

THE CIVIL DEFENSE PROTEST
AT CITY HALL PARK

by Mary Meigs

At 3 p.m. a good many people had already gathered in the park, and from then on there was a steady stream: young people, old people, mothers with babies in carriages, fathers with children on their shoulders, leaders of the protest, people passing out leaflets. By 3:45 the park was so crowded that you could hardly move. Innumerable policemen were standing on the outside, a bus-load of them sat waiting, dozens more had taken up positions inside the park so that no matter where you stood there seemed to be one close to you. (There was a general tendency to move with seeming carelessness as far away from the policeman near you as you could get, so that around each there was a small vacuum.) If you craned your neck you could see officials standing on the steps of City Hall and you wondered what they were thinking. A cold wind had begun to blow and massive clouds were gathered overhead.

At 4 o'clock the first siren went off and for a few minutes we stood silent and united in a common sense of elation and solemnity. We had been told that after the second siren those who wanted to take shelter could do so but something unexpected happened. At the second siren nobody moved. A police official began shouting through a loud speaker, "You are all under arrest," and his voice was drowned in a burst of laughter and cheering. Some of us began to sing. Out of the confusion at the center of the crowd emerged policemen, each with his victim, who was walked through our ranks and thrust into a waiting paddy wagon. Why those particular people? Why not us? Questions without answers. In a second protest an army of us walked to the Courthouse and circled two by two round and round the block, while, as usual, an absurd number of policemen stood by "to keep order" and across the street, youths jeered and carried signs saying, "Why don't you go back to where you came from?"

The next day the New York papers reported that from 50 to "several hundred" people had taken part in the protest. Those of us who were there know better.

SUMMER PROGRAM A folder will soon be out giving details of the New England CNVA summer program. Meanwhile, any who would like to attend for a good part or all of the summer should write Dr. Gordon Christiansen, Chairman of the Personnel Committee, 13 North Bank Street, New London, Connecticut.