



Sir George Occupation Ends in Violence

MONTREAL (CUP) - The occupation at Sir George Williams University ended violently Tuesday (Feb. 11) and left in its death throes over a million dollars worth of damage, a fire and water gutted ninth floor of the school's Hall building, 96 arrests and numerous injuries to police, students and by-standers.

Monday night, the whole affair seemed calm and approaching satisfactory settlement. Tuesday morning, it exploded wildly out of control.

The spark to explosion, ironically, was a weekend-long round of negotiations between the occupying students and the administration. By Sunday afternoon, the negotiators had hammered out a working proposal - and that's where the confusion began.

The students' lawyer said he had been told by his administration counterpart that the terms of the agreement - acceptance by the administration by the administration of the five demands set by the occupiers in return for an end to the occupations - would be ratified by his superiors.

The occupiers sensed victory and arranged a party Sunday night.

Meanwhile, the administration lawyer took the agreement to principal Douglas Burns Clarke for signature. Clarke hesitated and said he wanted to sleep on it. The next morning, he did not sign but rather called a faculty association meeting to discuss the proposals. Spirits were still high in the two occupation centres - the computing centre and the faculty club - everyone waited for final victory.

But the faculty, after a stormy seven-hour session, rejected the proposal and replaced it with another one unacceptable to the students. The faculty was incensed over Clarke's morning suspension of professor Perry Anderson, ostensibly for his own protection.

The faculty had also supported the old hearing committee and was not willing to renege on that support.

Their refusal to accept the negotiated agreement had tragic consequences.

When the faculty rejection was relayed to the students, they greeted it with stunned resentment. Two weeks of frustration and wearying occupation sharpened into focus. Some occupiers cried, others hardened and called for a close-down of the school.

At that point, the principle of non-destructiveness still held.

The occupiers decided to seize the entire building. As a major portion rushed to lock all the entrances, a small group headed out into independent action. They swarmed into the cafeteria, seized chairs and tables and started barricading all the exits and escalators from the fourth floor to the eleventh.

To get into the cafeteria, they took axes to the locks, a move that brought the police in.

About 4 a.m., 50 uniformed police marched into

the school. As they tried to mount the barricades, they were washed away by powerful streams from fire hoses trained on them by the students.

But realizing the weakness of their position, the students retreated from all areas of the building into the computer centre.

That was the breaking point. Once they had watered down the police, they were there to win or lose, win or lose big.

The police followed them up. They broke through the barricaded glass doors of the computer centre and were again met by jets of water from within.

Two policemen were cut - it is unclear whether they were injured by window glass or flying bottles, it is probable that both were involved.

Realizing they hadn't the strength to get in, the police settled down to a seige. Forty of them stood outside the centre in ankle-deep water singing "Michael Row the Boat Ashore".

The students then started to smash up the centre. They tossed IBM cards, print-outs, papers, research documents - anything they could find - out the windows. These were followed by typewriters, portable computers, adding machines. Nine floors down, the city streets, now cordoned off by police for three blocks, were thick with papers. By-standers, at least 1,000 strong in early morning, waded through reams of it.

The students then announced they would destroy the computers, one by one, until the police left. This was at 8 a.m. and Clarke had had enough. He told the police he "wanted them out of there, and I don't care how you do it".

The police told him they had to wait for the riot squad, Montreal's crack team designed for crowd control and riot-busting. The squad arrived at 9:30. But they didn't move in until 1 p.m.

Various administrators, thinking they could save the computers, wanted to hold off.

Meanwhile, a huge mob had gathered in the streets below. The majority cheered the police. Others, about 400, supported the students. Fist fights erupted continually, at least five people were arrested throughout the day. And the police, as they moved in to quell the fights, used billyes to break up knots of people, injuring several.

One police van was set aflame but the fire was quickly extinguished.

By 1 p.m., it was clear the computers were being destroyed. The riot squad was given orders to move in and started breaking down the barricades.

At that point, the occupiers smashed the remaining computers and set fire to the barricades.

Flames shot out 15 feet and the police drew back. The blaze was visible for three city blocks. Thick black smoke filled the corridors and at least five policemen and firemen were overcome by smoke and rushed to hospital.

The students, ringed by fire, stayed in a back

room near an open window. Out in the corridors, newsmen and other students fled the area to get away from the smoke, unbearable even two floors away. Dozens retched in nausea.

The fire began to move in on the students. The riot squad managed to put out the fire and get the students out before they were all either burned or overcome by smoke.

The police seized 96 and kept them lined up against a wall for two hours as they put out fires and awaited instructions.

Only a few of the occupiers managed to evade arrest.

At 6 p.m., they were shoved into nine paddy wagons and taken away to be processed. The university will press charges against all of them - one official said: "We'll hit them with every criminal charge possible."

The students have been charged with conspiracy, arson and mischief. Mischief alone carries a maximum sentence of life, arson a maximum of 14 years.

At least 20 of the 96 arrested were women; the group is almost equally mixed, black and white.

The damage: at least a million dollars worth of computers. The centre itself won't be functional against until next October.

The whole ninth floor of the Hall building is butted. Walls are down, floorboards torn up, windows smashed.

Water damage has wrecked at least five other floors.

Valuable research projects were destroyed.

Animals in psychology experiments on the eleventh floor all died.

Some academic records and exam marks are forever lost.

96 students now face severe criminal charges and lengthy sentences.

The university will be shut down at least until Monday and may take months to get back to normal operation. And of course, the Anderson case may never be properly handled.

It's a sad story of frustration, rigidity, weakness, absurdity and betrayal. An administration roundly scorned by students for mishandling the affair finally came to grips with the situation and lost out to the faculty.

The students, who had taken such delicate care of the computers for two weeks, finally destroyed them and lost any chance they may have had of legitimacy.

The faculty, never militant throughout and at no time the leaders in the affair, raised its hackles at the worst possible time.

And everybody loses - over a dispute about the composition of a committee.

