

U.S. Had Role in Arrest OF 894 Miss. Students

11/19/70

The U.S. had a role in the arrest of 894 students from the University of Mississippi who were arrested in London, England, in 1968. The students were arrested on charges of participating in a civil rights protest. The U.S. government was involved in the arrest because the students were carrying firearms. The students were held in a prison in London for several weeks before being released. The U.S. government was criticized for its role in the arrest because it was seen as interfering in the internal affairs of another country. The students were eventually released and returned to the United States. The incident was a major event in the history of the civil rights movement.

U.S. Had Role in Miss. Arrests

ENFORCE, From A1

"We're real proud of it, the way they (Mississippi police) handled it," declared George Murphy, director of LEAA's Atlanta regional office. "There wasn't any bloodshed."

For students, it was a different story.

Charged with blocking a public road on campus and disobeying police who ordered them to disperse, all 894 demonstrators—one-third of the student body of 2,500—were suspended from school.

After 24 hours imprisonment, they were released from Parchman on bond and permitted to return to their campus, collect their personal belongings and go home to ponder the future.

Valley State's beleaguered Negro president, J. H. White, whose policies were the target of the student boycott, has announced that the state-supported school will follow a policy of "selective admissions" when students begin to register today for the second term.

Students anticipate that none of the college's elected Student Government Association leaders, all of whom helped direct the boycott, will be readmitted. And White has summarily fired two faculty members who advised the demonstrators.

Strange Alliance

For the time being at least, the events in Itta Bena stand as a victory for one of the strangest alliances ever assembled in the name of law and order: President White, Mississippi's segregationist Gov. John Bell Williams, his all-white state Highway Safety Patrol, 58 black policemen from various cities in the state

and the Department of Justice.

Until now, the Justice Department's role has gone largely unnoticed.

Federal involvement in the campus arrests grew from the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which created LEAA as a Justice Department agency for federal economic and technical assistance to local and state law enforcement agencies.

Under terms of the act, the state of Mississippi (like other states created a state Commission on Law Enforcement Assistance and its operating agency, known as the Division of Law Enforcement Assistance.

Although Mississippi's population is at least 40 per cent black, the commission's members are all white, most of them high-ranking representatives of state and local law enforcement agencies.

Received Federal Grant

For Fiscal Year 1969, the Mississippi commission applied for and received a federal "action grant" of \$288,405. The Justice Department did not challenge the racial composition of the Mississippi group.

The group's plans provided for "staff assistance" by the new state law enforcement assistance division to state and local police agencies in "developing plans and procedures for coping with civil disorders (riot control and natural disasters) and organized crime."

That program won federal approval. Thus when campus protest began to swell at Valley State College early this month, federally sponsored machinery had already been

established for containing what the state's white political establishment perceived as a potential black insurrection.

But as campus revolts go, Valley State's was mild. At stake was a list of 30 demands sponsored and prepared by the college's Student Government Association and presented to president White.

The demands — and their treatment give some indication of the quality of student life at an all black state college in Mississippi.

The students demanded academic scholarships. President White agreed to immediate approval of ten. The only scholarships previously awarded were for athletes and members of Valley State's crack marching band.

Boycott Urged

The students also demanded student government control of the college's student activity fund, a coin-operated laundry for students and clarification of "fictitious laboratory fees." White denied those demands, but approved such others as relaxation of the campus dress code. He also granted the students the right to name new college buildings.

The student government called for a student boycott. Within a few days, it was more than 95 per cent effective with the backing of the state's all-white Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning—asked for outside police assistance.

Officials Conferred

Two of his black campus security officers, he said, had been injured by students, and students had been threatened by boycott leaders. He filed no formal charges, however.

In the state capital of Jackson, officers of White's all-white board met with the state commissioner of public safety and Kenneth Fairly, executive director of the state law enforcement assistance division.

Then Fairly called LEAA officials in Washington and Atlanta. Washington's Paul Estaver and Atlanta's George Murphy agreed that the best solution was to handle the Valley State protest with black policemen.

Fairly scoured the state and found 58. Ray Pope, a white former police chief from Waycross, Ga., who is now an LEAA regional official in Atlanta, flew to Mississippi to offer technical assistance. Satisfied that the operation was proceeding smoothly, he returned to Atlanta.

Governor Pleased

While the arrests proceeded, white highway troopers and Leflore County sheriff's deputies blocked newsmen's entry to the campus. But on campus, all went smoothly.

As Fairly later reported, there was no violence and there were no injuries or pictures of "a white cop with his nightstick mashing the head of a black student." Gov. Williams, said Fairly, was pleased.

"What we liked was the evidence of black professionalism, black command leadership," Fairly said yesterday.

Justice Department cooperation was "excellent," he said. "We were in constant contact." Department officials have "looked at this situation and think it has some application for use elsewhere," he added.

"All of us in this business are looking for new ways to handle old problems."