

June 5, 1968

Student Mobilization Committee chapters, student antiwar committees, and campus activists from around the country are sending letters of protest and organizing petition campaigns against the exclusionary and bureaucratic actions of the New York Working Committee of SMC. The following excerpts from some of the letters we have received indicate the type of response the campaign for a full national conference of SMC and for reinstatement of the two fired Young Socialists has been getting from around the country.

INDEPENDENT COMMITTEE ON VIETNAM, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK CITY:
(From letter to the SMC office) "Last May 27 the Steering Committee of the Independent Committee on Vietnam met and discussed the developments in the recent meetings of the Working Committee of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam. The following observations were agreed upon unanimously:

"1. That the motion for an Independent Staff was undeniably and indefensibly exclusionary.

"2. That Kipp Dawson and Syd (Stapleton) were fired from the staff in spite of the fact that they played major roles in making the April 26 Student Strike a fantastic success.

"3. That although Syd and Kipp were accused of allowing their membership in the Young Socialist Alliance to impair their work in SMC, not one single specific charge has been raised against them, much less proven.

"4. That these developments, as well as summer plans, require immediate discussion and litigation in a full scale National Conference of SMC in the Midwest, which the Working Committee has consistently refused to convoke.

"5. That the Working Committee insisted on hiring YSAer Howard Petrick, who is unavailable to work for SMC.

"6. That the Working Committee refused to hire a prominent YSAer Lew Jones, although he is obviously well qualified and has refused to hire any YSAer as an act of good faith.

"7. That it is the inescapable conclusion that a move is afoot to exclude the YSA from the SMC.

"8. That the ICV has in the past given full and valuable support to SMC, which includes sending 25 busloads of people to the Pentagon on October 21.

"On the basis of these observations, the Steering Committee of the ICV adopted the following resolution:

"Until such time as the Student Mobilization Committee rights itself by reinstating Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton, by holding a National Conference in the Midwest to decide the issue of their expulsion, or by any other satisfactory means, the Independent Committee on Vietnam will withhold its political and financial support from the Student Mobilization Committee and will cease to send a delegate to the Working Committee. We feel that the future of the antiwar movement is more important than the ICV's continued participation in the SMC under the present circumstances.

"Many members of the ICV have been arrested in the recent demonstrations at Columbia. While we are awaiting trial with the Columbia administration as our prosecutor, we are facing disciplinary proceedings with the administration as our judge and jury. This constitutes the legal basis on which we are seeking a court injunction against the disciplinary proceedings. Thus we are especially sensitive to the way in which the SMC Working Committee simultaneously denounced and fired Kipp and Syd without bringing the matter before a National Conference."

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: (From letter to Linda Morse) "As an active member of the High School Student Mobilization Committee and the High School Strike Committee in Berkeley, I'm appalled with the course the Student Mobilization Committee has taken.

"The expulsion of political groups is frightening, since the antiwar movement has always been proud of the fact that it held a non-exclusionary policy.... High school students were the most eager to build the April 26 strike and participated in huge numbers. However, this could not have occurred if the SMC had an exclusionary and undemocratic organization.

"High school students are well aware of political differences in SMC and respected it because of this. We, high school students, are not afraid of being honest and, if need be, blunt about our feelings. This is why in the Northern California area we are telling everyone about the policy change. We don't sit back and let others, who believe they know what's best for us, make the decisions. We shall circulate petitions asking for these three demands:

"1. Abide by the January SMC National Convention decision requiring another national convention to consider summer and fall antiwar activities.

"2. Include in any SMC mailing all viewpoints regarding the present differences over orientation on personnel.

"Reinstate Syd Stapleton as Editor of the Student Mobilizer and Kipp Dawson as National Coordinator pending a decision by the national convention." (Signed) Linda Richardson.

NOTRE DAME SMC, CHICAGO: (From letter to SMC) "I have recently received two communications, one from the Student Mobilization Committee and the other from Mr. Syd Stapleton and Miss Kipp Dawson. The communications relate to the dismissal of Stapleton and Dawson from the National staff of the SMC for 'insensitivity' and 'Trotskyite' dependence. After reviewing both sides in the dispute, and after talking to some of those involved, and after a period of independent consideration I find that it is my conscientious duty to protest this action by some elements inside (and, I fear, outside) the SMC. I do so for the following reasons:

"1. The action is manifestly antidemocratic and smacks of a coup mentality.

"2. Despite statements to the contrary the action violates a cardinal principle of the SMC and the movement against the war in general: political non-exclusion.

"3. The whole issue is intimately related to the direction the SMC is to take in the near future, the relationship of the membership of SMC to the New York-based leadership, and most importantly the question of carrying out decisions made by the membership at national conferences (I shall return to this last point below). And finally,

"4. Certain statements have been made concerning Dawson and Stapleton in regard to their 'personalities' and their effectiveness as organizers: it has been stated that they are 'hard to work with' because they forward the YSA line and not the SMC line. Since I have discovered that the YSA line is to fully support the SMC line of mass mobilizations against the war, racism, campus complicity and imperialism, I am mystified. I can only conclude that there are elements inside SMC who wish to purge YSA for factional and/or political reasons, who wish to direct the SMC away from its defined policies.

"Now let me return to the matter of implementation of national conference decisions made by the membership. It was unambiguously decided at the last national conference to hold a full national conference on the weekend of June 29 'in a relatively central part of the country.' The recent decision to hold a continuations committee meeting in New York that weekend is in contradiction to our past decision.

"Thus I make two demands:

"1. That Stapleton and Dawson be reinstated as staff members or that some compromise, acceptable to them, is reached.

"2. That the national office hold a full national conference on the June 29 weekend some place in the Midwest so that the membership can consider this and other matters.

"I should like to point out that I am not a member of the YSA or the SWP. I am, however, a member of SMC and am very disturbed by these recent events. Unless the above demands are met I will have to seriously reconsider my membership in SMC and my support of the organization. Further, as chairman of the University of Notre Dame chapter of the SMC I will inform our membership of the situation and my decision. Please reply to me in writing immediately." (Signed) Leonard A. Joyce.

MINNESOTA MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE, MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL: (From letter to SMC) "We strenuously object to the May 8 decision of the Working Committee of SMC that the staff be composed entirely of independents, and we reaffirm the principle of non-exclusion as necessary for building the antiwar movement.

"We also object to the decision to call a Continuations Committee meeting in New York June 29.

"These decisions undemocratically reverse decisions made at the SMC national conference last January, and threaten to bring about the demise of the SMC itself.

"In order that these and other questions might be thoroughly and democratically discussed and resolved, we strongly urge that a national conference of the SMC be called for the weekend of June 29 somewhere in the Midwest, rather than the Continuations Committee meeting in New York City." (Signed) the Executive Committee: Kathleen Brady, Ellen Brooks, Orin Doty, David Gutknecht, and David Thorstad.

BARRINGTON, NEW JERSEY: (From letter to Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton)
"...It seems to me that the exclusion of the members of the Young Socialist Alliance by SMC was a rather ridiculous and foolish move. If you were all working for a common purpose, which you were, mainly to end the war, I can see no logical reason as to why Young Socialists should be excluded. I think this is liable to hurt SMC, too, because, for one thing, they are losing a lot of help, and for another, with a purpose such as theirs, they need people of all political beliefs, etc. Besides that, this is liable to cause a major split in the organization....I sure hope that SMC grows up." (Signed) Liza Lenard. (Since she wrote this letter Liza and two of her friends have circulated the petition calling for a full national conference and reinstatement of the two Young Socialists in their high school. By May 31 they had sent in 20 signatures.)

BARD COLLEGE RESISTANCE AND POLITICAL ACTION COUNCIL, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y.: (From letter to SMC) "Brothers and Sisters, It is only with reservation that I use the term 'brothers and sisters' in my greeting. The decision made on May 8 has just come to our attention up here, and everyone is wondering what the hell you think you're doing.

"The exclusionary policy against YSA is one of the most absurd, undemocratic and dangerous decisions that the movement can take. What organization is next on your list, Senator?

"If your goal is to split the movement, to divide the forces in this country from their common goal, then you are moving on the right track. Saving face by excluding specific YSA members, rather than the organization as a whole, won't do you any good. This doesn't save face, it only plunges you deeper into the grave error you have made.

"YSA and I do not agree on many issues, but our goals are in many respects the same. Your goals, too, are in many respects the goals of YSA. What are you afraid of? Of SMC getting a bad press in the Times? Come on, people, don't be fools. Above all, be democrats. Are you going to ban Black people next? Destroy student solidarity and you may find yourselves destroying the movement. I hope that isn't your aim.

"This decision must be brought up at a Midwestern conference, to assure the greatest amount of participation. And that's how it was decided at the last conference. Follow your own rules! Now is the time of the furnaces." (Signed) Jeffrey Raphaelson for the above organizations.

SAN FRANCISCO STATE COLLEGE: (From letter to Linda Morse) "Unfortunately, neither myself nor others working in the S.F. State College Campus Mobilization Committee can fully accept the 'explanation' given for an action that is so clearly exclusionary....I cannot understand the firing of two staff members on a political basis. Does the Working Committee really have the authority to take such action?....That decision should be rescinded immediately; Kipp and Syd should be rehired, regardless of political differences that exist among the staff.

"If these political differences exist, they should be resolved. Why do you find the idea of a national conference 'ridiculous?' Don't you think a national conference--the highest body of the SMC--would be the proper authority to resolve such divisions?"

"Another point which Kipp and Syd make in their letter is certainly valid for us on the West Coast. A national gathering should be held in the Midwest, not New York.

"For the sake of the antiwar movement (and the Vietnamese) please act rationally and take measures to correct the anti-democratic actions in the national office of the SMC." (Signed) Helen Meyers.

DETROIT: (From letter to SMC) "I am in receipt of letters from both Kipp Dawson and the following reply from the 'new' SMC. As a former chairman of the University of Wisconsin's Committee to End the War in Vietnam and as a presently active member of the Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam the change in the SMC is a vital concern of mine.

"I have supported the SMC in the past because it was not multi-issue, sought to involve ever increasing numbers of people in the effort, and stressed the importance of large demonstrations on the streets independent of either major party. And my judgement is that the results this united front approach achieved were exemplary. Although I am not in the YSA I understand it was that group along with a number of independent radicals which put forth this organizing tactic.

"It therefore makes sense to me that a deviation from a united front into a multi-issue group would necessitate purging the YSA from the leadership. This you have attempted, and I might add, rather crudely, to do. You are making a disastrous mistake. The country does not need another multi-issue unprogrammatic radical grouping, certain parts of SDS find themselves in that role. Are you proposing to compete with SDS? Had you left things alone SDS could have continued successfully recruiting people from the independent antiwar movement. Moreover, without active support from the YSA you do not have a chance of ever organizing again a coordinated mass demonstration. Since these demonstrations are a tremendous radicalizing force (they were instrumental in precipitating the French upsurge) the Communist Party tacitly opposes them.

"To sum it up, you have accomplished both sedating and confusing the growing radicalization in this country and throughout the world. And you have done so in an underhanded and dishonest manner. Unless your decision is summarily reversed, unless you hold a broad conference like the one in Chicago, in a central location, and unless you once again structure an organization so as to allow independent radicals like myself to function in it I will not only withdraw my support but openly use my prestige to oppose you vigorously.

"The movement to support the Vietnamese by calling for immediate withdrawal must continue to be built. Support for black self-determination must be built. The new SMC does neither effectively and therefore a blow has been dealt to the left unless it is immediately dissolved and reconstituted along its old lines." (Signed) Michael Smith, Attorney at Law.

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TWIN CITIES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE, MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL: (From letter to SMC) "(It was voted unanimously at the May 21 meeting of the TCHSSMC to send this letter in the name of the Committee to the national office of the Student Mobilization Committee.)

"The TCHSSMC protests the policy of exclusion taken at the May 8 Working Committee meeting. The dismissal of YSA members from the staff reflects a policy of exclusion that can only serve to break up the antiwar movement.

"We find the statement that Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton's performance was unsatisfactory especially hard to believe for this reason:

"The motion dismissing Syd and Kipp at the May 16 meeting was preceded by a motion at the May 8 meeting which dismissed these identical two people from the staff for political associations.

"We feel that the motion passed on May 16 was merely a cover-up for the exclusionist nature of the earlier motion.

"It has also come to our attention that the New York Working Committee proposes to hold a Continuations Committee meeting rather than a full national conference, 'in a relatively central part of the country so that large numbers can attend.' (From structure proposal motion passed at the January 1968 National Conference.)

"We feel that the issues brought up by the recent decisions of the SMC Working Committee can best be resolved by a national conference June 29-30 in the Midwest." (Signed) Steve Stewart, Chairman, TCHSSMC.

WILMINGTON, DELAWARE: (From letter to Linda Morse) "I would have written to you earlier but decided to wait until I had taken a good look at the facts and differing viewpoints on the recent SMC actions against YSA staff members. After reading carefully the different position papers and after speaking with antiwar movement people in this area about this issue I cannot but condemn the anti-YSA actions in the Working Committee of SMC.

"It is quite clear that at the bottom of this issue is a very political struggle over the character of the SMC. This is not surprising and should not be suppressed and passed off as a problem of personalities or some vague statements about loyalties. Struggle among tendencies in the antiwar movement is essential for its health and growth. Any suppression of any of these tendencies will be disastrous to the movement as a whole. And apparently this is what is happening.

"The undemocratic action of the Working Committee, with absolutely no consultation or mandate from the rank and file antiwar movement, if not corrected immediately, will bear the responsibility for the weakening of the movement at the very moment when it must be the strongest possible. You and the others who have entered into this ruinous alliance will have to bear the responsibility for this abandonment of the Vietnamese people and the American GI.

"In the midst of struggle in our own antiwar committee, we have not found it necessary to resort to such crude methods to deal with varying political tendencies. We would not stand for it for an instant.

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"I strongly advise you and the others who have indulged in such distasteful maneuverings to immediately restore Miss Dawson and Mr. Stapleton to their staff positions. I also urge you to call a national conference of the SMC to put the basic questions before the membership and also so that the membership may democratically elect its officers and staff and rid itself of the bureaucratic procedures of the past several weeks. This conference must be held in a centrally located place so that as many people as possible may attend.

"I trust that you will see the necessity of such actions at this point and that you will use all of your influence to bring them about." (Signed) Mark Zola, staff, Wilmington Anti-War Committee.

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY SMC: (Telegram sent to SMC) "Protest undemocratic policy of political exclusion. Demand return to decisions of last conference and full national conference in Midwest June 29." (Signed) Cleveland State University Student Mobilization Committee.

WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND: (From letter to Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton) "Below is part of the body of my letter to the Student Mobilization Committee of New York:

"I am writing to you to protest the dismissal of Mr. Kipp Dawson and Mr. Syd Stapleton from the staff of the Student Mobilization Committee. I believe that you were unjust in passing this damn 'exclusionary policy' and dismissing members of the Young Socialist Alliance....I ask that the exclusionary policy be abandoned and that Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton be restored to their rightful positions."

"I went on to demand that a national conference be held on the weekend of June 29 somewhere in the Midwest...." (Signed) Nick Anthony Stevens.

CAMPUS MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE, BERKELEY: The following petition is being circulated by the Campus Mobilization Committee in Berkeley:

"Dear Linda Morse,

"We, the undersigned, urge the SMC Working Committee to:

"1. Abide by the January SMC National Convention decision requiring another national convention to be held within six months to consider summer and fall antiwar actions.

"2. Include in any SMC mailing all viewpoints regarding the present differences over orientation or personnel.

"3. Reinstate Syd Stapleton as Editor of the Student Mobilizer and Kipp Dawson as National Coordinator pending a decision by the national convention.

"If you will implement the above three proposals SMC will be able to resolve what ever problems exist within SMC's traditional non-exclusionary and democratic methods.

"We are anxious to receive confirmation of your endorsement of our proposals."

(On May 28, 27 signatures on this petition were sent to Linda Morse. More are being gathered.)

PHILADELPHIA SMC: (From letter to Linda Morse) "We in the Phila. SMC office have received both Kipp's letter and yours, and we can only view the recent actions by the Working Committee as a sad and possibly disastrous mistake...."

"You accuse Kipp and Syd of making decisions for SMC, but we believe that Kipp and Syd are adhering to the decision of the last conference, and that other members of the Working Committee should be wary lest they stray from that very explicit decision in Chicago to reaffirm the character of SMC as a broad, united antiwar committee. The Chicago conference decisively rejected the idea of turning SMC into a multi-issue organization that competes for adherents with SDS, YSA, DuBois and other tendencies. Instead, SMC has continued to be the one focus for cooperation by all of these tendencies; SMC has been the cutting edge of a united radical student movement which is unanimous about one thing: massive and visible actions such as strikes and demonstrations to force the government to get our GIs out of Vietnam...."

"It is imperative that the Working Committee do the following:

"1. Adhere to the SMC Chicago conference decision to have another conference, and have it in a central location...."

"2. Reinstate Kipp and Syd until the time of the conference...."

"Here in Phila., the SMC has newfound respect and enormous potential for growth after a city-wide demonstration 2½ times larger than anything we'd had before, and successful Strikes on campuses that had nothing before." (Signed) Joel Aber, Rich Feigenberg, coordinators of Philadelphia Student Mobilization Committee.

BERKELEY: (From letter to Linda) "I have been shocked to hear the results of the recent working committee of the SMC in excluding people who are members of other political organizations. This is a serious mistake which could destroy the antiwar coalition which the SMC is. SMC should be open to all antiwar people regardless of their political affiliation. Leave the red-baiting to the reactionary, witch-hunting congressional committees.

"The working committee has no right to make such a political decision to exclude members of the CP, SWP and YSA. A national convention of all antiwar activists should be called to hash out this problem and plan the fall antiwar actions...." (Signed) James A. Ogden, Peace Caucus, AFSCME Local 1695, University of California.

DETROIT COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM: (From letter to SMC) "Upon hearing the news of the decisions made by the Working Committee on May 8 and 16, our membership unanimously voted to protest the expulsion of Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton. We were surprised to learn that the so-called non-exclusionary SMC had red-baited two of its staff members right off the staff. Such an obvious contradiction of the policy guidelines laid down by the last National SMC Conference can have nothing but a detrimental effect on the international struggle to end the war.

"Under the impetus of mass actions initiated by the SMC, the movement has continually expanded and gained strength as most recently proven by the International Student Strike. It is because we want to see this continue that we lodge this protest and ask for a general membership conference held in a central locale to reaffirm the policy of non-exclusion and to plan further antiwar actions." (Signed) Dave Chamberlin, Chairman, Detroit CEWV.

WILMINGTON, DELAWARE: (From letter to Kipp Dawson) "...We of the antiwar movement must, above all, struggle for democracy. We fight for democracy in the jungles of Vietnam and in the black communities of a racist America. Now we must fight for democracy in the Student Mobilization Committee. The disgusting witchhunt, exclusionary policies which you described in your letter cannot be tolerated...."

STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT ONEONTA, N.Y.: (Petition sent to SMC)
"We, the undersigned, students at S.U.C. at Oneonta who oppose the war in Vietnam, protest the action of the Working Committee of SMC in New York of excluding members on the Working Committee on the basis of political differences (the removal of YSAers).

"Our stand is to maintain a united organization which includes all who oppose the Vietnam War and the machinery that perpetrates those actions." Signed by 15 students.

MADISON COMMITTEE TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM, MADISON, WISC.: (From letter to SMC) "We have just received word of the exclusion from the SMC staff of two people because of their membership in the Young Socialist Alliance. These two people, Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton, were removed from your staff at first because of their membership in 'political organizations.' When this excuse did not work, the line was changed. All of a sudden they have been fired because of 'incompetence.' In reality, they have been excluded from the antiwar coalition because of their membership in the YSA; and by so doing, certain people in the Working Committee have bureaucratically used the SMC to carry out their own factional ends at the expense of the united coalition necessary to build a force capable of stopping the war in Vietnam.

"The people responsible for this anti-democratic maneuver are violating the mandate given them at the Chicago SMC conference last January, and are seriously endangering the SMC's role as a single-issue, non-exclusionary organization. The decision to hold a continuations committee meeting in New York, rather than a full conference in Chicago or some other centrally located city, in addition to being a violation of that same mandate, raises the danger of a bureaucracy abrogating to itself powers that belong only to the highest decision making body of the SMC, the national conference.

"When the Madison CEWV sent its donation of \$100 last week, we did so on the assumption that the money would go toward building the kind of militant, united front movement which organizes the massive demonstrations which gave us the funds to send the SMC that very donation. With the unwarranted 'firing' of two of the most active workers in the SMC and the calling of the 'Continuations Committee' meeting as a substitute for the national conference, we have serious doubts that the SMC will continue to fulfill its traditional, salutary function, and perhaps our money would be better used elsewhere.

"For that reason, we are stopping payment on our \$100 donation, and we will hold that money in reserve until: 1) the non-exclusionary nature of the SMC is reaffirmed by rehiring those individuals fired from the staff for political reasons, and 2) the SMC calls a national conference by the end of the July 4 weekend in Chicago or another major Midwestern city." (Signed) Madison CEWV, Robert Wilkinson, chairman.

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PHILADELPHIA: (From letter to SMC) "Not being a member of the YSA and being active in the antiwar movement on the Penn campus, I know how hard it is to work with them in an open atmosphere. They have always been one of the worst organizations for factional infighting at any national gathering, and never give up if you don't adopt their line. Nevertheless, unless Dawson and Stapleton are flagrantly abusing the English language, it appears the Working Committee has flagrantly abused its privileges. If in fact the Committee voted on May 8th to exclude staff from political organizations, later rescinded that motion but fired them anyway, then I am disgusted. We, the Peace Movement, don't need that kind of crap; it will only destroy the SMC's credibility with the non-aligned students like myself...."

DETROIT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT MOBILIZATION COMMITTEE: (From letter to Working Committee) "Today, May 25, the regular weekly meeting of the Detroit High School Student Mobilization Committee was held. The news about recent actions of the Working Committee was discussed. The DHSSMC membership voted to condemn the actions of the Working Committee in regard to Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton and in regard to structural disputes. We wish to demand, therefore, that Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton be immediately reinstated and that a full national convention in the Midwest be held over the weekend of June 29, in accordance with convention mandates (a convention, you will recall, is the highest body of the SMC)...." (Signed) Gordon Fox, Chairman, Wendy Wilder, Secretary, Eric Sell, Treasurer, Louise Goodman, High School Mobilizer.

LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK: (From letter to Linda) "...Non-exclusion, in my opinion, is one of the most important accomplishments of the antiwar movement. We have made it 'legitimate' for progressive movements to include and work with radicals of all persuasions, a great victory over the McCarthyism of several years ago. The resolution excluding members of 'political organizations' is a great step backwards for the student movement. It is so worded that members of the CP, YSA, DBC, SDS, F&P, YPSL, YAWF, etc., etc., etc., would be excluded from the staff solely because of their membership in a 'political' organization. In a political movement such as the anti-Vietnam-war movement, few activists indeed are non members of 'political organizations,' and need I remind you that the specific group under attack, the YSA, has made many fine contributions to the antiwar struggle. Staff assignments should be given out on the basis of one's qualifications and work, not political associations or lack of them. To do otherwise is to foster McCarthyism...." (Signed) Peter Gellert, Co-Chairman, Long Island High School SMC.

PHILADELPHIA (From letter to SMC) "...I personally would have strong reservations about supporting an organization whose policies had the effect of infringing upon the civil liberties of a certain segment of its membership. In light of your urgent plea for funds (to which I was about to respond when I received the letter from Mr. Dawson and Mr. Stapleton), I urge you to distribute immediately the minutes of both meetings of the Working Committee, along with statements by both supporters of, and dissenters from, the Committee's decision...." (Signed) Linda Olivenbaum.