

The Battle of Stanford

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It's not every day you get baton-charged on the Stanford University campus. But this is what happened - and much more - on Friday April 21, 2006, a day of extraordinary events on campus.

This is a rather long-winded account of my experiences during the day, including background information and some details that will be more interesting to some people than others. I am quite clearly writing from my own perspectives on the issues and my own experiences - I do not pretend to be covering all bases or perspectives. They are my own thoughts, and though I did speak to a number of people on the day, I have made no particular or thorough attempt to survey the thoughts or attitudes of others.

To the impatient reader who wishes to read about the most sensational events of the day, I recommend skipping immediately to section 4, although you will miss substantial details of what happened on the day, and in the lead-up.

1 Background

As far as I know, there was word about on Tuesday, but it was largely rumour and regarded sceptically; it was certainly not public knowledge. Word of it got to me on Wednesday, though still unconfirmed and doubtful. On Thursday it was announced publicly, or at least, word of it got (passing) mention in a mainstream newspaper. It was happening Friday - at 24 hours notice.

The dastardly figure himself, the Great Leader, the figurehead, the symbol, the world's most dangerous person, Caesar himself was coming to campus! That's right, George W Bush, leader of the "free" world, president of the world's most powerful nation, war criminal, robber baron and crony capitalist - a symbol, a focus for all that is wrong with the world - was going to be right here.

Bush rarely sets foot in the Bay Area - nor indeed does any leading figure in his administration - known as it is for its overwhelmingly liberal sentiment, its 80% democrat voting pattern, and so on. This is Baja Canada at its finest. The reason for the secrecy behind the visit, and such a late public release of details, is clear: the avoidance of mass protests.

Bush was coming to the Bay Area to visit Silicon Valley executives, to mumble some semi-coherent words on some panel about competitiveness, high technology and education. (This was rather comical in itself, Bush and Schwarzenegger together exhorting mathematics, science and high technology despite their obvious and self-admitted ignorance and ineptitude in these fields; but that's another story.) But it was also a good opportunity for him - at least, so it must have seemed to him and his advisors - to meet with some appropriately rabid right-wing academics about economic and political issues, to discuss current and future social and economic policies of an appropriately horrendously regressive nature. A perfect supply of such convenient and obedient intellectuals came in the form of the Hoover Institute, the arch-right-wing think tank on the Stanford University campus, famed for amusing rants by Milton Friedman. (I would describe them as "conservative", like others do, except I don't believe this is usually their message; their flavour is rather, generally speaking, radically regressive, statist, corporatist and authoritarian - this is what the word "conservative" usually means in the US, but not historically.)

Coming to visit any university campus is usually a dangerous plan for any high state official, who especially in the US - of either major party - will most likely have a string of crimes, disasters, tragedies, lies and hypocrisies to their name. And the university campus is likely to contain various annoyingly well-informed and consistent individuals who may take the opportunity to confront authority. This is particularly so in the Bay Area. Berkeley does not even enter the realm of thought for such visits. But Stanford - Rich Kids University Inc - is quite a different story.

Here the campus is prettier, the students are richer, their parents own the world, their ambitions are more corporate, and the atmosphere is more docile, subdued under crushing loads of study, bribed by extraordinary and astronomical tuition fees, and opiated by the Democratic party and the luxurious style of life. The sentiment is generally liberal, but overwhelmingly in the form of wide-eyed and barely reserved support for the Democratic party, which is very large on campus, than in the sense of radical thought, activism or confronting authority. There are some policy groups associated with the Democrats which seem to do quite useful work - as far as can be hoped, anyway - within the system, within state and corporate institutions. However, there is also a considerable presence of activist groups, rather small in number but impressively well-organised, liberated, efficient, energetic, non-sectarian, non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. There is also a considerable progressive ethos throughout some of the co-operatives and residential arrangements on campus. In my 18 months here there have been a couple of attempts at large rallies, on issues like the war, immigration and labour issues, which attract maybe a few hundred people, and a general sort of disinterested apathy, occasionally hostility (usually on means rather than ends) - as one might expect - from much of the student population, even the liberals, even occasionally the Democrats. There have also been a number of smaller actions by the activist groups, who are usually issue-based - e.g. labour, Black, Hispanic, Asian issues - the actions are more radical, more confronting, but disciplined, committed to non-violence, and

often effective.

This, I think, is a standard evaluation of the roll call of progressive forces on campus, though of course my own perspective is clear. Bush (or rather his advisors) clearly thought these forces were not strong enough to prevent him visiting the campus; possibly some of the student groups might have agreed with this assessment. But this assessment is insufficient to explain the events of Friday April 21, 2006, which I will dub, with conscious exaggeration and sensationalism - but not so much as one might think - the Battle of Stanford. A reassessment is in order; the outlook is more optimistic for progressives than some of us (including myself) thought.

2 Lead up

Although it seems some groups may have known and done some organisation earlier, it appears that it was really in the 24 hours of public notice that the protest was organised, from scratch. Nobody was particularly optimistic about organising a mass action in such a short time, particularly given the usual student workload and the usual student attitudes. There were also other protests organised near the Cisco headquarters, where Bush was visiting before Hoover, which would draw protestors from the wider community to alternate locations.

On Thursday night there were apparently meetings of various groups and cops on campus; however the protest was primarily organised by a non-campus group. Neither the campus Democrats or any of the issue-based activist groups had planned anything in particular, though most of them planned to join the protest individually.

There were also - at least as I understand it - plenty of emails doing the rounds, surging through social and campus networks and mailing lists. A notification even made it to the mathematics department student list, arousing tiresome discussion and debate of the permissible uses of email lists. (This was astonishingly petty to me, an incredible and perverse irony: on the one hand, one of the world's most dangerous leaders and war criminals coming to campus, and the need to act against him; and on the other, intelligent students in a little department engrossed over the question of whether an email should be sent to a discussion list; debate not necessarily confined to the pro-Bush contingent either. The contrast was unbelievable, and saddening. But that's a different story.)

The details of time and place were clear; there was also a suggestion to wear black to make a statement against Bush, based on the Johnny Cash song "Man in Black" (which is not, as I have to continually point out, anything related to aliens or Will Smith). These things are difficult to gauge, but the impression one gets is that whatever informal communication channels were available, were used - the miracle of modern organising and decentralised, non-hierarchical networks. In any case - and possibly creating some friction in the process, as with my experience in the maths department - a quite amazingly large number of people were notified and mobilised in a very short period of

time, as subsequent events were to attest.

On Friday morning the Stanford Daily, the student newspaper, screamed "President visits Hoover" on its front page, with details of the planned visit and security arrangements, and mention of the protest but without details. It quoted activists as pessimistic about turnout.

At 2 p.m. on Friday afternoon, the protest was due to start at White Plaza, a central campus location. There were already several hundred there when I arrived, many writing placards, many wearing black. People milled around; the crowd grew to a sizeable few hundred. And it attracted more and more people through the day.

By a strange twist of fate, this Friday was actually the beginning of Admit Weekend, when all the prospective freshmen for next year are on campus with their families. Many of them joined the protest - both prospective students and parents, and were continually doing so as they encountered it. This gave the crowd more of a young and idealistic look than usual, to my eyes at least. I wouldn't have described it as large, but rather satisfactory and a little more than I had expected.

After a little while, we marched the few hundred metres up a leafy campus road, alongside the main quadrangle, up towards the Hoover institute. And there the main protest began.

3 Logistics

Geography was against us. There were many different approaches to the institute, and other adjacent buildings. So there was a rather complicated arrangement of roads and buildings and walkways, all of which led near, or around the vicinity of the institute. The building itself is easily identified by Stanford's trademark, the Hoover Tower. The security arrangements for the visit included placing snipers in this tower. There were also portable metal fences - rather flimsy as crowd control goes, but effective delineators and human barriers nonetheless - establishing a perimeter around the building, and consecrating a holy, protected land on which the Great Leader could walk unperturbed by the rabble. Given the ungainly layout of buildings, this perimeter extended further in some directions than others, and closed off access to substantial surrounding areas, gardens and walkways.

There was even confusion as we marched up to the institute. The front part of the march turned around when it got to the end of the road, opting to head for the rear of the building, and running into the rear of the march; but then checked itself again and headed in the original direction. We all thought it was hilarious. The main road, Serra Mall, which goes past the front of the building, was blocked off in both directions; although the placing of fences proved, as we later saw, to be manifestly incompetent.

Arriving at the barricades, so to speak - or rather, the holy wall - on Serra, there were already a reasonable number of people gathered, spread along the fence. They included more prospective students and parents, and seemed to

be local residents, part of the general Palo Alto community. A few chants got going, and placards were waved; people milled around behind the crowd on mobile phones trying to invite or locate their friends. We played spot-the-sniper, noticing menacing dark shadows in some of the windows of the Hoover Tower. On the holy turf on the other side of the barriers were a few, generally friendly, local police officers, and a few rather more scary secret service agents complete with dark suits and earpieces. There was one loud pro-Bush counter-protestor amongst the crowd holding a "Stay the course" placard, but we drowned him out easily. He was tolerated very peaceably. In fact the atmosphere here was such that it could have been a Palo Alto garden party.

There was no sign of Bush yet. The word was that he was arriving and leaving via helicopter, "Marine One" - another highly macho, militaristic presidential travel accessory. Apparently they had been practicing taking off and landing at the campus helipad throughout the week. He would presumably come from the helipad in a car, to the institute. Although people knew his planned schedule, there was no word of his arrival. We saw helicopters circling, clearly keeping an eye on the local situation, and some police cars and commercial vans came through, but nothing else.

It occurred to me that the metal barriers, the security fence walling the boundaries of the Holy Land, could easily have been breached by the crowd, which could have overwhelmed the small number of police immediately present. Given the magnitude and severity of Bush's crimes, a sufficiently hotheaded young radical may well have seen more than enough reason for direct action. But that was not the order of the day; it was a very peaceful, intellectual, middle-class protest. Apart from general good temper, there may also have been an element of fear: when I commented on the flimsiness of the fence to a friend, he just pointed to the snipers in the tower.

I was pleased to meet up with a few people from the maths department, and we walked around the perimeter to see if we could scope the situation out, whether Bush had arrived by some alternate means, and what was happening around the other side. With so many buildings and walkways and fences, it was a circuitous route involving lots of detours. Walking around the library, there was a small barrier and two rather casual-looking police stood there, on our side of the barrier; I think one was blue and one was green. The green police, sheriffs, were generally scarier, and equipped with riot gear. In fact this green policeman was only casual-looking in the sense that he was casually waving around a very long and very scary-looking baton. This was not the last we were to see of a casual approach with weapons capable of inflicting severe injury - a general attitude of machismo and nonchalance towards violence which would worsen later.

The setup contrasted with the security arrangements I have seen in the past for protests at universities in Australia. There, the dominant feature of the police presence is their horses - or rather, the piles of faeces left by their horses, leaving a foul stench around campus for days afterwards. A favourite campus protest chant in Australia, therefore, is: "Get those animals off those horses!" Horses usually make batons unnecessary, though I have seen them used a few

times there. A secret service does not really exist in the same way as in the US, and of course snipers are unheard of. A Greek colleague informed me that the situation also differed from that in Greece, where police do not even have jurisdiction to enter the university campus - apparently an extraordinary victory for campus autonomy. However, as a result it is the party toughs protect their leaders. I am not sure if this is an improvement.

We met more mathematicians on the way. Of course, the event had as much its celebrity-spotting aspects as political ones. Like most protests, there was something of a festival atmosphere (the usual drum section was lacking though, I realise afterwards), and a crowd camaraderie of silly chants and jokes. It is, after all, a celebration of the humanity which drives many people to oppose Bush's policies, as much as it is a denunciation of his many crimes. It sometimes seems as if you are having too good a time to get serious about why you are there. There were people pressed almost all along the barrier on this side, which was very long. In fact, there were enough people to create a sizeable presence along all major approaches to the institute. It was quite impressive.

One organiser suggested that people move around to another approach: a strategic insight based on geography. Though there were several routes into the institute, all the plausible ones in the present context passed through a single intersection, a T-intersection as another road, Galvez Street, ended at Serra Mall; but it was on Serra Mall on the other side to where we began. She suggested we move there. Not everyone did, but I was going in that direction anyway.

4 Battle

There was quite a throng around the intersection; Serra Mall was fenced off on this side as well, but the intersection itself was not. Some people stood in the intersection, others behind them on Serra Mall, others along Galvez Street, others along both footpaths of Serra Mall. There were a number of police around. People were packed into this area quite densely.

The crowds here seemed to contain more people from the broader community, though still plenty of Stanford students. There seemed to be high-school students and older people; some seemed to be faculty or staff at the university. Everybody's favourite octogenarian rabble-rousers The Raging Grannies were there; parents with children stood further along the footpath; students were continually riding by or parking their bikes to take a look or join in. Here as elsewhere, there were plenty of prospective freshmen and their parents - it seemed they really got into the spirit of things! And, last but not least, a perennial Stanford fixture was also there - the Stanford marching band. You just can't get away from them!

There chants were fairly standard. "1, 2, 3, 4, we don't want your fucking war - 5, 6, 7, 8, stop the killing, stop the hate". John Lennon's vision lived anew as everybody sang "Give Peace a Chance". To a familiar rhythm we heard "Hey ho, hey ho, Bush is here, he's got to go!" And there were some witty and risqu

ones: one girl on the megaphone started the chant "Protect MY Bush!"

The placards were rather varied. There are plenty of issues on which to protest against Bush, of course, and many were in evidence. There were some old classics: "George is a category 5 hurricane"; peace signs; "US Out of Iraq Now!" and so on. A lot of people were wearing stickers saying "We all deserve the freedom to marry". There were also issue-specific placards relating to Darfur ("Save Darfur!"), to military spending ("I asked for Universal Health Care and All I Got was This Stealth Bomber!"), to reproductive rights, and so on. Some smelt a little of elitism: "Smart People Against Bush". Later there was a large placard/sculpture, depicting the statue of liberty with hood and electrical wires, as in the most famous Abu Grahیب photograph. There was some street theatre, and later on even a mock oil auction conducted by people wearing Bush and Condi masks. There was a lot of fun to be had!

Somewhat surprisingly, I found I did not always agree with the sentiments being expressed. In general, the feeling of flag-waving jingoistic patriotism, uncritical loyalty to the Democratic party and a little too much attention to the unchallenged assumptions of the mainstream media and corporate and political elites seemed to get the better of some of the protestors and the messages they had inscribed. At the mild end was a little militarism: "Pro-Troops, Anti-War". Then we had "Chavez, Hamas, Bush: Democracy Gone Wrong" - I take serious issue with the first of the three, though if one listened only to the mainstream media one easily gets this impression. It may also reflect something of the attitude of the Democrats on foreign policy that does not differ essentially from the Republicans on many core issues - certainly in regard to Venezuela, within the mainstream of the Democrats. But the worst, perhaps, was downright untrue and betrayed the worst type of uncritical party loyalty: "Nobody Died When Clinton Lied". Evidently this person never heard about the events in the Sudan, Yugoslavia, and Afghanistan and Pakistan, under Clinton's reign, and this just for a start - the assertion is utterly outrageous and flies in the face of all the facts. I can only assume that this person employed some vague reasoning like the following: people died when Bush lied, because Bush is a Republican, and Republicans are bad, but Democrats like Clinton are good, so Clinton is Bush's opposite, therefore the statement is true. For supposedly intelligent, progressive people in an elite university to be so badly informed about the very recent past - obliterating from history some of the worst events of the '90s - is very disconcerting. But this was only one person; it just riled me.

The band played a few numbers, entertaining all around with their zany antics. People danced to their music, and spirits were high. I was standing on the footpath, second from the front; people were lining the footpath some distance down Galvez street. The road was blocked; no motorcade had arrived; unless George had some ingenious underground route, or used some hitherto undiscovered passageway, he could not have arrived.

At some point, a flotilla of small, unusual- and military-looking helicopters flew over us at low altitude. Evidently that was the president: there were one- and two-finger salutes all round. They were flying over us to land at the helipad, on the other side of campus. The police seemed to be getting a little anxious;

presumably their leaders did not want to fail for the Great Leader.

Indeed, at this point a lot of riot police arrived on the scene. A column of Little Green Men marched down the street. They were all Men of course, and these sheriffs were dressed in Green; I call them Little, although they were actually quite large, because their subsequent actions proved their moral integrity and scrupulousness to be very small in stature.

They were all dressed up, these Little Green Men. Big, padded, probably armoured uniforms; big chunky guys; dark sunglasses; big protective helmets with visors covering the entire face; they had the grim look of soldiers about them. They looked tough and macho, and they were. Marching in time, these guys were a militarised version of the police. They did not smile like the local police did occasionally. They avoided eye contact, as all good riot police must. They were set with grim determination; they would brook no common humanity with these protestors, who were to be seen as a lower class of people, as non-people.

This crowd, this festive, happy, musical, entertaining, colourful, idealistic, broad-ranging crowd, was standing in clear space. It was not doing anything illegal; it was not standing in any area beyond any of the fences the police had established. These unholy rebels were not on Holy Land! Many were on the road, but this had not been fenced off, and indeed the police had stopped all traffic through the road. They were doing nothing wrong; they were singing songs; they were entirely peaceful, and well within their rights. So it seemed rather absurd when brawny, nasty-looking Little Green Men came and lined up not far from them. They formed a line facing the front line of protestors, looking rather menacing, but totally ridiculous. People laughed, because it looked so funny. The lead Little Green Man on his megaphone told people to move back. But there was no fence, we were back. People jeered - after all, what were they going to do against people standing in a public space singing songs? Some people defended them: "they're only doing their job!" - a common point of view, often inculcated through childhood, all part of the ideology of a benevolent state that protects and serves us, although many people including the poor and various ethnic groups tend to know otherwise, through experience.

That was when the riot police simultaneously drew their batons.

It was even more absurd. What were they thinking? We still were not breaking any laws; not violent; not even particularly angry. Laughs and jeers went up again.

So they started marching on us.

There was a collective gasp from the crowd. These Little Green Men were moving in formation, it was a military manoeuvre. They walked in carefully planted steps, shifting their weight deliberately. They held their long and heavy batons out in front, ready to push people back or strike them. They moved with all their bulk and padding, looking like the cool tough armoured cop in a movie. They swaggered, and their faces were set. They clearly enjoyed acting tough, and they were clearly physically strong. They acted like Robocop. And as in the movie, the "bad guys" were to be disposed of, not to be accounted as human beings, were to be meted out justice - and here, justice was violent show

of force, to physically push us back, using all means available.

Some people screamed; some people ran away immediately. Most people stood in disbelief. When the Green Men got within a few metres of us they all started bellowing monosyllables.

”Move... Move... Move... Move...”

These were not communications, but orders. There was no reasoning, no negotiation. They gave the impression not of humans, not with linguistic abilities, but machines running a programme, of primitive animals - I saw hateful, ignorant apes marching on me with a one word vocabulary. The words were deep and dangerous, physically menacing. They were displaying raw force, they were not only prepared to use it, they were using it; it was the monopoly of violence of the state, against an innocent and undefended enemy - the paradigm of state violence in all its horror. The people in front of me ran back past me, terrified.

I am a pretty quiet and mild-mannered guy under usual circumstances, but there is nothing which upsets me like illegitimate displays of authority - especially when it is in the shape of a baton very close to my face. I lost my temper. Not to do anything violent, of course, but to yell and to chide. None too politely (well, by my standards - by most people's standards it probably was quite polite) I informed the deputy sheriff approaching me that we were breaking no law, we were doing nothing wrong, just standing on the side of the street, you have no right to be doing this, shame on you, there's a fucking war criminal coming by and you do this to us?, and I inquired of him whether he felt good about the actions he was performing. I did not stand in his way; I moved back as he approached. But he heard me, and he almost flinched; I saw his eyes dart towards me; he almost made eye contact. Perhaps there was some humanity there, I do not know; perhaps he just saw me as more of a potential threat than the others around me.

The crowd was incensed. Instead of the usual chant of "This is what democracy looks like!", referring to ourselves, the focus shifted to the Little Green Men who had just used force against us: "This is what fascism looks like!" "This is what a police state looks like!" The meter was not as aesthetically pleasing, but it captured the mood.

We had just moved back, but some of those who were in the intersection, whom the police tried to push back down Serra Mall, employed a classic tactic: they sat down. A sit-in began. There would have been a few dozen people sitting. The Green Men were standing up right against them, standing at ease and brandishing their batons, resting on their palms, staring into the crowd level headed, still looking inhuman like Robocop. They had succeeded in pushing them back a little; some of the road was cleared, but for the purposes of a presidential motorcade, it was blocked. The road was still blocked.

And so things stood at stalemate for a few minutes. I backed off from the crowd and walked a little down the street to cool down. I was considering moving to a different part of the fence, when I heard the megaphone - "You will be moved Get off the street You will be moved". I thought I should see what was going on down at the intersection.

The police had seen fit to employ a new tactic: the fire department.

A fire truck had driven up to the protest - from behind the protestors, on our side, not the police side. (Note: I did not see the events described in the rest of this paragraph, but multiple independent accounts have confirmed it. But I did see the rest.) It had its lights on and was evidently trying to get through the crowd. It didn't run anybody over, however; it stopped at the crowd. Some people got up to get out of its way; some people didn't; some people didn't know what was going on. For now, you see, the people sitting in front of the fire engine with its lights flashing were "obstructing justice", and so were immediately arrested. They were carried off. The police violently dragged away a small girl who must have been no more than 18 years old; it looked utterly revolting. Three people were arrested.

The firemen jumped out of the truck, enraged. They got out to argue with the remaining protestors: there's a medical emergency at the Hoover tower, we have to get through, what do you think you're doing? These honest, hardworking protectors of public safety, responding to a medical emergency, were being thwarted by a depraved group of political zealots intent on their goals regardless of the consequences for the health of others. These proud, strong, brave, virtuous, good firefighters - how they denounced our moral calibre!

Once the sitting protestors were taken away, and the street was clear, the firemen got back in their truck and drove off.

In reverse.

They did not proceed to the Hoover tower; they did not proceed to any medical emergency; they went back down the road, where they came from. Clearly, there had been no medical emergency, it was a total fabrication, a tactic to clear the street, an excuse to arrest those otherwise breaking no law. The fire department - an apparently innocent branch of the emergency authorities, supposedly limited to doing the important work of putting out fires and directly protecting the physical safety of residents - had been used as a political tool. Some of us may have our doubts about the police, but we do not doubt firefighters: what they do is noble, brave, untainted. The police had used that assumed honesty and credibility - acted out enthusiastically by the firefighters themselves, who had proved talent worthy of an Oscar - as an unscrupulous tactic to achieve a strategic and quasi-military aim in a non-violent, legal, peaceful civil protest. The police had lost all credibility; after these actions, nobody could claim that they were just "doing their job". That is not how you just "do your job" when you are to uphold the law: you do not bend the law and bring otherwise respected professionals like firefighters into disrepute. It was utterly outrageous.

The police moved into the breach as people were cleared away: they formed a wedge, protruding into the street, again pushing people back, as the truck reversed. They looked exceptionally tough now: a "flying V" of soldiers standing at ease with batons poised - very symmetric, a perfect tactical formation, a militarist's wet dream. Their jaws were set more firmly than ever.

But the dream was not to last long. The chants now became angrier: simply "Fuck the police!" I could not disagree. People now in the crowd began to walk forward, pushing forward: it was one of those things that nobody in particular

does, but which crowd dynamics amplify, and creating a collective movement of a mass of people. The police, in a single line, could not resist.

These tough macho toy soldiers, these Little Green Men, how pathetic they looked now! Their egos must have been crushed; perhaps they were even afraid. The lead man, before so proudly and grimly serving as the point of the V, almost got cut off from his comrades. I felt sorry for them now; but I was sure no scuffles would break out, and none did. They shuffled back, pushed back by a weight they could not withstand; no longer the powerful steps they had made forward, exuding violence. They had lost credibility; they had lost their egos; and now they had lost the territory. The fire truck tactic had come to nothing - their defeat was total.

Perhaps. Once the police had been pushed back to their former line, the crowd ceased its advance. And then people began to notice a few other toy soldiers behind the front line - there was a particularly chunky guy with a particularly chunky gun. It was a grenade launcher - tear gas grenades. We were in disbelief; would they stop at nothing?

The tense stalemate continued; time passed, and the road was blocked to Bush. It was now over an hour past his supposed arrival time; if he was coming from the helipad by road, he had not come yet, and the time in which he could realistically come was rapidly passing. The police, though disgraced, now holding their line in ignominy, were not quite insane enough to deploy tear gas against a protest that was still peaceful, still colourful, still singing, but perhaps a little less nave. Fortunately, the only attack that made contact with my body was an attack by caterpillars, which were dropping from the trees everywhere. The realisation dawned that his schedule must have moved on. In fact the arch-right-wing academics from the Hoover institute had made their way off campus and met Bush there; he could not come here. He could not get through; we had won.

5 Victory!

A very satisfying victory too. In fact, the victory was complete in every way. It is hard to imagine how it could have been better.

We had achieved a mobilisation of at least a thousand people around the Hoover institute throughout the hours of protest. It was an impressive organisational accomplishment at short notice. Many people came and were drawn to the protest, probably many who had never protested before, and even sitting in and blockading. A very broad base of people had participated, including not only students, but faculty, prospective students, the local community, and prospective students and parents: the happy coincidence with the Friday of Admit Weekend was, in the end, a best case scenario. The future bodes well with next year's crop of freshmen, already informed and even perhaps becoming radicalised. We have a movement which is perhaps more numerous, more militant, and more forthright than we had expected.

All the protestors had faced police brutality together and, instead of only

responding with anger, we celebrated our humanity and our shared opposition to Bush's crimes. We had learned something about the way the police operate, although this was an egregious example. And the police had utterly disgraced themselves with their machismo, their overwhelmingly casual attitude towards using violence, and an unbelievable unscrupulousness in using the fire department as political pawns (willing political pawns, to their discredit) for violent tactical purposes. The people had been treated as worse than human; but they lived up to their humanity, and those who treated them so were left hanging their heads in shame.

And George W Bush did not set foot on campus.

ADDENDUM (26/4/06): Several people have pointed out to me that I have been too generous to the police, in particular my comment that the police behaviour was 'egregious'. On reflection I tend to agree - it seems not to have been particularly atypical, and if anything, restrained.

I do not have the experience in the US to judge first-hand whether the behaviour was typical or atypical, unusually violent or unusually restrained. I have made clear the actual amount of physical force used, which was not particularly severe overall, though shocking enough, as I have described. One would assume that, had we been on a less prestigious campus, we would have been dealt with more viciously. Of all the people I have spoken to about it, nobody has given me the impression that the level of force was unusually severe - it was typical, or restrained.

When I described their behaviour as 'egregious' I primarily had in mind their fire truck incident, which was outrageous. But I am now reliably informed that even this tactic was not novel - it has been used in the past. How its usage has been able to endure beggars belief.

So the characterisation as 'egregious' does not stand. Rather, the behaviour - as outrageous as it was - was to be seen as business as usual, and if anything, a voluntary bout of good behaviour while the rich kids were around. The consequences for our judgment are obvious; the conclusions one wants to draw about the police force in general, or the violence of the state, I leave to the reader.