

Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee
17 East 17 Street
255-1075

The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee condemns the complete suppression of constitutional rights and the unnecessary and sadistic use of violence by the New York City police at the Hilton Hotel on November 14th. The Parade Committee, a coalition of 150 anti-war groups, was responsible for organizing the demonstration, which drew over 6,000 people to protest the war and Dean Rusk.

It was obvious to those of us who arrived at the site early that the police had been briefed and were planning to use suppressive tactics on the demonstration. Never before in our two years of organizing peaceful protests have we arrived to find complete hostility and no one in charge. We got a complete run-around when seeking to set up the hitherto normal communication between coordinators of the demonstration and the police. By 5:25 pm, five minutes before the scheduled start of the picket line, the area on the west side of Sixth Avenue, across from the hotel, was sealed off to more demonstrators with only several hundred pickets inside. Our marshalls were refused permission to move freely to organize the other pickets down the block. The result was mass confusion, with people bunching up, unable to move, and leaderless.

By 6:30 pm, the police had completely sealed off the whole area from Fifth Avenue to Seventh Avenue, and 55th Street to 51st Street. No demonstrators were allowed in. Instead, they were told by the police to "go home" and were left with no form of peaceful protest. In addition, leafleters at 53rd Street and Fifth Avenue were ordered to move under threat of arrest. This was a complete suppression of our right to peacefully protest and leaflet.

Within the sealed-off area, demonstrators were crammed between barricades and the police permitted no communication between sections, by our marshalls. Demonstrators were unable to move and felt trapped and vulnerable. Our marshalls, who are trained to deal with potentially provocative situations, were unable to enter these areas to provide leadership.

When the police started using horses and clubs on demonstrators, people reacted first with fear and horror and then with indignation. The police were not dealing with an armed mob out to destroy life and property. Rather, they were using excessive and

sadistic brutality on an unarmed group of people protesting the war. When students at Fort Lauderdale "rioted" in the spring, overturning cars and breaking windows, police do not use violence like this against them. We feel that the violence was a direct response to the political nature of our demonstration -- namely protesting the war -- and we are outraged at its use.

The overwhelming majority of the demonstrators reacted to the situation with a remarkable show of discipline and self-restraint. The isolated instances of provocation on the part of a few individuals were, in our view, unwise and undesirable. We must state, however, that we understand how agonizing it is to watch someone being beaten brutally to the ground and to hold yourself back and not intervene. Thousands did just that.

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