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The Walkout at Northern High

by David Gracie

When 2300 students walked out of Northern High School in Detroit on April 7, 1966 they were protesting two injustices: first, grossly inferior educational opportunities for Negroes in all our inner-city schools, and second, a particularly repressive high school administration at Northern. Recent studies at the national and local levels point up the validity of the students' protest. They show that for many Negro youngsters the years spent in school are years of regression and not advance; in fact, the gap between their measured ability and their achievement may actually increase while they are in school. Detroit Board of Education testing revealed that only about 20% of the graduating class of Northern High in June, 1966, were achieving at 12th grade level. When U.S. Congressman John Conyers spoke to that poorly educated graduating class, the veterans of the walkout, at commencement exercises in beautiful Ford Auditorium, he shattered whatever illusion of success might have been created by the beautiful surroundings and the sight of some 250 students in caps and gowns, by reminding the students that more than half of their brothers and sisters who began high school with them had by now dropped out. Here is the full measure of our failure. In the lower grades Negro youngsters become so frustrated that over half of them drop out in high school, and of those who remain perhaps only 20% are trained so that they could begin to compete with the average graduate from a white school.

That Negro high school students would walk out of school because of this, in order to demonstrate their deep desire for something better, should have been cause for rejoicing in the city. Instead it produced a reaction of fear.

Background

It was the concern for quality education that motivated Charles Colding, a Northern High Senior, to write his editorial for the school newspaper "The Northern Light." In the editorial he asked why Negro students were receiving inferior education. In particular, he compared what was being offered at Northern with the education of students at Redford High, an outlying white school. The English Department head, backed up by the principal, refused to allow the editorial to be published. This was the spark for the walkout. Here the larger issue of quality education for Negroes and the particular problems of Northern were joined. The suppression of the editorial was the last straw in what the students (and many teachers) felt was a whole series of repressive measures by the administration. So when the students walked out they carried picket

signs objecting to inferior schooling (the big issue) plus those calling for the removal of their principal and the police officer assigned to the school (the particular problems of Northern).

The police officer, they felt, was an important part of the whole pattern of repression. He had been assigned to the school by the Police Department, an arrangement which many of us in the community had been led to believe was necessary because of the heavy pedestrian and auto traffic on the school corner, the activity of pimps in the halls of the school. The officer was a Negro, a resident of the school community, and was supposed to be a friend of the student body. It was a great surprise for us to see the picket signs demanding his removal, and to hear from responsible students at the school what a prison-like atmosphere had been created by his activity within the building and his patrolling of off-limits stores in the area. Students particularly resented the fact that he had an office in the school building and was treated by the principal as part of the administration.

The existence of the police problem was just one of a series of surprises for the adults in the community. The event itself and not only its particulars took most of the community completely unawares. The students had planned their protest by themselves, with only a very few adult confidantes. While my church is only two blocks away from the school, and some Northern students belong to the church, I knew nothing about the walkout until a day or so before it happened. I later learned that someone had asked the student leaders why they had not enlisted the aid of a local minister; they had responded by saying that the principal had all the ministers in his hip pocket. There was truth in that observation. The principal's version of conditions at Northern was our view; it was the only one we had heard. He claimed that Northern was among the best schools in the city, that everything was offered that the students needed, and that all that was lacking was student motivation and the creation of good study habits. He was willing to go to community groups and tell the parents what students had to do to achieve, and he did some of this, speaking once at St. Joseph's Church. We may have winced at his paternalistic attitude, but it seemed to us that his heart was in the right place and he was giving it a good try. We know that some effort was being made to encourage the most talented students to go to college, and for the rest we assumed that all was well. We even supported his efforts to retain the police officer at the school when the Department began to have second thoughts about the arrangement.

Our community organization knew nothing of the trouble brewing at the school. It was and is a community organization of the non-militant variety. The North Woodward Community Council operates on the principle of cooperation with the authorities. When grievances are dealt with it is done through authorized

channels; they are not dramatized, and public pressure is not employed. The principal himself was a moving force in our small community council. I recall that we were all vaguely concerned about the lack of recreation space in the area, but none of us knew how to proceed about this need. It took the walkout to show what we should have been publicizing ourselves: that Northern's gravel playfield was only big enough for a small elementary school (Northern is the only Detroit high school whose total plant, including playfield, does not occupy one city block), that the gym floors were in such disrepair that nails were protruding and in places a ball could not be dribbled on a straight line, that this school with its fine basketball team could only seat 100 visitors at a game, etc. But we were a group that didn't dig for facts and wouldn't rock the boat anyway; small wonder that the students deliberately avoided coming to us or any other local adult organization for help.

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C.O.R.E. was the one organization approached by the students. After a walkout had been decided upon, C.O.R.E.'s advice on how to do it was sought. It was at the C.O.R.E. office on 12th Street where picket signs were made and some final planning sessions held.

Superintendent of Schools Samuel Brownell was himself surprised by the walkout (or so he tells it). He, too, learned of the impending strike only a day or so in advance. When he came on the scene he tried to forestall the walkout, but when he saw that he could not he instead authorized it to take place. It was scheduled for April 7, the day before Easter vacation began, so he probably reasoned that, if he cooperated with the students now, Easter Week could be used to smooth out their grievances and they would return to classes on the following Monday. Thoughts of the upcoming millage election were in his head, and he may have seen the demonstration as being of some potential benefit in getting out the necessary Negro vote for the millage. In any event, he authorized it, giving the students the afternoon off, and agreeing to speak to them at their rally. This action embittered the principal, guaranteed 100% student participation in the walkout (although I think it would have been near that anyway), and it did not really strengthen his bargaining position with the students, who tended to resent his attempt to "take over" their demonstration. Nevertheless, it was an imaginative move. It is too bad that it was to be his last move with any imagination.

The walkout

Thursday, April 7: The demonstration was impressive; the great crowd of students marched around the high school directed by student parade marshalls, and supported by a group of parents who carried signs of their own, one of which read: "This should have happened 20 years ago." After marching the whole group came down the street to St. Joseph's Church for a rally. I had offered the

church for the rally, believing that some neutral place was needed for the students to say what they had to say, for those of us in the community (who were very much in the dark) to hear it, and for Superintendent Brownell or others to respond. About 1000 students and community residents jammed into the church; I have no idea how many had to be turned away for lack of space. Al Roberts of C.O.R.E. helped to run the meeting, but it was the student leaders (Colding, Judy Walker and Michael Batchelor) who called the shots. What I remember most vividly is the outstanding Northern graduate who told of the hard time he was having keeping up with his studies at the University of Michigan, the growing sense I had through all that transpired that the students would be satisfied with nothing less than the removal of their present principal, and the Superintendent's talk. The Superintendent made an appeal for the millage and assured the students that he would meet with them soon to talk about specific grievances. The principal was not present, although I understand that he had been invited by the students to attend. He went on Easter vacation and by the time he returned positions had hardened to the point that communication between himself and the student body was impossible. Of course the theme of student complaints had been that such communication was really impossible all along.

Monday, April 11: On the day after Easter Superintendent Brownell met with student leaders and some parents and interested community members at the church. The students presented him with this set of demands: 1) Principal Carty was to be removed and not replaced by Assistant Principal Donaldson. 2) Police Officer Lucas was to be removed from his assignment at Northern. 3) Teachers who wished to stay at Northern should not be forced to move at the end of three years. (This referred to the rule which transferred new teachers after three years to a different school in a different environment. The students believed that their hope lay with the young teachers, and did not want them to be forced to leave.) 4) Comparative information about education at inner- and outer-city schools should be prepared and made public. 5) A student-faculty council should be created at Northern. (Students believed that the existing student council was completely unrepresented and powerless.) 6) A school-community agent should be appointed for Northern.

These were the demands throughout the boycott, with the addition of a seventh, that no reprisals were to be taken against striking students. They were all reasonable demands as subsequent investigation was to show, and some of them were acceded to rather quickly: the police officer was reassigned elsewhere, a counselor was named school-community agent (it was significant, however, that his first task was to play truant officer by acquainting parents of striking students with the legal penalties for such conduct), and it did not take long after the final return of the students for a

student-faculty council to be formed. At this Monday meeting, however, Superintendent Brownell was taken off-balance when he was presented with the student demands. He had hoped to talk things out at this meeting and persuade everyone of his good intentions, but the students had different ideas. They presented the demands and soon adjourned the meeting, after having called for written responses to their demands at various specified dates in the near future. The Superintendent had a strike on his hands. Never having faced a student strike before, he did not know what to do.

Tuesday, April 12: In the afternoon the Superintendent called a meeting of community leaders to receive their advice on how to proceed. This was a fruitless exercise as they did not know what to do either. In the evening the Board of Education went to work on the problem. I was called by certain Board members at night and asked to head a citizens investigating committee at Northern. The assumption was that since I had the confidence of the students they would cooperate with a committee under my charge and trust its findings. I said I would consider it, depending on the response of students and parents to the idea, and that I would attend a meeting on the 13th between Board President Dr. Remus Robinson, Board Members Peter Grylls and the Reverend Darneau Stewart and the student leaders.

Wednesday, April 13: At the meeting the Board members promised a Board investigation of student grievances to begin the following Tuesday (the 19th). Of course the students were expected to return to classes on Monday and await the results of the investigation. Furthermore, a citizens investigating committee was to be established with myself as chairman and students and parents from Northern among the participating members.

The student leaders consented to appear before the Board, but said that no one would return to school if the principal was there on Monday. What they were asking for, in effect, was a temporary suspension of the principal while the investigation was in progress; they were very sure that they could make their case and that it would be clear to one and all that the principal should be removed. Although the Board members were clearly in charge at this stage, Superintendent Brownell was present at the meeting and he agreed to this condition.

April 14-17: At a meeting of students on Thursday evening and a parents meeting on Saturday it became clear that the Board hearings would be accepted (at least given a try), but that no one wanted to serve on an investigating committee until some positive response had first come from the Board. I notified the school authorities that I could not chair a committee if community people would not serve, and they would not serve until student demands (1) and (2) had been satisfactorily dealt with. Copies of this communication went to the press and Bill Serrin of the Free Press became curious about what was happening, did some digging, and broke the news to the community at large that a strike situation

existed. All through Easter Week the only press stories had been statements by the Superintendent that all was well.

Monday and Tuesday, April 18-19: All was not well, but the students did return to school on Monday. Principal Carty had been called to the School Center Building "to study the situation," while an assistant superintendent and the field executive took over at Northern.

On Tuesday afternoon the Board heard the student leaders, a parent representative, and the Detroit Federation of Teachers building representative at Northern. The building representative, Ed Vanderlaan, wished to present teacher grievances against the principal to support the student demand for his removal. There was a curious atmosphere to the whole hearing as the Board of Education demonstrated in one way after another that it could not really hear and understand what the students were saying. First we learned that the Board was in a hurry; they all had to leave at a certain hour to attend the testimonial dinner for Superintendent Brownell, who was soon to retire. They met as a committee of the whole, and no satisfactory answers were given to Charles Colding when he asked if they had power to take any action today, or just when they might reach a decision. They simply said they would hear the students today and the principal tomorrow. Throughout the proceedings kind words were attempted, some sincerity was evident, but what was communicated to the students was this: We are graciously condescending to listen to you, even though we are very busy people, and we must run off to honor the Superintendent, so get off your chest what you want to say and, then, in our own good time, we will decide what shall be done about it. When the students did try to get it off their chests, Board Member A. L. Zwerdling, who chaired the hearing, cross-examined them as if they were in a court room. (Mr. Zwerdling is an attorney, one of the liberals on the Board who did show some understanding of what was happening as subsequent events unfolded.) The one example that sticks in my mind is this: Batchelor: "The counsellor pushed me into the principal's office." Zwerdling: "How many feet would you say he pushed you?" And when the building representative tried to present cases which would indicate the pattern of administrative repression, which affected teachers as well as students, the chairman stopped him after every other sentence to be sure he was not trying to get cases adjudicated outside of the contractual grievance procedures. By the time everyone had spoken and the Board members had gone off to honor the Superintendent, the students were convinced they had not been heard and doubted that the Board would take any direct action anyway. This was communicated by them to the community rally at St. Joseph's that evening, and it was decided not to return to school the following day. The press picked up a statement at the rally by a student leader to the effect that the Board had treated them "like dogs." The statement they should have caught was Charles Colding's. He put his finger on the whole problem when he said that he felt before the

Board just like he used to feel in Mr. Carty's office.

The freedom school

Wednesday, April 20: Students reported to St. Joseph's Church in the morning for a rally. It was a very effective boycott the first day: of 2300 students, less than 200 attended Northern (where Assistant Superintendent Wolf still presided), about half of the rest came to the Church, while the others stayed home. During the afternoon the Board heard the principal but made no decision other than to turn matters back to the Superintendent, who ordered the principal back to Northern Thursday morning. The battle lines were drawn.

The idea of a Freedom School had been presented at the Tuesday rally as a means of demonstrating that students were not striking against school as such, but rather against an inferior school, and that their goal was quality education. The idea became an actuality after Dr. Karl Gregory appeared on the scene. Gregory is a Northern alumnus who is now on the faculty of Wayne State University in the economics department. He drove over to see for himself what was happening and overheard students talking about the need for a school to take the place of Northern during the boycott. He offered his services to Charles Colding and then returned to Wayne to his own classes. He was contacted by the students at 4:00 P.M. and asked to begin recruiting teachers for the Freedom School that was to begin the next day. The response to his recruitment efforts was amazing. It was possible to launch Freedom School at 8:30 the next morning, and within a very few days approximately 150 teachers had been signed up to serve. Many of them were Wayne University faculty members. Dr. Gregory assumed duties as principal of the Freedom School and became its very articulate interpreter for the press. He told a reporter that when he was a student at Northern a counsellor had told him he would never make it to college. Now he was on a college faculty, and that particular counsellor was still at Northern (presumably continuing to give similar encouragement to Negro students!).

Thursday, April 21: At 8:30 A.M. Freedom School got underway. After mass singing of freedom songs, two lectures were presented to the students who jammed into the main body of the Church. Dr. David Herreshof of Wayne lectured very effectively on "Civil Disobedience," and Dr. William Bunge of Wayne lectured with a great deal of humor and insight on "The Geography of Racism."

These lectures were warmly received by the students, but the picture of Dr. Herreshof in the Pulpit of St. Joseph's (a picture which appeared in the Detroit News that evening) greatly increased the number of furious phone calls and letters I was receiving. It was bad enough for white people to have to face this uprising of Negro youth, seeking their rights, but it was intolerable to see someone who was assumed to be a Jew teaching those young people about civil disobedience from the pulpit of an Episcopal Church. That seemed to touch every nerve in the bigot's body.

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Later in the day there was a teacher orientation session and a meeting of parents. The students had received their first homework assignment and many went right to work on it. It was an essay on what was wrong with Northern High School. What the essays revealed was the students' frustrated desire for learning. "What I do at Northern I could do at home," wrote one student. The students were very much aware of the fact that many teachers at Northern had given up on them and had stopped trying to teach. "No-teach teachers" were the object of many complaints. Complaints about the police officer were numerous; and about crowded classrooms and poor equipment. In these essays the boycott was viewed as a matter of fighting for student rights. It was hoped that it would force improvements in the school not just for the present corps of students but for their younger brothers and sisters. It was strongly felt that if the principal were not removed no major changes would be forthcoming.

Friday, April 22: At the morning rally the Reverend Cameron Byrd spoke on "All God's Children Got Shoes" (the element of protest in Negro spirituals). Basketball star Bill Buntin, a Northern alumnus, spoke to the students. He did not take sides in the controversy, but his presence was encouraging, and he was obviously impressed when he saw that great display of student solidarity. Mary Ellen Riordan, Detroit Federation of Teachers president was very much on the scene attempting to persuade the student leaders to return to school. At 11:00 A.M. the rally ended and workshop sessions began.

The student workshops were held in every possible meeting place within St. Joseph's Church. But our church was not big enough to handle all the students who were now attending. Fortunately two other churches had opened their doors: Scott Methodist and Grace Episcopal. They were so far away that it was necessary to use buses to reach them. Buses were found, but our great desire was to have another Woodward Avenue church open to the Freedom School so that the large crowds could be handled with a minimum of confusion and delay. The big Woodward Avenue churches, white and colored, barred their doors.

The purpose of the workshops was to allow students to decide what courses they wished to have in Freedom School and how they wanted them taught. Each workshop elected a secretary and a student representative. These elected officers gathered later in the afternoon for a report session. Their reports were electrifying! I think anyone who heard them would have been inspired to teach in an inner-city school, because the desire for learning that was expressed was so strong. There was also a great desire for self discovery, a desire to identify with the nation and its history; this found expression in the unanimous request from all workshops for the teaching of Negro history. (Part of the tragedy of Northern is that students there are using an American history text written from the white southern point of view.)

While the workshops were in session a press conference was being held in the Church House. The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (an important organization of Negro pastors) had met and through an ad hoc committee had expressed support for the students. The Reverend W. C. Ardrey presented their views to the press. The Reverend James Wadsworth, NAACP president, made some supporting remarks. The issue of the removal of the principal began to be honestly faced. It was noted in these press statements that there had recently been changes of principals at Chrysler and Pasteur Schools due to community pressure. Why should the Northern High community not be allowed the right to a similar say about who its principal should be?

Another kind of pressure was building, and this, along with the Northern students' determination to maintain their boycott, was to bring some results. A student group, whose press spokesman became the Reverend Albert Cleage, began to organize a sympathy walkout of all other inner-city high schools for the following Wednesday. Meetings of high school student leaders began to be held to plan the sympathy strikes, bumper stickers reading "Support Northern Students" began to blossom, and it looked as if something big was really underway.

Saturday, April 23: A large parents rally was held at the church in the evening to bring people up to date on the issues and to explain the Freedom School. Councilman Nicholas Hood spoke positively of the student boycott and indicated that he knew something personally about the problems at Northern. Principal Carty had given him "the third degree" when he came to speak to a class in home and family living. Reverend Wadsworth spoke and was asked to invite Charles Colding to the NAACP Freedom Fund Dinner the following evening so that he could present the students' story to the many important people who would be assembled there. Wadsworth hedged, the crowd jeered, and he had to conclude his remarks by reminding people that he was not the enemy. There were two real highlights of the emotion filled evening. The first was when thirty-one Northern High teachers were introduced. These teachers had sent a telegram to the Board of Education requesting permission to teach at the Freedom School since that was where their students were. The second was when the Reverend Stephen Campbell of Russell Street Baptist Church rose up in the congregation to speak. He said that he had come to tell his daughter to leave Freedom School and return to Northern, but that after hearing all he had heard that evening he was not going to do that after all — he was going to support the boycott. He began to preach, standing there near the front of the nave, and people began to respond. He was the first local minister to join the movement* and he offered his church for Freedom School classes. Episcopal Bishop C. Kilmer Myers attended the rally and offered prayers for the student leaders. Needless to say his presence was of real importance to me, as was his subsequent support of our Church's involvement

*I am a local minister by sufferance, while he is one in fact.

in the struggle in the press. The total result of the rally was that support became solid for a continuation of the boycott and increased attendance at Freedom School on Monday.

At this rally, as at all the others, the most eloquent speakers were the student leaders. Mike Batchelor was a particularly gifted speaker. I have a vivid recollection of Mike standing in the center aisle of the church addressing the senior class earlier that week. He helped the seniors hold together in the boycott. Theirs was of course the greatest temptation to yield because they felt their diplomas were in jeopardy. It was altogether a rare combination of leaders. Charles Colding has a keen analytical mind and a tremendous amount of self assurance; Michael Batchelor is a born orator and political leader; Judy Walker has a magnetism and spirit which can move people into action. But we were equally impressed by the other students who emerged as leaders through the Freedom School. There was an abundance of talent.

Over the weekend there were countless meetings. The three student leaders in particular kept up a terrific pace meeting various officials, the press, and supporting students from other schools. Freedom School organization work went on continuously as well. Many hitches had developed on Friday, the first day of small group sessions, and they had to be ironed out by Monday. Frank Joyce of the Northern Student Movement did yeoman service in organizing, Arthur Reese of the D.F.T. Southern Freedom School project helped train the teachers, but with them as with all of us it was clear that we were serving the students in their movement. The three student leaders were responsible for all decisions about the boycott, while the elected Freedom School Board made curriculum decisions. Many adults were making important contributions, but in supporting and technical roles.

Sunday, April 24: In the morning I preached at St. Joseph's on what I thought to be the meaning of the boycott, using the model of the ghetto as colony. The community was deciding that it would no longer tolerate having its institutions run by outsiders, and was demanding a share in the decision making, a share that those of us who grew up in white communities have always taken for granted as being our prerogative where we live. A community has the duty to take strong action to protect its vital interests, and that is what this community, led by its young people, was doing. The Vestry of St. Joseph's had gone on record in support of the students during Easter Week, and I wanted to be sure the congregation knew what was at issue.

At the Freedom Fund Dinner of the NAACP that evening all the "right people" were present. It was evident from the start that the establishment point of view was going to prevail. In the opening prayer Fr. Sheehan of the Archbishop's Human Relations Council prayed that this terrible cup might pass from the city, obviously meaning the threatened city-wide school boycott on Wednesday. Reverend Wadsworth advised the students that they had made their point by now and should return to classes on Monday. Colding was

present but was not allowed to speak because both Dr. Robinson, Board president, and Superintendent Brownell were being honored that evening, and Charles' remarks might prove embarrassing to them. The NAACP line was the same as the Detroit News editorial line: You have made your point, return to school now, don't let the radicals spread this thing; we, the enlightened community leaders, will take over from here.

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Monday, April 25: Monday was a real day of victory for the students. Every morning, of course, the whole student body had to decide whether to return to Northern or to continue to fight, but over the weekend not only had the NAACP and the press and TV been urging return, but the Superintendent had pressured parents by sending a letter warning of violation of the truancy law for minors. Yet, in spite of all, the students reported to "St. Joseph's High" in increased numbers. We estimated that a clear majority of the students was now in attendance at Freedom School. We were bursting at the seams in the church, with classes being held in every corner, in various parts of the nave and choir, and on the front lawn. It is a real measure of the spirit of the movement that there were no serious disciplinary problems throughout the entire boycott. There was one slight tussle in front of the school and the reactionary Redford Record got a picture of it for their story of the boycott.

That picture fit the paranoid understanding of the boycott which prevailed among many suburbanites and northwest Detroiters. "How can you support all that rioting?" I was asked. And again, "What about all that violence?" But where was the violence? The students were behaving with a dignity and a sense of discipline which none of us knew they possessed. They did not fully know it themselves until they struck for their freedom. This white paranoia led to terrible imaginings about what Wednesday would bring as well. "If all the Negro students are in the streets protesting, we'll soon have a repeat of 1943!" Such was the fear and that fear was the lever which forced a settlement on Monday evening. The Northern students had demonstrated their solidarity against great odds; Wednesday was approaching; now was the hour for the Board and Superintendent to find a solution.

Since Monday was the last day of Freedom School during the boycott, it would be well to say something of the value of this experiment. Many students discovered in Freedom School something they did not know was possible — that learning could take place in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect because students wanted to learn and teachers wanted to teach. Essays which students later wrote about what Freedom School meant to them point this up vividly. In a school with no police, no attendance charts, classes organized by students, teachers who loved their subjects and responded to their students, learning took place in a new dimension. This was so much the case that students attempted to keep the Freedom School going after the boycott was ended in after school sessions.

This was no great success because of many factors, including post-boycott exhaustion and the nearness of graduation day, but it was successful enough to indicate that Freedom School had tremendous meaning for many of the students who took part in it.

On Monday evening the student leaders, their parents and I were called to a meeting with Dr. Robinson, Superintendent Brownell and Board Members Grylls and Stewart. The students accepted what was offered that evening, which was basically that the principal should be removed from the school during the course of an investigation by a citizens investigating committee on which there would be strong student and parent representation. Everything at the meeting indicated that the students were now recognized to be in the position of strength and that their demands were going to be taken seriously.

Tuesday, April 26: In the morning the students assembled at St. Joseph's again for Freedom School. At the opening rally the three student leaders reported that an agreement had been reached which would allow an immediate return to school. "Is Carty gone?" someone shouted. "Mr. Carty is not at Northern," Mike Batchelor answered. There was cheering and rejoicing. The students marched back to school as they had come out — one body; they had not been divided in the arduous period from April 7 until April 26. Now they felt that a serious beginning was going to be made in dealing with their problems and that they could return to school with dignity. It was their decision to return as it had been theirs to walk out.

Why they did it

Before sketching in the way in which the Board and Superintendent responded after the 26th, it might be well to consider the general question of why the students acted as they did. Why did they resort to pressure tactics? Why did they not honor due process (as many asked)? I think the students correctly understood that it was only pressure that would bring any results. The fact that Northern was in the bad shape it was argued against any readiness on the part of the Superintendent to make major changes without being pressured. The fact that students had to walk out to let the Superintendent and Field Executive and others know that the principal was failing in his job proved that there was no built-in system of evaluation of administrators that could be relied upon. We learned, further, that the real intention of the Superintendent and Board was to quiet the students down, return the principal to Northern, and perhaps reassign him elsewhere in the fall. (This was gathered from conversations I had with various officials.) This would have avoided publicly facing the charges of the students and publicly recognizing their validity. The students had to use pressure, then, in order to be heard at all.

There was also real confusion about what "due process" amounted to. There seemed to be no administrative process that would work to anyone but the principal's advantage. And as for

the Board hearings, we all knew that the Board was badly divided between liberal and reactionary members, too badly divided to act boldly and on its own initiative. The hearings were viewed as a delaying tactic, which they probably were, since the Board turned all responsibility back to the Superintendent after it had briefly heard both sides. (All the while Board members were admitting privately to the press that the principal had put up a very poor show.) The principal had the backing of the Association of Principals, which was providing him with legal counsel, and they talked of suing the Board if it took his job away from him. Board members were also anxious about the millage election (which failed) and began to fear the loss of the white vote. All of this added up to the unlikelihood of any strong Board action, unless they were forced to take it. As for the citizens investigating committee the students needed assurances that this could really work before they would cooperate with it. They could not identify with a committee unless they were sure it could really change things.

What should due process have looked like to be convincing and to lead the students to put their trust in it? I think that if the Board had completed its investigation, in spite of the students' resumption of the boycott, and had issued a strong directive to the Superintendent telling him to reassign the principal and to assure the students of action on their other obviously just demands, this would have met the requirements. Or, if they had been convinced that the principal was being unjustly charged, or had any real doubt about it, they should have required his temporary suspension, set up machinery to hear the matter more thoroughly, and set a date for a final decision. But, instead, the students were simply told by some Board members: "You can trust us. We care about your best interests." No matter how true that was, the structure of justice was lacking, and the strength and ability to act of those who said they cared was very doubtful.

If we are agreed that pressure was necessary,, then we can evaluate how the pressure was applied. There was much criticism of this in the newspapers and in the editorials. "We can't let the kids run the schools," was the refrain. But in the absence of a militant community organization of adults and with the teachers badly divided along DFT/DEA lines, who else had the unity and strength to apply the pressure? And if adults had done it, it would have been a far messier thing. I was continually amazed by the absence of incidents. Teachers at the school were nearly coming to blows, but the young people kept cool. There was (as far as I was aware) an almost complete absence of vilification of the principal or any of the other adversaries in the struggle. The truth was spoken with an absence of bitterness that adults know nothing about. And through it all there was a dignity and an awareness of participating in the larger struggle — the Freedom Movement — which was a cause for pride. I hope the students retain that pride for the rest of their lives.

The investigating committee

The committee was asked by the Board to bring in an interim report by June 15. Mr. Charles Wells was appointed chairman. I was named vice-chairman, having been demoted for obvious reasons. On the eighteen-member committee were the three student leaders. Four were parents of Northern students who had been in the forefront of parents' activities, including Reverend Campbell and Mrs. Lena Bivens. Others came from Detroit PTA Council, M.E.S., U.A.W., Wayne State, Mercy College, NAACP, Osborn High School. The committee interviewed Northern students, teachers and administrators (including the principal), and held community hearings. Administrators and teachers were interviewed by those members of the committee who had not been participants in the boycott, since those that had could not be expected to make an objective evaluation of what they heard.

The Committee recommended these important changes: 1) A new principal should be assigned to Northern. He should be appointed very soon to begin the monumental task of rebuilding the school-community team. This recommendation was based largely on the inability of the principal to see what was behind the walkout. When interviewed he maintained that the needed change at the school beyond obvious physical changes, was to get rid of "troublemakers" on the faculty. They had been responsible for dissension, not he. Committee investigation also substantiated what was fairly obvious by now, that the principal had lost the support of the student body and of the community residents. 2) Teachers who desire to transfer from Northern should be allowed to do so. 3) Teachers who desire to remain should be allowed to do so. Three-year transfers should be waived in these instances. Behind these recommendations was the discovery of tremendous division among the faculty: on the one hand, a group of older teachers who had small faith in the students' ability to learn and great faith in strong disciplinary measures; on the other hand a group of mostly younger teachers of opposite persuasion. It was felt that with the early announcement of a new principal the older group would be motivated to transfer. Several of them had already indicated that they would not stay if the principal were forced to leave. Among these was a group of teachers who went to the Detroit Free Press during the time the committee was at work. To the reporter they told horror stories about the failure of discipline at the school since the boycott: they were afraid to walk down the halls, students were threatening them with knives, and so on. Walking down the halls of Northern myself the only cause for fear I found was in the attitude and behavior of those very teachers, who showed many symptoms of paranoia. 4) "Social promotions" should be discontinued. students should be graded for their performance and not passed until they meet certain standards.

Further recommendations encouraged a strong parents organization at the school, supported the creation of the student-faculty council to hear student grievances and carry them to the administration, called for a bona-fide school-community agent, asked for two assistant principals, asked that the 9th graders be kept at junior high schools in order to reduce the crowding of the building, asked that the police officer be assigned to duty *outside* the school and be responsible to the precinct inspector, not the principal, and requested a new physical plant soon, with needed repairs now. Three final recommendations are worth writing out in full:

(i) The Board of Education should review existing procedures for handling problems involving inadequate administrators and teachers and where necessary take steps to improve them.

(ii) The Board of Education should convene immediately a special study committee to review and, where needed, recommend changes in the lines of authority between the schools and the central administration.

(iii) Efforts should be made to encourage Wayne State University to designate Northern as its demonstration school. Under such an arrangement many innovations could be initiated in an effort to significantly raise the levels of educational achievement at Northern High School.

Response to the report was slow in coming considering the June 15 deadline set by the Board. The Board heard the report on the 15th and then turned the whole matter over to the Superintendent again. (It was like watching a tennis match to see the responsibility continually shifted from Board to Superintendent and back.) Two weeks went by with no announcement of a new principal. The Superintendent finally found his way of removing the principal by writing him a letter asking him if *he* thought he could be effective at Northern in the fall. He answered saying that he could not be effective because the Superintendent had not backed him up when the students walked out. So to the very end it was not possible to make a decision about the school's top administrator on the basis of his actual performance.

The pattern of teacher transfers that followed indicated that some of the most disgruntled teachers were in fact leaving; others of the old school remained, however. Furthermore, the new principal, when he was finally announced, turned out to be the assistant principal whom the students had rejected as a replacement from the beginning. The investigating committee had noted: "A majority of the students are antagonistic towards the current principal. He has," their observations continue, "a dictatorial attitude which fosters a lowering of their self-esteem and a general feeling of oppression as symbolized by the techniques of the previous police officer. Their reaction to the assistant principal, while more positive, seems to be clouded by his previous close association with the principal." In the light of the importance attached to the principal by all concerned, promoting the assistant would seem a rather in-

adequate response. It strikes one as an attempt to communicate to the "anti's" in the white community that capitulation to student demands was not total. While the assistant did prove himself a much more flexible man than his predecessor in the period between April and June, his promotion hardly leads one to expect a sweeping new deal at Northern.

All the other changes requested above were approved, including building repair and the beginning of land purchase for a new building someday. All, that is, except the three quoted above. They met the following responses:

(i) The Superintendent told the committee that existing procedures for inadequate teachers and administrators were adequate; (ii) no special study committee on the confused lines of command between principals and the School Center Building has been named; and (iii) no special relationship with Wayne has been sought.

Some long overdue changes have been initiated at the school, but they represent only a crack in the door, with some light shining through. Some force will have to kick the door all the way open or it will just slowly close again. A strong principal, committed to major change, a strong and independent parents' organization, a Superintendent and Board willing to make of Northern a demonstration school, where it could be proved that student aspirations could be met, these would be parts of the necessary response.

The boycott proved there are limits to what students will accept. One Northern student put it this way: "This was the most serious school protest that Detroit has ever had. I feel that other Negroes in this city are going to start demanding the same kind of improvement. The Board of Education is slowly realizing that Negroes are becoming more aware of the problems and will not accept poor education as before." The question is whether the larger community will learn to welcome this discontent and growing awareness. Will we join with the students in their demands? Will we provide the continuing pressure for change which students, just in the nature of things, cannot provide? They can protest the old Northern, but we have to make a major investment in building the new one.