

Statement by  
President Clifton R. Wharton, Jr.

May 11, 1972

It is with great personal sorrow and regret that I must report the necessity to use police action on the campus of Michigan State University this afternoon. This was done with the most extreme reluctance and only after there was no other alternative.

The occasion was a deliberate and apparently well-planned move to take over and totally disrupt the university's administration building. This effort went far beyond anything that can be termed a "peaceful demonstration."

The demonstrators ripped doors off their hinges, broke onto the roof, forced their way into the cashier's and registrar's offices, sought to enter rooms occupied by a \$1 million computer and intimidated many employees.

Despite this extreme provocation and damage, every attempt was made to avoid the use of police. I personally walked from floor to floor with a loud-speaker, telling the demonstrators to leave the building or else face arrest. Everyone, including those on the roof, had more than ample warning and opportunity.

To their credit, most did leave voluntarily in response to my request. Yet, as always in such situations, there were those relatively few hard-core disruptors and agitators who demand physical confrontation. They refused to leave the building until escorted by police.

At this point it was obvious that no alternative remained but to summon police. It should be made absolutely clear that the State Police, who had come to the campus to lend assistance, remained several hundred yards away from the building until it was absolutely necessary for them to move in as a last resort.

And it was a last resort. There was no way in which responsible administrators of this university could have permitted this group, some of whom had already shown that they were bent on physical destruction, to have control of the building. Police used a minimum of force to clear the building and left the scene within an hour after their arrival. There were no arrests.

I have noted that the effort appeared to be well-planned. This is based on the obvious fact that literally within seconds after the rally had "voted" at Beaumont Tower to "take over" the administration building, members of their group had entered the building, had physically blocked employee efforts to lock the doors, and in certain instances had keys to selected sensitive rooms.

This senseless episode was another unfortunate display of how a militant few seek to use genuine concern over such major issues as the Indochina war to wage their own war of confrontation and disruption. Typically, they included those who are not students at this university.

I, as president of this university, have sought in every way over the past few days to be as responsive as is humanly possible to the genuine issues raised by the anti-war groups of students and faculty.

Within limits beyond which I cannot go and still retain my accountability to our students and the people of Michigan, I have taken every step I can to meet the legitimate suggestions which give expression to the sentiments which most of our students and faculty obviously feel.

But this is not enough -- or perhaps I should say that anything would not be enough -- to satisfy those few who seek aimless confrontation and purposeless disruption as their price. The events of the past few nights on Grand River Avenue, and this afternoon on campus, give ample evidence of this.

One can say only in their behalf that they were for the most part non-violent. Yet, any acts which needlessly and physically deprive others of their rights, cannot truthfully be called "peaceful."

Fortunately, the great majority of our students and faculty have remained calm and have gone about their business of education during this trying period. Despite what I know are intense feelings on the part of many regarding the war, they have seen the ridiculousness of seeking to use this institution as the scapegoat to express those feelings.

I am sure they join me in denouncing these distressing events and will continue to help in maintaining the integrity of Michigan State University as an educational institution.

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