

Kent State Not End of Protest

Last week's feature story, Kent State Seven Years Later, by Gordon Turtle has aroused quite a readership response. This particular article, written by Sarah Butson, takes exception with what she sees as Mr. Turtle's pessimism concerning student activism in the seventies. Ms. Butson, 23, is a grad student in Animal Science working on a Master's in genetics. She hails from Guelph, Ontario and has contributed a number of articles to the Ontario.

In response to the *Kent State Seven Years Later* article (Gateway feature story, September 15) I would like to commend Gordon Turtle for his thorough description of the May 1970 Kent State massacre. The shootings at Kent provided history with one of the most powerful indictments of the American repression against anti-war protestors. To millions throughout the USA, Kent State demonstrated the link between the endless slaughter of the Indochinese people and the American troops in a hated war, and the willingness of the government to turn its guns on those who fought to end that war at home.

However, I differ with the author's somewhat pessimistic analysis of the event as harbinger of the death of student activism. The social and governmental crisis triggered by the Cambodian invasion and the Kent State massacre detonated a series of anti-war actions, surpassing all previously-conceived forms of protest. Explosions of anti-war action spread to 1,500 campuses; more than half of America's post-secondary institutions. Initially, students mobilized to shut down the schools, but the struggle developed further when campus facilities were taken over. The transformation of the campuses into "anti-war universities," converting them into instruments for political action and debate, and linking up this anti-war consciousness with other strata of society was an unprecedented development and a critical turning point in the student strike.

In Washington, more than 100,000 people demonstrated on May 9th; in Seattle, 30,000 marched on May 8th; in Chicago, over 60,000 people; in Boston, 50,000 attended a memorial rally; 50,000 in Minneapolis. The list continues.

This tremendous nationwide upsurge had a major impact on American trade unions, initiating a break with Meany's pro-war line. The first large layer of AFL-CIO unions and unionists publicly repudiated the line of support to the war that George Meany and his cohorts had developed in the name of organized labor for half a decade.

Similarly, the student anti-war movement affected the anti-war GI's who made their feelings known alongside civilian supporters in demonstrations at Ft. Bliss, Ft. Dix, Camp Pendleton and many other bases.

The May events led to an open rift in America's ruling

class, precipitating a crisis in the Nixon administration which split publicly not only over the war but over its effects on its (in)ability to rule the United States.

Strike councils that appeared on many campuses united the forces of oppressed minorities, Black and Puerto Rican communities, GI's and the workers' movement with students in a mass upsurge which literally rocked the nation. Together with the victories of the indefatigable Vietnamese, this display of power on the home front was a key factor in forcing the American government to withdraw its forces from Cambodia.

The American events of May 1970 did not lead, as the upsurge in France of May 1968 did, to a general strike of workers. Nevertheless, the American events marked a new high point in anti-war consciousness and action by important sectors of the American people and revealed that the American students had a political potential and weight that they themselves had never suspected.

While it is true that the following school year (1971) did not see a repeat of anti-war action at the same level of intensity as in May 1970, student activists continued to organize. In fact, on April 24th, 1971, the National Peace Action Coalition organized the largest and broadest demonstration in American history: 800,000 people took part in anti-war demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco.

In response to changes in the international and national political scenes, the Washington-Peking and Washington-Moscow summits, the detente, the demobilization of the anti-war movement and the crisis of leadership in the student movement, a decline in activism began towards the end of 1971. The signing of the Vietnam accords created the misconception among most people that the Paris agreements meant an end to US presence in Vietnam and an end to the war. These factors had a profound effect on student activism for a period of a few years, but it would be incorrect to state that the decline in mass actions signalled a reversal of the radicalization process. The relative calm on the campuses in the interval between 1971 and 1975 was heralded by the media as a return to the quiet 1950's. But this was nothing but wishful

thinking by big business commentators.

On the international level students have remained a powerful striking force. French students protested compulsory military service and plans to restructure the educational system during 1973 in actions which exceeded those of May 1968. In the same year, tens of thousands of British students demonstrated in support of British miners and against government attacks on financial assistance to students. High school students of Soweto in 1976 and this year continue mass protests against the barbaric apartheid system of South Africa. Brazilian students this past summer mobilized broad contingents to demand civil rights and an end to the extreme

governmental repression in Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy ...

In English Canada in 1976 there were a series of anti-cutback

struggles and demonstrations with students supporting workers in their fight against the wage and price controls. Here in Alberta there have been a

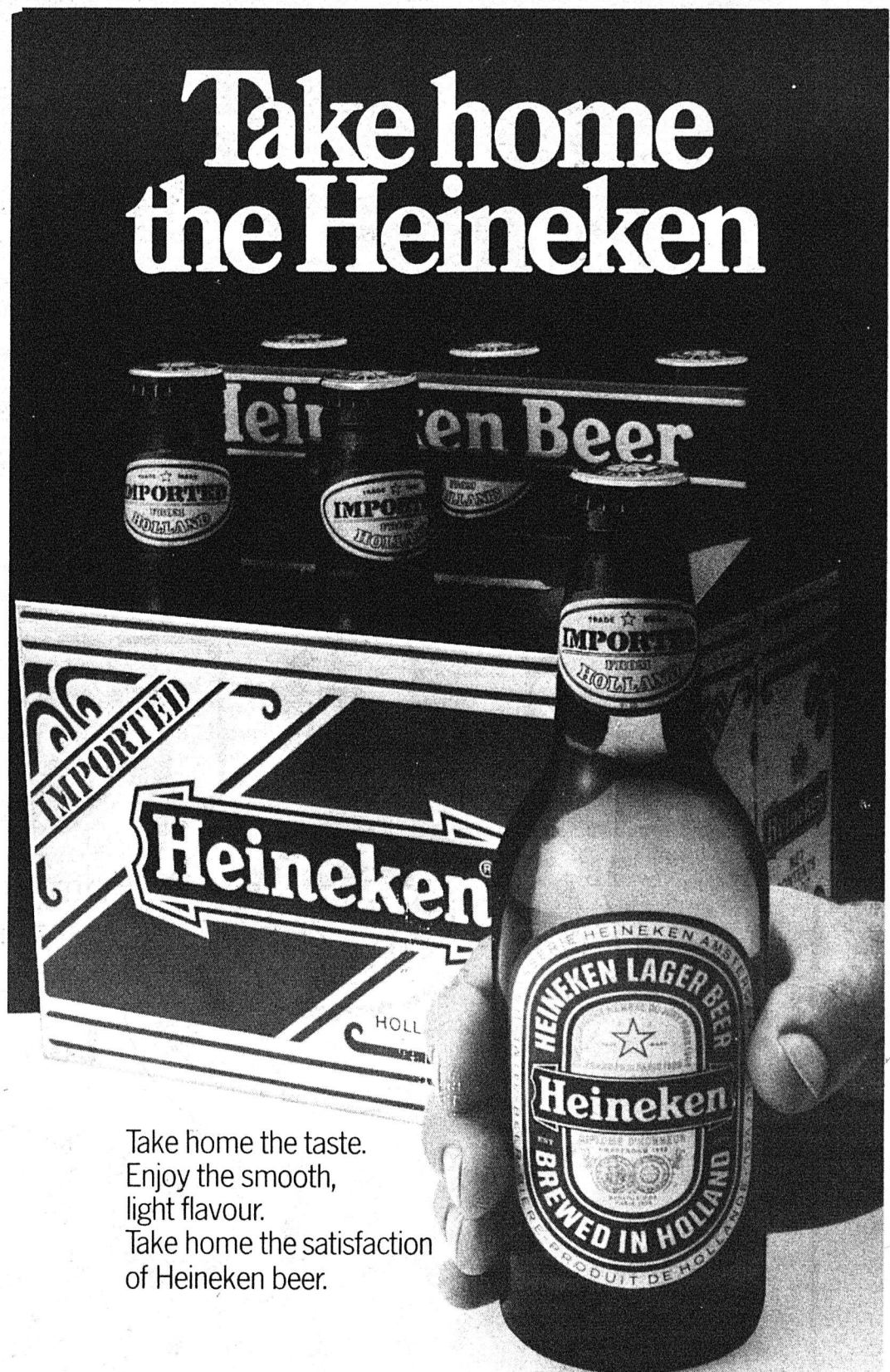
number of protests against tuition fee hikes, Canadian complicity in South Africa and discriminatory fee differentials for international students.

Quebecois students have displayed the highest level of combativity over issues ranging from opposition to the Language Bill 63 that instituted bilingualism and maintained the status quo in favor of

Anglophones in Quebec, to the right of the Quebecois to self-determination.

The perspective of a renewed student upsurge is indicated by the worsening of the economic crisis and the increasing militancy of the working class. The wealth of the political and organizational experience that has been developed in the student movement over the past years will continue to be tapped by future struggles. Student activism is NOT dead: the depth and breadth of the radicalization and the ongoing combativity of students as allies of workers on a global scale will bear witness to this position.

Sarah Butson



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