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Article Summary: At UNL news of the Kent State shootings led to a sit-in at the ROTC Building and then to a brief student strike. The level of unrest on campus was typical for a public institution of UNL’s size.

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Names: Steve Tiwald, Jim Pedersen, Joseph Soshnik, Phil Medcalf, Dan Ladely, Stephen Rozman, Mike Shonsey, Alan Siporin, Gail Gade, G Robert Ross, Flavel Wright, Paul Olson, Norman Tiemann, Durward Varner

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Photographs / Images: Joseph Soshnik, students leaving ROTC building, Steve Tiwald addressing students in Coliseum, Stephen L Rosman with Durward Varner during a student sit-in
UNL Student Reaction to the Cambodian Incursion and the Kent State Shootings, May 1970

By Stephen Witte

On April 30, 1970, President Richard Nixon announced that United States and South Vietnamese ground forces had entered Cambodia in order to attack Viet Cong bases. Almost immediately significant student protests against Nixon's decision broke out on college and university campuses, and in less than a week, scores of campuses were experiencing student strikes and other forms of protest. On May 4, four students died at Kent State University in Ohio from National Guard gunfire during a confrontation between protesting students and guardsmen. In the following days, hundreds of American college and university campuses were either shut down or significantly affected by protest activity.

The Vietnam War was extremely unpopular with many of the nation's college students in 1970. An individual's opposition to the war could be based upon moral objections to war in general, moral objections to the Vietnam conflict specifically, fear of being drafted to fight, fear that one's friends or family members might be drafted, or any combination of these reasons. Whatever the source of antiwar sentiment the Cambodian "incursion" represented an extension of a war that in the opinion of many young Americans had already gone on too long. The events at Kent State raised the appalling prospect of widespread domestic violence perpetrated by either a repressive government or by dangerous student radicals—depending on the observer's point of view.

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The University of Nebraska-Lincoln was not immune to the waves of dissent sweeping the country's institutions of higher learning in the spring of 1970. News of Kent State sparked a sequence of events on the UNL campus that climaxed with a sit-in at the Military and Naval Science Building followed by a student strike. UNL was not to be another Kent State or Jackson State, for there was little violence, no serious injuries or deaths, and no use of the National Guard. By May 8 Governor Norbert Tiemann said that he hoped to be able to tell President Nixon that college campuses in Nebraska were "like a garden" compared to those in other states. However, the absence of violence had not been guaranteed, and there were to be consequences of the unrest for the university.

In contrast to campuses such as Princeton University and Oberlin College, the University of Nebraska's Lincoln campuses did not experience any large-scale student protests of the Cambodian incursion prior to May 4. There had been antiwar sentiment among some students since at least the 1965-66 academic year, when UNL graduate student Carl Davidson founded a UNL chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which sponsored antiwar "teach-ins." Antiwar students felt betrayed by Nixon's decision to send American troops into Cambodia and considered it an unjustified expansion of the war. At the same time, a number of students on campus supported Nixon's decision, and would later oppose both the sit-in at the Military and Naval Science (or ROTC) Building, and the Associated Students of the University of Nebraska (ASUN) strike. Student reaction to the Cambodian situation consisted largely of informal discussion among small groups from April 30 to May 3.

The student government at UNL reacted quickly to Nixon's April 30 announcement. Newly elected ASUN President Steve Tiwald accepted an invitation to attend a special National Student Association (NSA) meeting in Washington, D.C., scheduled for May 1. The meeting considered possible responses to the Cambodian incursion. Tiwald's trip was financed by NSA funds, and he returned to Lincoln on May 2. The NSA called for a nationwide student protest of the presence of American troops in Cambodia for the weekend May 1-3, and a National Student Strike Information Center was established at Brandeis University.

The commission appointed by the University of Nebraska Regents to investigate the campus unrest at UNL later alleged that Tiwald and other ASUN officials planned for a student strike upon his return from Washington. Tiwald denied that ASUN had made any plans for a strike prior to the Kent State shootings. It is likely, however, that ASUN officers discussed the possibility of staging a student strike. This hypothesis is supported by Tiwald's attempt to discourage the occupation of the ROTC Building on May 4 by offering a strike as a counterproposal.

The main student newspaper on campus, the Daily Nebraskan, did not react to the Cambodian situation until Monday, May 4, partly because it did not publish on weekends. The May 4 Daily Nebraskan was a year-end parody edition with serious news limited to the front page, where an editorial by editor Jim Pedersen urged
UNL students to protest "this most recent of many intolerable acts by our government in Southeast Asia." Pedersen went on to suggest that UNL students take some action to demonstrate opposition to the war such as organizing a march, wearing black armbands, or joining a national student strike. Portions of his comments were reprinted in the May 4 Lincoln Evening Journal, which might have led some readers to believe that the student newspaper had agitated for disruptive protests. In addition to Pedersen's editorial, the Monday morning campus paper carried a short notice of a protest rally to be held north of the student union building at 1:30 that afternoon. The rally was organized by the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, a student organization registered with the university's Office of Student Activities. The committee chairman, Mike Shonsey of Omaha, had requested and received permission to hold the rally through normal university channels. By the time the rally was scheduled to begin, news of the shootings at Kent State University had reached the UNL campus. The news was to trigger large-scale student protest at UNL of a kind not seen before, beginning with the afternoon rally at the student union. Lincoln Campuses President Joseph Soshnik was not concerned about possible student unrest until he was informed of Kent State and the march on the Terminal Building, which followed the student union rally on May 4.

The week from May 4 to May 11 was the high point of protest at UNL against the Cambodian incursion and the Kent State shootings. Many antiwar students were convinced by the events at Kent State that the time had come for action in the form of rallies, a protest march on the local draft board, an occupation of the Military and Naval Science Building, and finally a student strike against classes at the university. Phil Medcalf, from Ainsworth, Nebraska, was perhaps the first student to take direct action. Medcalf was a scheduled speaker at the May 4 rally, but when his turn came to speak, he announced that he was going to the Lancaster County draft board offices and invited audience members to accompany him. Although it is probable that Medcalf had decided earlier in the day to make this announcement, there had been no organized group planning a march on the draft board. Who would later play important roles in the occupation of the ROTC Building.

The protesters asked the draft board to cease operations for the rest of the day, but this request was refused. All available Lincoln police officers in the downtown area were called to the scene, and the police then declared the demonstration to be an unlawful assembly and ordered the group to disperse. Most of the protesters did so, but others refused to leave and thirteen people were arrested. After the arrests, a group of about 150 students assembled across the street from the Terminal Building and continued the protest. The demonstration broke up by 3:30 P.M. Once informed of the events at Kent State and the march on the Terminal Building, President Soshnik became concerned about the possibility of trouble on the downtown Lincoln campus. He cancelled a trip to South Sioux City in order to remain in Lincoln to monitor the situation. Soshnik was not alone in anticipating further student protest activity that evening. The May 4 Lincoln Evening Journal quoted ASUN President Steve Tiwald and Vietnam Moratorium Committee Chairman Mike Shonsey as saying that a student strike was now a real possibility. The Journal further reported that a "strategy meeting" would be held that evening at the United Ministries for Higher Education (UMHE) Building.

Prior to the main student meeting at UMHE, a small, ad hoc group of students including Dan Ladely, Alan Siporin, and others met to discuss occupying the Military and Naval Science Building. The main meeting started about 7:30 P.M. with approximately two hundred students in attendance. Observers from the Office of Student Affairs were also present, as were faculty members Ivan Volgyes, Philip Scribner, and Stephen Rozman. Professor Paul Olson was present for at least part of the meeting. Alan Siporin spoke in favor of occupying the ROTC Building, but Steve Tiwald suggested a student strike instead. Many students at the meeting were convinced that they had not yet done enough to protest the Cambodian situ-
tion and the shootings at Kent State, and some believed that a strike would not be a sufficiently strong statement. Siporin announced that he was going to the ROTC Building, and from fifty to one hundred students left the meeting and went to the Military and Naval Science Building. Rumors of a possible march on the ROTC Building had reached Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of Student Affairs G. Robert Ross, who had convened a meeting of the military science department heads late that afternoon. Ross and the military science faculty were still conferring when the first students from the UMHE meeting arrived. Three or four campus police officers, including Captain (and department chief) Gail Gade were present as well, and briefly attempted to prevent the students from entering the building. It is unclear whether the doors to the building were locked when the students arrived (approximately 8 P.M.). Gade would later maintain that the doors had been locked, while Ross believed they had not been locked. Dan Ladely, one of the first students to arrive, saw a policeman holding a door shut and concluded that the door was not locked.

The initial negotiating session between the administration and the student spokesmen lasted for about three hours. Soshnik's main goals were to convince the students that their action was not going to change U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and to arrange for some honorable way for them to leave the building. He was determined not to use force if at all possible and to follow closely the university's policy on disruptive actions. That policy called for the use of persuasion before other means to end the disruption and for discussion of issues with the protesters so long as discussion was not carried out "under condition of duress." The student representatives believed that Soshnik was negotiating in good faith, but often the two sides would be near an agreement only to see it fail. According to Soshnik, one major obstacle was the insistence by the student spokesmen that the demands presented to the administration reflected the will of the entire group, while the spokesmen maintained that they could not guarantee that the group would accept any concessions they might make to the administration. Another problem from the administration's viewpoint was the presence of Dr. Stephen Rozman, who allegedly counseled student leaders not to compromise when agreements seemed close. Rozman's actions that night became a major source of controversy, culminating in his dismissal in 1971.

At approximately 1 A.M. Soshnik and the other administrators went back to the campus police station to prepare a response to the protesters' demands. The party returned to the occupied building for further discussions about 3 A.M., with Soshnik reading a prepared statement to the students around 3:30. The statement called for a special faculty meeting at noon on May 5 in the Nebraska Union ballroom, at which the students' requests for support of the NSA strike, the suspension of ROTC, and academic credit for Free University courses would be acted upon by the faculty. Student representatives would be permitted to speak at both the faculty meeting and at a later all-university meeting in the Coliseum at 2 P.M. Soshnik pledged to relay the students' demand for open meetings to the Board of Regents and to open discussions with student representatives on whether the campus police would continue to carry firearms. He added that the administration was not aware of any conduct that warranted university disciplinary action, including the actions of those arrested at the draft board on the afternoon of May 4. The statement ended with a request that the students help ensure that the campus remain free of violence. Soshnik and the administrative team left the building after reading the statement, which was applauded by the roughly five hundred students remaining in the building.

The demonstrators' spokesmen believed that the administration had agreed to permit the protesters to remain in the building overnight on condition that the students remain peaceful and not disrupt morning ROTC classes. Student leaders attempted to police the actions of people in the building and requested demonstrators to remain in the lower level "pit" area. Before Soshnik read his statement to the assembled students, Ross telephoned Lincoln attorney Flavel Wright and told Wright that the administration might seek...
a court order directing the students to leave the ROTC Building. Wright replied that any action would have to wait for later in the morning. At 5 A.M. Soshnik asked Wright to obtain an injunction against the demonstrators from the Lancaster County District Court, and Wright began work on the injunction petition soon afterward. Soshnik did not think that it would be possible to hold classes as long as demonstrators remained in the building, and wanted any enforcement action against the students to be mandated by some authority external to the university in order to avoid dividing the campus community.

Ross returned to the ROTC Building at about 5:30 A.M. and asked the demonstrators, who then numbered about two hundred, to reduce their numbers to a token few and to permit janitorial workers to clean the building. The protesters agreed only to the latter. Before he left the building, Ross made a statement that the students interpreted as meaning that they could remain in the pit area as long as they were peaceful. This statement, along with the belief that Soshnik had agreed to permit peaceful students to remain, explains the surprise of many of the demonstrators over the announcement later that morning that the university was seeking an injunction.

Soshnik and Ross became concerned that violence might break out between demonstrators and ROTC students arriving for morning classes. Soshnik doubted that the leaders of the occupying students could guarantee that there would be no interference with classes. The administration asked the ROTC faculty for input on whether ROTC classes could be held.

Meanwhile, the student leaders continued to assume that they would be permitted to remain in the building. Shortly after 7 A.M. Alan Siporin reminded the demonstrators to remain in the pit and to permit ROTC students to enter the building for their 7:30 classes. Some ROTC students did arrive for class, only to find that their instructors were not in the classrooms. A military science instructor talked with some ROTC students in a nearby parking lot and informed them that he was awaiting word from Soshnik as to whether ROTC classes would go on as scheduled.

At approximately 9 A.M., Soshnik returned to the Military and Naval Science Building and announced that the administration had determined the occupation to be "disruptive or potentially disruptive conduct." He directed the students to leave the building within fifteen minutes and informed them that they would be subject to penalties in accordance with university policy if they refused, starting with probation and proceeding to suspension after an hour. He also announced that the university was seeking a court order and offered transportation to those students wishing to attend the hearing. Most of the demonstrators remained where they were. Fifteen minutes later, Soshnik announced that any student remaining after five minutes would be put on probation. After another fifteen-minute interval, or at about 9:34 A.M., according to one report, Soshnik announced that the remaining students were now on probation and that suspension would follow in an hour.

The mood among the demonstrators became a combination of concern that force might be used against them and a sense that the administration had broken its word or that Soshnik had been pressured by Chancellor Durward Varner or the Regents to clear the building. The perception that force might be used was heightened when some students who went to the City-County Building for the injunction hearing saw a sizable group of Lincoln police officers getting into cars, and concluded that the police would soon be coming to enforce a court order.

Professor Paul Olson provided a suggestion that may have prevented further confrontation between the administration and the student demonstrators. Olson asked Ladely if the students would leave the building to attend a meeting where they could discuss events with the faculty. Ladely replied that he thought they would do so. Olson then discussed the idea with Richard Gilbert, the chair of the University Senate Liaison Committee. The available members of the committee decided to move the previously announced special faculty meeting to 10 A.M. Olson told Ladely of this, and Ladely relayed the news to the other students. When contacted by a member of the committee, Soshnik approved the idea immediately.

At 10 A.M., the students left the Military and Naval Science Building and went to the student union ballroom to attend the faculty meeting. The group thought it had made its statement and was relieved to end the occupation under circumstances that avoided police action yet kept discussion of the issues open. Because the administration had made no effort to take the names of the students involved in the sit-in, none faced any university disciplinary action once the building was cleared.

The court hearing on the injunction petition was in progress at the time the protesters departed from the ROTC Building. The judge had arrived late that morning, and there were cases on the docket ahead of the injunction petition. When word reached the court that the ROTC Building had been cleared, the petition was dropped.

The protesters worried that if the injunction had been granted, the police, the National Guard, or both might have been used to remove them from the building. It was true that local law enforcement agencies had prepared for possible action. During the early morning hours of May 5 the Lincoln police, the Lancaster County sheriff's office, and the Nebraska state patrol had assembled a joint riot-control force of 145 men at the Lincoln National Guard Armory, just a few blocks from the campus. This was at the request of university officials in case it was decided that force was needed to implement a court order. The force remained on standby until the morning of May 6. President Soshnik did not want to use force unless absolutely necessary, and Lincoln police chief Joe Carroll said police would wait for a request from the university before
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Students leaving ROTC building. Courtesy of Omaha World-Herald.

entering the campus. Although the police team used the National Guard armory as a base, no guard personnel were alerted or activated. \(^5^0\)

Nebraska Governor Norbert Tiemann reacted negatively to the student occupation of the ROTC Building. In a statement released by his office while he was campaigning in North Platte on May 5, Tiemann said that he would not tolerate "lawlessness in Nebraska" and that he considered the occupation of university buildings to be lawlessness. The governor stated his belief that unlawful forms of protest jeopardized the right of peaceful assembly. He went on to say that state law enforcement officers stood ready to assist city and university officials. Tiemann said that he had no intention of using the guard at the moment, but he "would not hesitate to do so" if necessary. \(^5^1\) During his campaign appearances, Tiemann suggested that if students rioted, both the rioters and any "professors who incite the riots" should be asked to leave the university. \(^5^2\) Despite the governor's apparent willingness to use the National Guard if necessary, guard officers indicated that Tiemann had given no order to mobilize. The governor did keep a close eye on campus events, cancelling a campaign trip to Omaha on May 6 in order to remain in Lincoln. On Friday, May 8, Tiemann repeated that he would use the guard if he thought it necessary, adding that in that event the guardsmen would carry live ammunition. \(^5^3\)

The possibility exists that Governor Tiemann felt it necessary to take a tough stance on student unrest due to his difficult battle with conservative challenger Clifton Batchelder in the 1970 Republican gubernatorial primary. However, the governor's correspondence with concerned citizens indicated that he always considered the use of the National Guard to be a last resort, and that while he supported President Nixon's decision to send troops into Cambodia, he also firmly supported the right of students to disagree with that decision. \(^5^4\) Tiemann's position on student unrest and the use of the National Guard during the 1970 general election campaign against Democratic nominee J.J. Exon was essentially the same as that contained in his May statements. Exon's position on this issue was not far from Tiemann's, so it would appear that the campus unrest issue was not a major factor in Exon's general election victory. \(^5^5\)

The consistency of Tiemann's public statements on this issue throughout the primary and general election campaigns would indicate that his position was not chosen simply to help deal with Batchelder's primary challenge.

While the National Guard did not mobilize to suppress student protest at UNL, the student government mobilized to facilitate protest. During the occupation of the Military and Naval Science Building on the evening of May 4, the ASUN Senate met and passed a number of resolutions supporting a student strike, calling for an all-university "town-hall meeting" at the Coliseum to discuss "alternatives available to students concerned about the Indo-China War and the problem of ROTC on campus," condemning violent forms of antiwar protest, and calling for discussions among student and law enforcement representatives. The student government did not endorse the sit-in at the ROTC Building. \(^5^6\)

At 10 A.M. on Tuesday morning, May 4, the special faculty meeting originally called for noon began. The protesters
who had just left the ROTC Building attended, as did a significant number of other students. The approximately 350 faculty members at the meeting passed a resolution that endorsed a voluntary faculty/student strike. The resolution recommended no punitive action be taken against those students and faculty members who chose to strike, while affirming the right of those who did not wish to strike to continue their normal activities.57

Several students and faculty members addressed the meeting, giving their impressions of the previous night’s events at the Military and Naval Science Building. ASUN President Tiwald read the affidavit submitted by the university to the court in support of its injunction petition. The affidavit alleged threats against ROTC students by demonstrators and carried the signature of G. Robert Ross. Some of those in attendance insisted that the charge was false. Professor June Levine of the English department stated that she had been present during the negotiations between the demonstrators and the administration, and she recalled that the student demonstrators had agreed not to interfere with ROTC students.58 At the 2 P.M. all-university meeting at the Coliseum, philosophy professor Phil Scribner suggested the allegation was made because the Regents had ordered the administration to get the demonstrators out of the building.59

The 10 A.M. faculty meeting had shown that there was some support among the faculty for a strike. At the 2 P.M. meeting in the Coliseum, students were to decide whether to proceed with a strike. Some estimates indicated that approximately one half of UNL’s 18,800 students attended.60 The meeting adopted a resolution that supported a three-day strike on classes, with the proviso that those who wished to continue attending classes could do so. Special “strike classes” were organized, in which instructors were to moderate discussion of the Cambodian incursion and related topics. Students were asked to participate in a canvassing effort to spread antiwar information. Plans for a rally on Saturday, May 9, were announced. Another meeting for the purpose of deciding whether to continue the strike was scheduled for Sunday, May 10.61

While the supporters of a strike were able to carry their motion at the Coliseum meeting, it was evident that at least a substantial minority of students opposed the strike. Several students spoke against the strike, and a number of strike opponents left the meeting after the initial strike motion was approved.62 During the “strike week,” the UNL chapter of the Young Americans for Freedom and the newly organized Committee for Undisrupted Education opposed the strike.63

The university administration, while not endorsing the student/faculty strike, did not attempt to overrule the faculty meeting’s recommendation that strikers not be punished. President Soshnik considered the strike “counterproductive” because students were losing class time without achieving their desire of getting U.S. forces out of Cambodia. However, he considered the decision on how to handle students who missed class to belong to the faculty, not to the administration. Soshnik did say that striking faculty members should make arrangements for their students to obtain the information they would have covered in class.64

ASUN quickly assumed management of strike activities, which included a letter-writing campaign in which students sent some 2,700 letters on the war to their congressional representatives by the afternoon of May 6. Canvassing efforts, in which students would visit and speak with local residents about the Cambodia issue, were organized in Lincoln, Omaha, and...
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On May 18, 1970, the Board of Regents issued a statement about the protests, in which the Regents stated their determination that educational programs should continue uninterrupted. The Regents also directed Chancellor Varner to proceed with an inquiry into the unrest with the assistance of legal counsel. Varner said that the Regents were investigating the incidents largely in response to pressure from constituents. Later, the investigation was entrusted to a commission of private citizens with Richard E. Spells, Jr., as chairman and Duane L. Nelson as staff counsel. The commission delivered its report to the Regents on August 18, 1970. The report generally commended students, faculty, and administrators for their success in avoiding violence and large-scale interruption of educational programs, and attributed the unrest to the "disruptive actions of a few individuals." The commission specifically labeled Stephen Rozman's actions as "highly inappropriate for a teacher."77

Public opinion of the student unrest at UNL appears to have been negative. The Lincoln Evening Journal conducted a poll in early May in which 48 percent of respondents indicated that their respect for students had declined due to the events on campus, while only 19 percent reported their opinion of students had improved. The same poll showed 49 percent approval and 43 percent disapproval of President Nixon's use of troops in Cambodia. The editor of the Scottsbluff Star-Herald wrote that "taxpayers are indeed sick and tired of shelling out for those who would use the campus for revolutionary purposes," a sentiment shared by the executive committee of the American Legion of Nebraska, which suggested that students at the university "for purposes other than obtaining an education" be asked to leave.

If the actions of Nebraska legislators are assumed to be representative of public opinion, the proposition that the public's reaction was negative gains strength. On May 14, Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Student Affairs G. Robert Ross appeared before the Nebraska Legislature's...
executive board to request approval for a dormitory renovation project. He was
greeted with numerous questions and negative comments about the student pro-
tests. Senator C. W. Holmquist wanted a list of instructors involved in the unrest,
while Senator Henry Pedersen couldn’t
"understand why some punk kids are
burning and looting in the name of aca-
demic freedom." Several days earlier,
Senator Terry Carpenter had hinted that
the university might encounter difficulties
in its future budget requests.

Senator Holmquist proposed that the
executive board investigate the student
unrest, but later agreed to drop the idea
when the Regents announced their own
inquiry. U.S. Senator Carl Curtis of Ne-
braska expressed his displeasure with stu-
dent unrest nationwide by suggesting that
federal aid to those colleges which closed
down due to student strikes be reduced in
proportion to the time lost.

Chancellor Varner thought that the uni-
versity was paying a price for the unrest in
terms of public opinion, and he was likely
correct. Two Regents also paid a price,
that of defeat for re-election in November
1970. Regents B. N. Greenberg and Rich-
ard Adkins were the only incumbents run-
ning in 1970, and both were defeated. All
four successful candidates for the Board
of Regents that fall said that voters were
concerned about the protests in May.
Robert Prokop, who defeated incumbent
Regent Greenberg, had been particularly
vocal in his criticism of the board’s han-
dling of the situation. During the cam-
paign Prokop had suggested that all of the
student protesters at the ROTC Building
should have been prosecuted and that the
Spelts Commission investigation was a
“whitewash.”

In addition to Regents Adkins and
Greenberg, one UNL faculty member lost
his job because of the May protests. That
was untenured assistant professor of politi-
cal science Stephen Rozman, who was
notified in February 1971 that his contract
would not be renewed for the 1971-72
school year. Rozman had been present
at both the draft board demonstration and
the ROTC Building sit-in on May 4. The
chief accusations against Rozman were
that he had undermined the UNL
administration’s position in the negotia-
tions between the administration and the
student group occupying the ROTC Build-
ing and that he had refused to leave the
building when President Soshnik ordered
the demonstrators to leave on the morn-
ing of May 5. He was also accused of be-
ing disrespectful to President Soshnik
after the occupation and of saying that the
affidavit submitted to the court by Vice-
Chancellor Ross in support of the injunc-
tion petition contained lies about him and
the other demonstrators.

If all of the accusations against
Rozman were true, the Regents would
have had a strong case for his dismissal.
However, some of the charges against
him were refuted by the special faculty
committee appointed to look into the
matter. The committee concluded that al-
though Rozman did speak “vigorously,”
he was not “abusive.” The committee fur-
ther found that Rozman did not attempt to
persuade students not to leave the build-
ing, and that there was no proof that
Rozman had refused Soshnik’s order to
leave the building. The committee’s gen-
eral conclusion was that “Dr. Rozman was
not guilty of inappropriate actions during
the week of May 4.”

The Board of Regents apparently did
not agree with either the faculty
committee’s assessment of Rozman’s ac-
tions, or with the committee’s definition
of “inappropriate” action by a faculty
member. This is a plausible explanation
of the Regents’ dismissal of Rozman. The
Regents were not academic professionals,
and there is no reason to suppose that
they would have the same opinion of
what constituted professional misconduct
as professors would. Because five of the
eight Regents who fired Rozman were
new to the university, this interpretation
seems strong. Another possibility is that
the Regents felt the need for a scapegoat
because of hostile public opinion toward
the student unrest. This explanation is
supported mainly by the emphasis on the
unrest during the Regents’ election cam-
paign. However, because half of the
board had just won their seats and would
not run for reelection for several years, it
seems unlikely that a majority of the
board would be so motivated.

The Rozman case was not finally re-
solved until October 16, 1972, when a fed-
eral appeals court ruled on a suit Rozman
filed against the university. The court
ruled that the Regents did have the au-
thority to dismiss Rozman, and Rozman

The Daily Nebraskan of February 11, 1971,
published this photo of Dr. Stephen L.
Rozman (standing at right) with Chancellor
Durward B. Varner during an encounter
outside Varner’s office. Nearby students
are holding a sit-in to protest the Regents’
decision not to renew Rozman’s contract.
Courtesy of University of Nebraska-Lincoln,
Archives & Special Collections.
student unrest was passage of LB 445, a bill introduced in the 1971 Nebraska Legislature by Senator C. W. Holmquist. The bill provided for dismissal of faculty and expulsion of students "engaging in certain activities disruptive of any public institution of higher education," and contained the emergency clause, which put it into immediate effect once the bill was made law. Holmquist said his bill was a direct result of the events on the UNL campus in May 1970.46

Nine years after the sit-in at the ROTC Building, UNL Police Chief Gail Gade said that the situation at the Lincoln campuses in 1970 was a "cakewalk" compared to events at Berkeley, California, and Kent, Ohio.47

That is an accurate comparison because there were no deaths or injuries at UNL as there had been at Kent, and Nebraska Governor Norbert Tiemann had not followed the example of California Governor Ronald Reagan and ordered the university to close.48

But that comparison does not answer the question of whether the reaction of UNL students to the twin shocks of Cambodian and Kent State was "typical" of students nationwide, for Kent and Berkeley were exceptional cases.

In 1971 Richard E. Peterson and John A. Bilorusky published a report on the May 1970 unrest on college campuses around the country.49 The report included the results of a survey of 1,856 college presidents on the intensity of dissent at their campuses.50 A brief examination of the results seems to indicate that the response at UNL to the Cambodian incursion and the Kent State shootings was typical for a public institution of its size.

Nearly 90 percent of institutions with 12,000 or more students (124 out of 138 responding schools in this size class) reported "significant impact" upon campus operations.51 A building occupation and a student strike such as occurred at UNL would seem to fit within the category of "significant impact." Almost 75 percent of the large schools reported peaceful demonstrations by students (such as the rallies on the UNL campus). Over 88 percent of the schools reported student efforts to communicate their concerns with area residents. The UNL student canvassing effort appears to fit that description. Over 66 percent of schools in UNL's size class had special seminars, workshops, or projects related to the issues at hand similar to the "strike classes" and "College of Life" at UNL. Unlike UNL and a majority of schools, a minority (46.4 percent) of these schools experienced a shutdown of one day or more. UNL again fits the majority profile, because there was no suspension of operations. Twenty-nine percent of the large schools reported "general student/staff strikes." Whether the voluntary, marginally effective strike at UNL can be called "general" is debatable, as is the question of whether the single Molotov cocktail thrown at the Nebraska Union puts UNL into the category of having experienced a "destructive demonstration" along with 29.7 percent of the large schools.52 The very mildness of the later two activities at UNL tends to reinforce the image of UNL campus reaction being typical for a large state university.

Peterson and Bilorusky's data also show that reaction to the Cambodia/Kent State events was in general much milder in small, private colleges than at the large state universities. The smaller colleges in Nebraska were reported to be largely undisturbed,53 while there was campus turmoil at UNL, by far the largest educational institution in Nebraska and the state's "flagship" school. It is easy to see why the citizens of Nebraska were so concerned about unrest on the Lincoln campus, for nothing quite like it was happening anywhere else in the state. Despite that concern, UNL students were no more "dangerous" than their colleagues at other large public universities, and in many cases were less so.

Notes

1 At the same time, Tiemann announced that if the Nebraska National Guard had to be called out to handle civil disturbances, the guard would be armed. "Guardmen Will Be Armed For Any Major Disturbance," Lincoln Star, May 5, 1970, 4.

4 Report of the President's Commission, 17; Dr. Joseph Soshnik (president of the Lincoln Campuses and Outstate Activities in 1970), interview by author, Omaha, Neb., Nov. 20, 1992.


6 Dan Ladely (current director of the Sheldon Art Gallery Film Series and a student at UNL in 1970 who was a spokesman for the group that occupied the Military and Naval Science Building on the night of May 4, 1970), interview by author, Lincoln, Neb., Nov. 12, 1992; Dr. Robert Stock (UNL English professor and former faculty advisor of the UNL chapter of the Young Americans for Freedom), interview by author, Lincoln, Neb., Nov. 16, 1992.

7 Ladely, interview by author.


10 Spelts Commission Report, 2.

11 "Summary Minutes" of a meeting held to respond to the Spelts Commission Report, Sept. 21, 1970, Spelts Commission file, box 89, Centralized files of Chancellors, University Archives. Present at this meeting were Lincoln Campuses President Joseph Soshnik, Dean of Faculties C. Peter Magrath, Executive Dean of Student Affairs G. Robert Ross, ASUN President Tiwald, and other student and faculty representatives.

12 Tiwald made this suggestion at a meeting at the United Ministries for Higher Education Building (the present UNL Culture Center) on the evening of May 4, Spelts Commission Report, 3.

13 Jim Pedersen, editorial, Daily Nebraska, May 4, 1970, l. The paper's staff had planned to cease publication with the May 4 edition, but due to the occupation of the ROTC Building and subsequent student strike, publication continued until May 22.

14 The paper's full title in 1970 was the Lincoln Evening Journal and Nebraska State Journal. Pedersen's editorial was noted in the article entitled "Students Protest at Draft Board."

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The summary of events at Kent State given in the Report of the President’s Commission indicates that the shootings occurred at approximately 12:25 P.M. (p. 277). Since Ohio is in the eastern time zone, the time in Lincoln would have been about 11:25 A.M., or approximately two hours before the scheduled rally. Dan Ladely recalls that news of Kent State had reached campus by the time of the rally. Ladely, interview by author.

Joseph Soshnik, interview by author, Omaha, Neb., Nov. 20, 1992. In 1970 the chief officer of each University of Nebraska campus held the title of “president,” while the chief of the system’s central administration held the title of “chancellor.” This is the exact opposite of the present situation in which chancellors oversee individual campuses and report to a single university-wide president.

Ladely, interview by author.

Ibid. The Spells Commission Report on p. 2 also identifies Medcalf as the original leader of the march, but does not mention that Medcalf had been a scheduled speaker; Dr. Paul Olson (UNL professor of English and former chair of the Faculty Senate Human Rights Committee), interview by author, Lincoln, Nebr., Nov. 12, 1992. Olson had seen Medcalf earlier in the day and had been told of his intentions. Olson knew of no student group planning the march. Dan Ladely, who participated, remembers that most of the people who followed Medcalf to the rally were not aware of threats by ROTC students against the demonstrators, but denies that Rozman was found someone rifling desk drawers in an office and along to leave the matter in the hands of municipal police. Ladely, interview by author.

Soshnik thought it would be useful for the liaison committee to observe the sit-in, as a communication link with the faculty as a whole, and perhaps offer suggestions on how to handle the situation. Richard Gilbert and Norman Rosenberg were among the committee members present that night. Soshnik, interview by author, Nov. 20, 1992. Paul Olson, although not a member of the committee, was also in the building during much of the night. Olson, interview by author.

Soshnik, interview by author; Soshnik, interview by author; Spells Commission Report, 17.

Ladely, interview by author; Soshnik, interview by author. Ladely recalls that Rozman did advise student negotiators, but denies that Rozman was able to prevent an agreement. Ladely, interview by author.

Rozman’s case will be more fully discussed later.

Spells Commission Report, 5. The full text of the statement appears as “Exhibit A,” following p. 26 of the Spells Commission Report. The provision that no disciplinary action would be taken against those arrested at the Terminal Building was not really a concession to the sit-in, as Soshnik had intended all along to leave the matter in the hands of municipal authorities. Soshnik, interview by author, Nov. 20, 1992.

Ladely recalls a specific instance in which he found someone rifling desk drawers in an office and asked the person to leave. Ladely, interview by author.

Spells Commission Report, 5-6; Soshnik, interview by author.


Ibid. It should also be mentioned that Ross was aware of threats by ROTC students against the demonstrators as well. See Ken Neundorf, “Soshnik, Ross Deny Pressure,” Lincoln Star, May 9, 1970, 1; Soshnik, interview by author.


Ibid., 5-6; Smitherman, “M & N Incidents Recapped,” 2.

Ladely, interview by author and interview by Round. Paul Olson recalls that some students were worried that the National Guard might be used against them. Olson, interview by author. Soshnik has consistently denied that Varner or the Regents pressed him to seek an injunction and clear the building (see, for example, Neundorf, “Soshnik, Ross Deny Pressure,” Lincoln Star, May 9, 1970, 1. He repeated that denial in an interview with the author on Nov. 20, 1992.

Soshnik, interview by author.

Ibid.; Olson, interview by author; Spells Commission Report, 8.

Ladely, interview by author; Spells Commission Report, 17.

Spells Commission Report, 8.


“Tiemann Says Lawless Acts Undermine Dissent,” North Platte Telegraph, May 5, 1970, 1; “Tiemann: No Plan to Call Guard,” 6. Paul Olson and Joseph Soshnik both recall that they were surprised that Tiemann was so quick to publicly mention possible use of the National Guard, especially since there had been no significant violence on campus yet. Olson, interview by author and Soshnik, interview by author.


“Tiemann: No Plan to Call Guard,” 6; “Tiemann: On the Alert,” Grand Island Independent, May 6, 1970, 1; “Guardmen Will Be Armed For Any Major Disturbance,” Lincoln Star, May 9, 1970, 4. This statement worried organizers of a peace rally scheduled for Saturday, May 9, as well as university officials. Soshnik and Olson each contacted the governor and asked him not to use the guard. Soshnik, interview by author, and Olson, interview by author.

For example: Tiemann to Randy Reeves, Lincoln, May 19, 1970; and Tiemann to Edward Hart, Lincoln, May 14, 1970; “University of Nebraska Striko” file, RG1, SG 39, box 95, Norbert Tiemann Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.


“ASUN Supports Striko,” Daily Nebraskan, May 5, 1970, 1. ASUN President Tiwald expressed his oppo-
sition to an occupation of the building before it even happened.


60 Estimates of the number of people in attendance ranged from 4,000 to almost 10,000. The Spelts Commission Report estimated 4,000 to 9,000 students present at the Coliseum meeting on p. 5, while giving a total enrollment figure of "approximately 18,800" on p. 18. The Lincoln Evening Journal ran a photo of the crowd at the Coliseum on p. 48 of its May 6, 1970, edition. The caption accompanying the photo estimated the crowd at "nearly 10,000" students.


62 Ibid. MacDowell estimated that about three-fourths of those present voted for the strike. Opponents of the strike were later to claim that the meeting was not truly representative of the students, because only a minority of them were present. Stock, interview by author.

63 "Spelts Commission Report," 11. The YAF was a national organization of politically conservative students, which had existed at least since 1968, while the CUE sprang up in May 1970 as a response to the strike. Many CUE members were not necessarily supportive of Nixon’s Cambodia policy, but merely opposed shutting down the university. YAF members were more likely to support Nixon’s decision. Stock, interview by author.

64 "4600 Students at Nebraska Vote to Adopt 3-Day Boycott," Omaha World-Herald, May 6, 1970, 8.


66 In fact, ROTC faculty participated, as did President Soshnik. Spelts Commission Report, 10.

67 Dan Ladely and Phil Medcalf were two of the committee’s members. "Seven Students Head Strike Committee," Daily Nebraskan, May 7, 1970, 3.


69 The estimated rally attendance was four to six thousand, while fifteen thousand people watched the spring game. "More Fans Than Protestors," Daily Nebraskan, May 11, 1970, 3.


72 Olson, interview by author.


75 Soshnik, interview by author.

76 "Inquiry Not a Threat," Daily Nebraskan, May 21, 1970, 1. The Spelts Commission Report has been cited numerous times in this paper. The date of the report and the members of the commission are listed on the letter of transmittal from Spelts to the Regents, a copy of which is included with the copy of the report itself in the Rozman file.

77 Spelts Commission Report, 1, 19.


83 Tishendorf, "Angry Senator . . . ," 17; Bob Nelson, "New Faces Will Occupy Four Spots On Expanded NU Board of Regents," Lincoln Evening Journal, Nov. 4, 1970, 40. As the article’s title indicates, the board was expanded from six to eight members that year.

84 Resolution of the Board of Regents directing that Rozman’s contract not be renewed. Information from Regents’ Meeting of Feb. 6, 1971, Rozman file.


86 "Report of Fact-finding Committee," 17; Soshnik, interview by author, Nov. 20, 1992; statement from the "Special Faculty Fact-finding Committee Appointed in Connection With the Stephen Rozman Matter" to the Liaison Committee of the Faculty Senate concerning "The Regents’ Resolution and Relevant Recommendations from the Committee" [February 1971], 5-6, Rozman file.

87 In addition to the four new Regents elected in November 1970, Kermit Hansen was appointed by Governor Tiemmann to replace a regent who resigned to accept a position on the Republican National Committee. Soshnik, interview by author. It should be added that Dr. Soshnik merely provided a fact upon which the author’s interpretation is partially based.


The full text of LB 445 is attached to a memo from George Round, then UNL director of information, to President Soshnik, stating that the bill had been passed by a 41-0 vote. Round to Soshnik, memo, Apr. 1, 1971. "Faculty Responsibility, Faculty Dismissal, and Non-Reappointment" file, box 02, Centralized files of Chancellors, University Archives. LB445 was still in force as of 1987. Revised Statutes of Nebraska (1987), sections 85-601 through 85-605. Bob Nelson, "Rozman, Regents Back Campus Disturbance Bill," Lincoln Evening Journal, Feb. 16, 1971, 5. Rozman favored the bill because in its original form it provided for "due process" for accused faculty and students. The bill as passed exempted faculty on "probationary" (non-tenured) appointments from this provision. See text of bill in Round memo to Soshnik, Apr. 1, 1971.

89 Cade and Marlin, interview by Round.


91 See note 10.

92 This number refers to the number of responses received by the researchers. Peterson and Bilorsky, May 1970, 10.

93 Eighty-six percent of the 138 large schools were public institutions. Peterson and Bilorsky, May 1970, 43.

94 I am indebted to Peterson and Bilorsky, May 1970, 42-45, for the data appearing in the preceding paragraph.


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