

INTERVIEW OF WILBUR LAYTON

BY

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Layton: I am Wilbur Layton, Vice President of Student Affairs. I think the student participation in these events, personally I was aware of the events of Nixon on Thursday, April 30th, and Friday, May 1st, and Saturday, May 2nd, the people's rally only I was not personally involved, but only aware of the information coming to me through my staff. Other than the business performed, and the same thing is true of Monday, May 4th business, when the students protested down at the Selective Service office. Then on Tuesday, May 5th, I was aware that there was a possibility of Iowa State students doing some kind of protesting or demonstrating, but I was then told that they had gathered at the Union and were talking about the Kent State thing, talking about some time, reaction again. Interesting enough, I got that information through news. I went over to Beyer Gym for my regular exercise period at noon. I was taking a shower over there when Sandeen found me and told me about the attempt to, I think the language here is a little strong, I don't think they attempted to block the Naval Science building. They did indicate their displeasure with the Naval ROTC military men. They soaped some of the screens and some obscene words, but it wasn't any genuine attempt to block the Naval Science building. By the time I got dressed and across the street to the Naval Science building, the crowd had moved up to the Armory. Sandeen and his staff were keeping track of what was going on.

Interviewer: By the time you got there they were already in the Armory?

Layton: No, I didn't even go to the Armory. They had left the Naval Science building by the time I got there. I went back to my office and Sandeen was in charge of keeping track of what was going on. But at

the Armory, the information I got back from Sandeen was that the people there wanted to spend the night in the Armory, a sort of symbolic kind of thing. They were not interested in really, well, I got conflicting messages. They didn't perceive it as a general sit-in to block ROTC, and I'm not sure. My first information was that there were ROTC drills scheduled in the Armory and their position in the Armory itself was such that they were disrupting the activities that were going on. Now I heard later that there was an Air Force activity of some kind that had been canceled because of the people in the building. But the group was gathered in the center of the Armory floor. And they were sitting quietly and talking. Some of them were moving around. We and Sandeen kept informed of what they were doing and we referred or given several alternatives of their behavior and how they might respond to it. We finally got across to the group and [to] us that all they wanted to do was spend the night in the Armory and have a rap session. A few people that were saying to me or messages I got was some of these people wanted to be arrested. They wanted you to come in and arrest them so that they could be a symbol. Sandeen and I talked this over. It was apparent that there wasn't an easy way for us to go about causing an arrest because there wasn't a reasonable charge placed against them in order to arrest them, even if we wanted to.

Interviewer: Did you feel that this was a strong possibility, if you arrest someone then they would become some sort of a martyr or symbol and you wanted to avoid this?

Layton: Yes. It appeared to us that as long as things were peaceful and non-disruptive, there was no point not to accommodate these people or have

arrests made.

Interviewer: Now, I understand you attempted or at least investigated the possibility of an injunction. What happened there?

Layton: We found that this had to be done through the Attorney General office. And the Attorney General was reluctant to cooperate. So, it became apparent that we couldn't get an injunction on that day.

Interviewer: Would you have used it if you got it?

Layton: I don't know. It was one of the possibilities we considered and we wanted to be armed with it in case we needed it.

Interviewer: Why was it difficult to get one?

Layton: Well, by the time someone got to the Attorney General, it was after 3 o'clock. The Attorney General himself got into the act about 4 o'clock and after chewing out our representative, saying the University administration has to get tough with the students, he looked at his watch and said that his office closed at five and he can't possibly get an injunction for us by five o'clock, but tomorrow he'd get it. And our response was we needed it today, that it wasn't any good tomorrow. His advice to us was to declare the people trespassing, which is not a criminal offense, and use the football squad to go in and carry them out of there. So, we rejected that idea, too. So, then, when it became obvious to us that what the group really wanted in our judgment and our conversations with them, by that time I had gone over. I conferred with Charlie Vanderbur, the Story County Attorney, about both the injunction and the charges that might be placed against these people, and that was an unsatisfactory conversation. By that time, I went over to the Armory, talked with Dean Sandeen and his staff.

Interviewer: Was this before five o'clock?

Layton: Right at five, it was right in that neighborhood someplace and after talking to the students I talked to Professor Dave Metzler. We decided, Sandeen and I, to tell them that they were occupying a building without authorization, possibly that we could take disciplinary action against them if they didn't move. And it became obvious that this is the reaction they wanted. So, we, what became apparent is that they were determined to stay there. We decided that rather to enforce it, we would let them stay and I got on the telephone to several faculty members and asked them to call other faculty members and converge on the Armory and turn it into a rap session. I was very pleased with the way in which the faculty members responded, Roger Lawrence for example. So, this group of twenty to twenty-five or so faculty members came into the Armory and some of them stayed until 2:00 a.m.

Interviewer: Did you seriously contemplate using disciplinary action against them if they didn't leave at a certain time?

Layton: Yes, these are things we did consider and actually told them.

Interviewer: The reason why you didn't institute action against them is what?

Layton: As the evening progressed it became apparent that this would have been a negative thing to do. It would have caused the students to behave in an even more highly emotional state. One of the messages that kept coming through was the need for many of the students to talk to adults, faculty to express their feelings, have some attention paid to them, some understanding given to them. And so it became apparent to both me and Sandeen that we shouldn't switch our approach in working with the students, give an understanding approach instead.

And the students then, I came back over to the Armory about five in the morning and they had already moved out and cleaned up the Armory and left it nice and clean. There was a little bit of vandalism. I don't know who did it. Somebody wrote something like "Marx still lives" or something like that on a wall. Somebody tried to plug up a toilet. And outside of that, oh, somebody tried to swipe some medals and did from our trophy case. The students had moved out of the Armory by that time, 5:30 or so, in the morning, and some of them had gathered around the flagpole on central campus. The man who is responsible for raising the flag, whose name I don't know, had a police officer come to raise the flag and the students at the flagpole prevented them from raising the flag and they were prepared with a scuffle, I guess. So, the man who was supposed to raise the flag and the police officer said to them that their orders were to raise the flag, that they had no authority ourselves not to raise it. The students earlier had asked that the flag be lowered to half mast all day as tribute or memorial to the four Kent State students. This was refused but they were told that the flag could be lowered to half mast during the noon rally itself. Well, the students, they wanted it down all day or at half mast and if they couldn't have that they weren't going to let it go up. Dick Bender was one of those persons, the student group on the flag incident, and I went over and talked to that group about it. They seemed determined to keep the flag down. We finally agreed that what we should do is raise the flag at the rally or just before it and lower it to half mast during the rally and then raise it up again. They agreed to that and in the meantime I understand, I wasn't there when the conservatives came over. I was called on by

Bjornseth, Augustine, Pete Julius, and Mrs. Bjornseth, and somebody else just before, protesting to me about the flag incident and insisting that the flag be up there. Now, I explained, one of the crucial things here in the decision not to raise the flag, of course, the issue was the day before there had been a riot on campus [in Alabama] over the same kind of incident and it didn't seem worthwhile to precipitate that kind of situation here.

Interviewer: Did you explain that to the delegation?

Layton: Right.

Interviewer: What did they say to that?

Layton: Essentially, come hell or high water, that flag has got to go up. So, I was called on by the conservative students. I explained to them that the flag would go up and be lowered to half mast at the rally and then be raised again. I also explained to them that the President's decision, he's the one who made the decision, that the flag stay down, and he did it and I am sure because of the fact that the riot had taken place and also at the University the afternoon before and we wanted to avoid things like that.

Interviewer: But that didn't convince them, did it?

Layton: Oh, no, it didn't appear logical to them and they just kept on insisting that we raise the flag. The flagpole is locked and they were going to break the lock and raise their own flag. They didn't see any inconsistency in their guilty goal in doing that as compared to the protesters and the kind of activity they were protesting. Anyway, the flag did stay down as the President ordered. It was raised and lowered to half mast and after the rally was over it was raised up to full again and the incident was forgotten essentially.

So, after the flag incident, and at noon I stayed in my office looking down on the east steps of Beardshear, sort of keeping an eye on the rally. I didn't walk over to the rally itself. I stayed in my office because my staff, who was out milling with the crowd, was able to contact me that way rather than if I had gone out to the rally, there would have been no coordination. I recognized Bob Trembly's voice and his call for a migration over to the drill field to disrupt. I think a kind of amusing, well, an amusing side light to this that I want to come back to. First of all, Trembly did break into the middle of this rally program, perhaps when Stuart Smith, I forgotten exactly where the sequence of the program was. There were at least two more speakers left on the program and Trembly took the mike and called for a migration over to the drill field and attracted thousands, I don't know, quite a large number, anyway. I saw the group move over to the drill field, I stayed in my office. The plan was that this handful of people, we would arrest them for disturbing the peace and disruption. As it turned out there were thousands which made it impossible. In hindsight, perhaps, that drill should have been called off because it was provocative. The amusing incident is this: Bob Trembly has a friend, Jack Duffy, who is a graduate student in psychology. Jack chose to go into ROTC as his means of military obligation and Jack and Trembly are very close friends. They have courses and classes together and did a big project together a year ago. The strategy of the disrupters of the ROTC drill was to sit down in the parade area, and grab the ROTC men as they came by. Well, Trembly was sitting there as Duffy walked by and Trembly blindly reached out at the ROTC men and just happened to get

Duffy and apparently had Duffy by one leg, and Duffy was down and shook his leg and said, "For God's sake, Trembly! You just ruined my shine." I found out about this, well, I knew of the disruption. They then moved into the Armory and I, myself, went over to the Armory. I just got there as the crowd had gotten up there, to a pretty high pitch and Trembly was again talking to them and this is something that can hopefully be verified with him, I haven't talked to him about it. My impression was that he was trying to exort the group to split up and go out and get more people involved in anti-war activities. And my own impression is that I think he lost control. He built them up to too high a pitch and somebody in the crowd yelled, "All the way to Lincoln Way", and judge as special significance. Now this just precipitated the movement of the group out of the Armory and they headed for Lincoln Way, went from Lincoln Way to Beach, stopped, and then went all the way downtown. They essentially repeated the path of the march they'd had on May 2nd.

Interviewer: Did you alert the city officials that the crowd was headed downtown Ames, or likely towards that way?

Layton: Yes, I did contact the police earlier that morning just to be informed of what was going on. Of course, they were concerned; well, they were worried about the Saturday, May 2nd, rally. They also knew about the crosses at the draft board the Monday before. The tension was quite high as they were concerned about implications of things down town. My own impression is that the, I had called Chief Siedelmann from the Armory when I saw the group building up this pitch, so that he would know the possibilities of this kind of action and as the group headed for Lincoln Way, they all began. Now he and his

force, I think, behaved beautifully because they didn't attempt to break up the thing. They sort of contained it, shaped its activities so that it wasn't wildly disruptive. So, I believe the police did a good job. I got in my car and then drove, I had driven down over to the Armory, down to Lake LaVerne to see where the group was headed or going and then I went back to my office to wait and see what happened. In hindsight, there was a relationship between the Armory, I hate to call it a sit-in because I don't really consider it a sit-in. Let's call it a teach-in. But the incident and the demonstrations in the Union earlier in the year. The demonstrations in the Union started out as a protest against military recruiters being in the Union and quickly turned from that into a demonstration in favor of freedom of expression and no limitation on the freedom of speech. At that time, in my judgment, instead of taking a hard line approach which would have been to say that these people were disrupting Union activities, calling in police and arresting them and so forth, I chose to understand what they were saying and agreed that there should be a non-disruptive demonstration allowed in the Union. So, I took that approach which was viewed by a number of people as a soft approach. Many people thought that they should have been arrested for the activities in the Union. My own judgment, from reading and knowing about incidents on other campuses in that particular situation, an excellent way to escalate the thing into a very nasty situation would have been to arrest the students. But our approach in this administration is really to try and understand what the students are trying to say to us. Sometimes they can say it verbally or orally, sometimes they have to do it in terms of other

kinds of behavior. And we don't always read the messages correctly but we try and understand what they are trying to express through these kinds of behaviors. And through that understanding decide how to work with them or help them meet their needs and what finally, I mean, the pattern was sort of set at the Union. It had been set earlier by other students, but this is what essentially repeated itself in the Armory situation. It became clear to us what the majority of the students were trying to say, trying to express, which was a combination of the anti-war sentiment plus shock and whatever, grief, over the Kent State incident. It became obvious that this is what they were trying to deal with. They were extremely frustrated over these things. The Cambodian thing, of course, had been a frustration, and the Southeast Asian war. But this combination of frustration and grief. Many of them were trying to cope with their own feelings, reactions and so forth. And in my judgment the heavy hand in the Armory situation, calling in the police and arresting them, would have for the majority of the people there, compounded their frustrations. And as it was taking a somewhat understanding approach, the faculty helped a great deal here talking with them, taking that approach. It helped the students deal with the feelings they had and helped them satisfy their needs. I think from the experience of Mayor Daley in Chicago among many others and the Berkeley events of '64, that the way to rapidly escalate things like this, make them grow in a very rapid way, undesirable direction, is to use a heavy hand.

Interviewer: Were you criticized again, though, by the Armory incident as you had been before?

Layton: No, not as much although there was some criticism from people concerned about the flag raising incident. They were upset. But it wasn't as strong a reaction as the Union thing. And I think it is in part because of the Cambodian decision and the Kent State murders that many people gained a better understanding of why students might behave in a certain way. And, so, I think they tended to react in a more understanding way.

Interviewer: Are you making any kind of plans for hostile actions next fall?

Layton: Only in terms of trying to be sensitive to issues and things that would upset the students. Again they can feel frustrated or get emotional, tense, and so on.

Interviewer: For example, there may be some agitation for time off for the campaigning next fall. Do you think this might cause unrest tension on the campus?

Layton: I am sure it will cause some. The Board of Regents indicated that there won't be a two-week vacation. The Faculty Council has been working on another statement, I haven't seen it yet, relevant to this business at this time. I think there is plenty of time that students can make in and around their class schedules if they really want to do it.

Interviewer: Again, would you favor something that would encourage faculty members to take this into consideration if students wanted to postpone the course?

Layton: As always, this is up to, as it was this spring, it's between the instructor and the student. They can work out, within our existing framework, which is pretty flexible, if they can work out something that will give the students some extra time, fine. The students,

I think, should, if they feel that strongly, I think that they have to learn that they can't have their cake and eat it, too. If they feel strongly enough, I think students ought to drop out of school for the quarter and give that as a personal contribution for the whole thing. Or reduce their class loads. They can have both then. I suppose my attitude is that the University itself shouldn't always be picking up the tab or things like that. Students accuse us of talking about business as usual, but the students on the other hand are talking about business as usual and they don't want to lose anything through their participation. My impression is that many students this fall will be quite active in election campaigns. The thing I am afraid of or concerned about is the aftermath of the elections because my own personal prediction is that the students campaigning is not going to be effective overall. In fact, just the opposite. That we will have a, I'm afraid, a continuation of movement for conservatives. And students in the main are going to be backing liberal candidates. They are going to be extremely frustrated when they see the election results the morning after the elections.

Interviewer: And they will think they can't get through the system of elections.

Layton: Yes, it's going to be two more years before national elections so this is going to add to the demonstrations.

Interviewer: By that time various amendments may be passed through Congress so that a lot of the pressure may be off.

Layton: As far as Southeast Asia is concerned. These are the kinds of things we have to look forward to this fall. And I don't have any, I think the key to this whole business is to help the students deal with their frustrations they have, help them satisfy their needs, ways other

than disruptive activity and violence.

Interviewer: Did you participate in the or go down to the meeting in Des Moines held by the Regents on proposals to control students?

Layton: Yes, I was there.

Interviewer: Do you have any general impressions of that?

Layton: I think that it was interesting that the messages that were being transmitted by students and faculty members, primarily from the University of Iowa, was, "For gosh sakes, listen to us, involve us in our own governance, we want to participate", and so on. The people furthest away from the campus, the American Legion, the Farm Bureau, and some others, the more conservative people were saying "Use a heavy hand." There were practically no specific constructive suggestions other than the kind of thing saying "let us participate."

Interviewer: Did the meeting ask any questions or was it strictly a hearing?

Layton: It was strictly a hearing. There were a couple, three questions asked, though.

Interviewer: Did you have any informal meetings with the Dean of Students from the other campuses or are you beyond that?

Layton: We communicate by telephone here in Iowa. I would guess that this fall we will start meeting regularly, be more formal. There is a group of about twenty Vice Presidents for Student Affairs that has been meeting together for about six months. We use this to retreat and keep track of each other. We have a person working on this which must take five to ten hours. It's the University of Maryland. It's a way to keep track, communicate. I think our students behaved themselves admirably this Spring. I can't really condone Bob Trembly for leading the troops over to upset the other troops. I think this

was unnecessary in terms of what the overall purposes of this thing was, the activities were. But as far as the on-campus events that occurred, I was very pleased with the constructive way in which our students handled themselves. They exercised tremendous control, both individually and as a group. Then, I think the culmination of it and the organization of the issues, sessions, or whatever GSB did, made some calls, and turning it essentially into an educational communication activity was very positive. So, overall, I was very pleased with the way in which our students conducted themselves. In terms of the off-campus things, I don't really think it's necessary, except for own personal satisfaction, for students to block a Selective Service office or a sit-in in front of the bus. I think the people involved get much more ego satisfaction out of it than they do in terms of effectiveness or effective contribution to the cause of peace.

Interviewer: But, is there anything specifically here that would account for the relative peacefulness of events here as compared to other campuses?

Layton: Well, I think the attitude of the students in the main, you have very few, if any, of the wild-eyed radical revolutionaries who have already objected to the system. I think our administrative response and our faculty response to help students has added to the situation of non-violence.

