

# LYTTON PLAZA: THE BEAT GOES ON

by fred nelson and vic lovell

Weekend happenings have been continuing in Lytton Plaza under sponsorship of the high school-based United Student Movement, and largely due to poor police tactics, nearly developed into a serious confrontation with Palo Alto authorities on Friday, Oct. 4.

That evening's event began with an open meeting conducted by the USM. Most of the participants were young, with a handful of members present from the MFU and other supporting groups. The crowd decided both that if the police attempted to shut down that evening's amplified music, they would surround the band and lock arms, and that they would surround the band and lock arms, and that they would avoid violence. 40 to 50 people, mostly young, volunteered to risk arrest by doing this.

### CONFRONTATION

Police Lt. Phil Ray arrived and issued a warning, heavier than before, to the effect that if complaints about the music continued, the music would have to stop, under threat of arrest. 6 to 8 plainclothesmen were then on the plaza. At 10:30, a police car came to a quick stop by the plaza, 2 officers jumped out and moved toward the band that was playing and the plainclothesmen moved in quickly after them. The crowd was surprised and the people rushed to lock arms around the band as planned, but ended up surrounding the police as well. The police, panicked, began to shove and kick their way out, and went across the street, where they were followed by about 50 people. The police car caught a light kick.

The plainclothesmen then retreated, heads hung, to the police station, followed by about 50 taunting people, who then returned to the plaza. (The Palo Alto Times report suggested that "the crowd lost its cool, and the police lost face.")

### MFU ABSENT

This action occurred while the entire MFU leadership was involved in a 40-hr. psychodrama marathon in Portola Valley.

When word reached them, the Free U members were deeply torn between continuing the marathon, designed to promote self-examination and to bind them closer as a spiritual community, and leaving to take part in the conflict. Finally, Jim Wolpman, Marc Porat, Kim Woodard and Vic Lovell left at 3pm Saturday to talk with Assistant Police Chief Clarence Anderson, in a meeting arranged by Wolpman. Porat alerted the media to possible Saturday night plaza activity, hoping that press presence would "keep the police honest." The Free U members, all sleepless, make several unsuccessful attempts to contact other plaza organizing groups to join them in the police meeting.

(David Shen, in the October 7 Peninsula Observer, implied that the MFU members failed to make a serious effort to contact others before meeting the police. The members involved admit that their efforts may have been ineffectual because of extreme fatigue, but insist that they did act in good faith, making repeated attempts to locate Bruce Franklin, USM leader Chris Merchine and others. Observer editor Dave Ransom, when reached, couldn't attend, and sent staff member Saul Wasserman to the meeting. Roy Kepler also attended. The MFU members have emphasized that they did not violate their own rule about restricted participation meetings but rather did what they could under high pressure, out of concern that people doing a Free U-initiated thing might otherwise be left unprotected, and hurt in a police confrontation.)

### MEETING THE POLICE

The meeting was restrained. Both sides seemed to want to avoid trouble. Anderson, referring to the Friday action, denied any intent to arrest, and said the officers who had converged on the band so rapidly had intended only to issue another curfew - noise warning. He wasn't challenged. The MFU people then talked to Anderson about tactics. He was told that the police shouldn't rush in and without warning demand the microphone; that they should ask for it from specific people we promised would be present, that they should issue their warnings, and if they felt it necessary, that they should state clearly ask dispersal of the crowd. They were advised that the music would then probably stop, and that they should allow, then, for an open meeting, giving both individuals and the group time to decide on appropriate action. Then, if they chose, the police could make their arrests.

This was a strong attempt to convince the police that the sudden, unexplained movement of the night before would probably lead to confrontation that neither side would particularly like. The MFU members felt the police had been ignorant in this area, and Anderson and an accompanying captain listened intently. We emphasized that the MFU was on a weekend retreat and not organizing or sponsoring the Lytton activities; that we were there because we initiated the demonstrations and wanted no street people hurt, but that we could make no deals. Anderson then asked why he couldn't talk to the "real" organizers, not the Free U. He was advised to try it, instead of having the people always having to come to him. He was unsuccessfully pressed for specifics about the nature, number and general source of complaints about the plaza activities, and was told that the MFU had no desire to bother people, and wanted to remedy complaints where this was justified (several personal tours by MFU members have proved that local residents and hotel guests, when inside their structures, can hardly hear the amplified music).

### SATURDAY NIGHT

The MFU people went back to the marathon and, after long discussion, half the marathon participants went back to the plaza for the evening. The others pledged to be with them in spirit to keep the community strong. A mantra was continually chanted as the MFU members drove down, walked around the plaza and sat down in the middle of it. No police interfered, and no police were pig-baited. The mood, for the first time, was truly jubilant. The crowd, this

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## MFU VOTES MEXICAN STUDENT SOLIDARITY

Archie Hunter, an organizer in the black community in San Jose, came to the co-ordinating committee meeting of Thursday Oct. 3 to tell us that he had sent several telegrams to black organizations around the country to organize a Mexican Student Solidarity Week for the next week. The Free University decided to allocate energy and money to work on the project. That same evening forty telegrams were sent to organisations on our lists around the country - SDS groups, telling them that we planned action in the Bay Area, and asking them to join in with us in their own areas. The following Monday a meeting of those interested from local groups, the Free U, Peninsula Observer, Santa Clara and San Mateo Peace and Freedom Movements, the Brown Berets, and the United Student Movement. After much discussion it was decided to hold a solidarity rally with the Mexican students on the Friday of last week at Lytton Plaza in Palo Alto, and to support the Bay Area wide protests of the weekend of Oct. 12 & 13 at the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco.

The demands cited on the leaflets printed for the demonstration called for boycott of the Olympic Games due to be held in Mexico City starting Oct. 12th. The demands of the students in Mexico (the unrest has now spread to most parts of the country) include repeal of an Anti-Subversive Act, the freeing of political prisoners, and an end to the violation of the integrity of university campuses by the invasion of police and troops in recent weeks.

The solidarity demonstration was held as planned on Friday Oct. 11 at Lytton Plaza, sponsored by the Ad Hoc Committee to Liberate Downtown Palo Alto (and Mexico City) and supported by people from all groups in the Ad Hoc Committee. The demonstration had added importance and meaning due to the arrest earlier in the day of Bob Cullenbine and Barry Greenberg of the MFU on trumped up charges of obstructing the police in the course of their duty at the previous Friday's Lytton Plaza street dance. Surrounded by police in riot gear we heard from the Brown Berets, the militant chicano organization, about life in contemporary Mexico and the parallels with the treatment of minority groups in the U.S.A. People, black and white, from the crowd laid it out like it is. The Newsreel, a San Francisco based group, dedicated to the making and sharing of movies about and for the movement, showed a movie on the fight for liberation. The S.F. Mime Troupe were there with a sketch on the Olympics, featuring righteous Avery Brundage and an "ungrateful" native. The evening at the plaza ended with a set by 39 Homer Lane, and the return of Barry and Cully from jail.

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

Contributions of money for the relief of the relatives of the dead, the injured and imprisoned in Mexico City, can be sent to Box MR, Peninsula Observer, 180 University Ave., Palo Alto. N.B. Please make checks payable to the Peninsula Observer, to avoid the possible stoppage of checks.

## Making It With the Times

from the Peninsula Observer

Standing in front of a backdrop of badly painted blue and silver sunbursts and fountains in the Children's Theater, John Lyman, assistant editor of the Paly Times, and city editor Robert Burgess gave the most boring lectures ever heard on the Peninsula.

They had handed out booklets entitled "Get Your News into the Palo Alto Times," and then they proceeded to tell the audience, composed largely of women's club publicity chairmen, everything that was written in the book. And they even SAID it was all in the book.

"We'll rewrite everything," "Call us if you want to ask anything," "Don't give us notices of your regular club meetings," they repeated over and over again.

But when question time arrived, they came in for trouble. Graham Lewis of the Free U stood up and asked about the blackout of news on Free U classes, since Burgess had just finished saying the Times loved news about classes. When Burgess denied there was a blackout policy, Lewis told him editor Alexander Bodi himself had boasted of the blackout. Burgess had no reply.

Marlene Charyn of the Observer pointed out that the blackout includes other groups the Times frowns on: "You called our former editor 'a leftist pamphleteer' and one of our current men 'the editor of a far-left underground paper.' You won't mention our name. We don't call your editors pamphleteers. We don't call your paper a pamphlet. You claim to be a mirror of the community. You only reflect what you like!"

When Lyman said he was not there to hear complaints, she challenged him to a discussion of the Times' exclusive policies. He agreed to meet members of both groups at the Times office. The meeting has not yet occurred. Then, after giving windy answers to questions from the straights present, Lyman finally recognized Free U coordinator Kim Woodard, who held up a board showing recent Times clippings knocking the Free U. Woodard began to say that the Times had lied about recent Free U activities, but Lyman cut him off. "I told you I was only interested in the next seventy-five years, not in the past seventy-five," he said. (The Times has been publishing that long.)

When Woodard persisted, members of the audience began to boo and Lyman closed the "clinic". As he did, the Free U's Robb Crist stood up and told the people they were watching a blackout in progress. "You see? It's just what they've been talking about. There's no free press or free speech. They let you hear what they want you to hear."

But the audience wasn't listening.

They were moving out disgustedly. A plump, middle-aged couple approached Marlene Charyn and Graham Lewis in the aisle and hissed, "Did you ever try being decent? Just decent?"

When the two looked baffled, the woman snarled, "Your whole crew is just rotten."

"Rotten to the core!" her husband echoed.

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time led by the MFU, danced out into the street. Later, cars were parked to block off the street, and the first true Lytton Plaza festival began. Taking the street was a political escalation, but the carnival mood denied this. The belligerence was gone.

The Times reported that Asst. Chief Anderson did not deem the street closing "of sufficient impairment to the very light traffic movement at the time to require action." "To me the tenor of the crowd was not anything...like Friday night," Anderson said. Anderson apparently learned an honest lesson in human relations, and the street people, for one good night, felt joy instead of fear or hate.

(A Palo Alto Times editorial on Oct. 9 attributed the lack of confrontation to "police restraint," claimed that this denied "to the older and more radical elements...that stuff they need for a real downtown blowup," and lamented that the only apparent legal way Lytton Savings can close the plaza to these activities is to close it to everyone, as urged by Downtown Palo Alto, Inc... which claims its interest is to open the downtown to the entire community.)