nat'l SMC statement on violence in the movement

The following is the text of the statement being circulated nationally by the Student Mobilization Committee as an important part of its campaign against the use of violence within the movement. The SMC is asking that the statement be endorsed by organizations and individuals across the country.

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We condemn the violent assault on the May 24 Student Mobilization Committee steering committee meeting in Boston by the Progressive Labor Party and SDS. This is not the first such hooligan attack directed at the antiwar movement by a few movement organizations. In fact, the instances of hooliganism within the movement have become all too frequent.

We condemn the use of violence as a means of settling political differences in the movement. This must not be tolerated. The free exchange of ideas is vital to our existence. We must be

able to hear, consider and test all points of view. In addition, hooliganism is self-defeating for all of us because it lends credibility to the government's attempts to slander the movement as basically violent and destructive.

We express our solidarity with the SMC whose meeting was subject to disruption and hooligan attack. We stand unequivocally for the right of all movement groups to hold their own meetings and demonstrations and to define the character of their own activities. Every group in the movement must have the right to make its own political decisions and statements without fear of intimidation, disruption or violence.

We call upon SDS and PLP to repudiate their actions of May 24.

We declare our unswerving commitment to the right of all movement groups to hold their own meetings and carry out their own activities without fear of violence from other groups.

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