

U-M faculty's historic teach-in of 30 years ago 'A VITAL SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY'

By Matthew Newman

The University of Michigan has long been recognized as one of the focal points for protest against the Vietnam War during the late 1960s and early 1970s. March 24 marked the 30th anniversary of one of the most significant anti-war demonstrations to be held at the university, the first "teach-in."

The U-M teach-in was among the first of a form of campus protest that was to spread nationwide. The teach-in became a new means of mobilizing students to examine policies of their government that they previously took for granted.

Throughout the fall of 1964, in spite of increasingly harsh criticism by the Michigan Daily, the Vietnam conflict did not appear to be a major issue on campus. This began to change in February 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered the bombing of North Vietnam. The president's escalation of the war outraged many professors who had worked hard for his victory over the avowedly hawkish Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election. By March 1965, many faculty members believed it was time to act against the war.

On March 11, 15 to 20 University professors met to discuss tactics. Sociologist William Gamson proposed a one-day strike or "moratorium" during which faculty protesters would refuse to teach classes and instead devote the day to teaching interested students about US involvement in Vietnam. After seeking the support of their colleagues, the number of professors committed to the moratorium grew to 49, only three of whom were tenured.

The proposed moratorium was immediately criticized by then-Gov. George Romney and the state Senate, which passed a resolution condemning the moratorium and demanding that the faculty members be punished. Nonetheless, the faculty group remained firm. "We respect the governor's feelings and the state Legislature's," Gamson, speaking for the group, responded, "but in the end, we have to answer to our consciences and meet our responsibilities to students, University and



country."

In contrast to their public display of resolve, many faculty protesters began to doubt the wisdom of a moratorium. Their concern was that a strike would divert attention from the issue of the war itself. One member of the faculty group, Prof. Anatol Rapoport, recalled, "It quickly became apparent that the Vietnam issue was about to be completely submerged in the ensuing fight about legality, the ethics, the prudence and the effectiveness of the work moratorium as an instrument of protest by academics."

One week before the moratorium was to take place, faculty organizers met to coordinate their plans. At the meeting, those faculty members who were uneasy about the moratorium forced the group to reconsider the tactic. After a discussion that continued until 4:30 the next morning, some faculty members suggested that rather than refraining from teaching they should intensify it by holding special lectures and classes at night.

The change to a teach-in benefited the protesters in several ways. Although state governmental officials were still not pleased with the activities of the faculty, they no longer called for punitive action against the protesters. Support for the teach-in among faculty members surged from the original 49 to over 200. Perhaps of greatest importance, a relieved University administration gave its support to the teach-in, permitting school auditoriums and P.A. equipment to be used for the event. Curfew for female students attending the late-night teach-in was suspended, helping both to boost attendance and convey to students the importance of the event.

In the days leading up to the teach-in, the organizers visited dorms, Greek-system and cooperative houses to encourage student participation, and local religious leaders spread word of the teach-in to their congregations.

The professors' protests against the war had gained so much credibility that Michigan Supreme Court Justice Paul Adams announced his intention to attend on the ground that "these professors are doing a vital service to their country in promoting debate on the question of US policy in Vietnam." While Ann Arbor preparations proceeded, organizers were urging colleagues at other schools to hold their own teach-ins. By March 24, the day of Michigan's teach-in, 35 other colleges and universities were planning similar events.

The teach-in began at 8 p.m. Organizers who had hoped for an attendance of a thousand were astounded when more than three times that number appeared. It was the largest demonstration in University history. The four Angell Hall auditoriums were packed, and the audience also filled the neighboring courtyard and many building passageways to hear three lectures



criticizing their government's Vietnam policy.

A midnight rally followed the lectures, and then faculty and students divided into small discussion groups. More than 600 students were still present at 8 a.m., perhaps the strongest evidence of student interest in the event. The teach-in also received extensive media attention. Journalists from all over the country were on hand, and a Detroit television station covered it live.

Three bomb scares over the course of the evening illustrated the intense opposition to the teach-in by those who considered debate over and opposition to US policy during a military conflict to be unpatriotic or disloyal. The first threat was delivered in East Quad as students gathered to watch a movie on Vietnam before attending the teach-in. The other two bomb threats occurred in Angell Hall during the teach-in, forcing helmeted police to clear the building and search for explosives. Undaunted, the speakers continued their remarks outside in the bitter cold until it was safe to return.

The three lectures were delivered by policy experts from outside U-M, two of whom had spent time in Vietnam. The first speaker, Robert Browne, was an economist at Farleigh Dickenson University, who had spent three years in Vietnam as a State Department adviser. Browne argued that the war in Vietnam was unwinnable. Given the positive coverage of the war in the mainstream news media at that time, Browne's view was one that most in the audience had not heard.

The second speaker was John Donahue, a Michigan State University anthropology professor who had done field work in Vietnam. He emphasized the long history of foreign aggression against Vietnam and charged that the United States was merely the latest in a line of aggressors, and not a benevolent savior.

Last to speak, Arthur Waskow of the Institute for Policy Studies, concluded his lecture outside after the third bomb threat. Waskow said US policymakers were demonstrating a "new arrogance" that rested upon "an old assumption that military means still apply to political ends. "We have not yet learned that the political freedom of the Vietnamese people cannot be advanced by a military policy that relies on burning villages with napalm and on torturing the villagers for information. Tactics like this can produce chaos or advance totalitarianism, but they cannot protect or advance liberty."

More than 80 counter-protesters attended the teach-in. Some participated in a discussion challenging the three speakers, but most sought to disrupt the event by heckling and chanting.

The teach-in proved to be a forum that appealed to broad sections of the student body. Indeed, it created a new relationship between students and faculty. Following the event, the Faculty-Student Committee to Stop the War in Vietnam was formed to organize other protest activities. As



Waskow observed, "This teach-in is in the true spirit of a university where students and faculty learn from each other and not from the calendar."

The Michigan teach-in became a model for other colleges. After speaking in Ann Arbor, Browne flew to New York for a Columbia University teach-in attended by 2,500 students. In the following weeks, teach-ins took place at Michigan State, Western Reserve, the University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania and University of Buffalo.

On May 15, 1965, professors from across the country staged a national teach-in in Washington DC that included members of Congress and State Department officials among its attendees. Television networks and major newspapers covered the event, and radio stations broadcast the proceedings to 122 campuses throughout the nation.

Spurred by U-M's faculty, the American academic community played an increasingly strong role in opposing the war in Vietnam. Once isolated and ignored, concerned scholars were now forcing their way into the national consciousness to voice rational objection to federal policies.

The intellectual nature of the teach-in gave the movement a respectability that previous anti-war protests lacked, thereby broadening mainstream opposition to the war. The fusion of scholarly argument and personal concern gave the academic community a powerful new role in the emerging debate over Vietnam.

Matthew Newman '94 of Ann Arbor studied the U-M teach-in for his undergraduate honors thesis. He is now studying philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University.



Last March 24, organizers of and participants in the 1965 teach-in returned to Angell Hall to give today's students 'the notion that they can make a difference,' said Elizabeth Kaufman of Ann Arbor (far right). The idea for the teach-in was born in her and her late husband's (Prof. Arnold Kaufman) living room. Others who were at the '65 events were (l-r) Prof. J. David Singer, Bill Ayers, Bernadine Dohrn, Alan Haber (at microphone) and Prof. Frithjof Bergmann. About 100 students attended the '95 teach-in.

Source: University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI) commemoration site for the 40th anniversary of the "Teach-Ins" at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pdenning/teachin/history.htm>. Website provides a history of the teach-in movement.

ORIGINAL FLYER FOR THE 1965 UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN "TEACH-IN"

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN TEACH-IN PROTEST ON THE WAR IN VIET NAM

March 24, 8:00 PM to March 25, 8:00 AM

Evening Conference: 8:00 PM - Midnight : Angell Auditoria

Chairman: William Gamson, U.M. Sociology Department.

Speakers: Robert Browne, formerly of Aid for International Development, a six years resident in Viet Nam.

John Donahue, M.S.U. Anthropology Dept., a field worker in Viet Nam.

Arthur Waskow, resident fellow in the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C.

most of the conference time will be devoted to questioning of the speakers.

Protest Rally: Midnight - 1:30 AM : Library Steps.

Speakers: Frithjof Bergmann, U.M. Philosophy Department.

Kenneth Boulding, U.M. Economics Department.

Allan Haber, a founder of Students for a Democratic Society.

J. Edgar Edwards, Campus Minister of Guild House.

Teach-In: 1:30-7:00 : Angell and Mason rooms and Auditoria: Resource people noted below:

First Seminars: 1:30 - 3:30 : The War in Viet Nam.

Aud B: Ayoub, Gyr, Wolf, Zweig	M 439: Friedell, Krystall, Ogelsby, Weinberg
Aud C: Boulding, Broomfield, Collver, Magidoff	M 443: Berkowitz, Burling, Leavitt, Newcomb
Aud D: Mayhew, Moskos, Rapoport, D. Weinberg	M 447: Bergman, Jackson, Mann, Posner
M 435: Diamond, Mayer, Isaacson, Rabow	M 451: Murphy, Pilisuc, Rothman, Sneed

Second Seminars: 4:00 - 6:00 : Viet Nam continuation and related topics:

Aud B: Krystall, Mayer, Newcomb, Wolf	M 439: Berkowitz, Mann, Ogelsby, Sneed
Aud C: Ayoub, Boulding, Moskos, Rabow	M 443: Bergmann, Burling, Magidoff, Rothman
Aud D: Friedell, Isaacson, Rapoport, Zweig	M 447: Collver, Jackson, Mayhew, Pilisuc
M 435: Diamond, Leavitt, Posner, J. Weinberg	M 451: Broomfield, Murphy, Gyr, J. Weinberg

• Movies continuous from 1:30 in Angell A. Protest workshop continuous from 1:30 in Mason 42

Meeting to plan further action, 6:00-7:00 in Angell B.

Concluding Rally: 7:00-8:00 : Library Steps.

Speakers: Thomas Mayer, U.M. Sociology Department
Nancy Gendell, Ann Arbor Women for Peace.

Coffee will be served in the fishbowl throughout the night. Participants are urged to read the U.S. white paper on Viet Nam and the rebuttal by I.F. Stone. Several thousand copies have been distributed.