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November 17, 1967

Mr. Ogden E. Johnson
Interim President
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, Michigan 49855

Dear President Johnson:

Dr. Robert F. McClellan, Assistant Professor of History at Northern Michigan University, has sought the advice and assistance of the American Association of University Professors as a result of the October 26, 1967, statement of the Board of Control of Northern Michigan University reaffirming the decisions, as announced in former President Edgar L. Harden's letter of July 28, 1967, to Professor McClellan, that Professor McClellan would be offered no salary increment for the 1967-1968 academic year and that his relationship with the University would be terminated at the end of the 1967-1968 academic year. In addition to the request to us from Professor McClellan, we have been asked to lend assistance by the unanimous vote of the chapter of the American Association of University Professors at Northern Michigan University, by resolution of the Annual Meeting of the statewide Michigan Conference of the American Association of University Professors, and by other interested persons and groups in the State of Michigan.

The Association's interest in Professor McClellan's case stems from its longstanding concern for academic freedom and tenure, the principles of which have been enunciated in the enclosed Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, a joint statement of this Association and the Association of American Colleges which has received the endorsement of over fifty educational and professional organizations. We note that, as stated in Northern Michigan University's Faculty and Staff Administrative Guide (pp. 6,7), the official policy of the University on academic freedom, adopted by the State Board of Education in 1961 and by the Board of Control in 1964, is in accordance with the 1940 Statement.

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When, shortly after the issuance of President Harden's letter of July 28, the case of Professor McClellan was brought to our attention, we inquired into the procedural steps which led to the decisions announced in the July 28 letter. We were informed that the decisions had not been based upon a recommendation by the head of Professor McClellan's department and ~~that there had been no~~ advance review by the Dean of Arts and Science. The procedures thus appeared to us to suggest a significant irregularity in the light of the following statements, found on page 10 of the Faculty and Staff Administrative Guide:

Evaluations of faculty are made by the department head who makes his recommendations to the dean. Following a review by the dean, the evaluations are sent to the Vice President for Academic Affairs with the dean's approval or modifications. The Vice President for Academic Affairs then makes his recommendations to the President. In each case of transmittal, conferences are held to discuss modifications in evaluations.

The procedures also seemed to us to be irregular in terms of Section V (see pp. 12, 13) of the enclosed Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, jointly formulated by this Association, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. Accordingly, we recommended that, prior to any official communication of interest in Professor McClellan's case from this Association to the President and to the Board of Northern Michigan University, every attempt be made to seek internal review of the July 28 decisions, through informal and formal expression of faculty concern. We were subsequently informed that the Faculty Senate of Northern Michigan University had on September 29 unanimously urged that the case be reviewed and that the local chapter of this Association had on October voiced its strong concern, but that the Board of Control, on October 26, announced its reaffirmation of the July 28 decisions. It has further been called to our attention that, following a vote of protest and demonstrations by the student body and statements of concern from numerous other sources, the faculty members of Northern Michigan University on November 2 voted a lack of confidence in the administration and the governing board of the University.

The information at our disposal (in addition to communications addressed to us, we have examined voluminous press accounts and public statements) relating to the developments outlined above suggests that the faculty of Northern Michigan University acted within its appropriate sphere of interest and consonant with sound academic principles in its attempts to gain a review of the July 28 decisions and to achieve a reevaluation of Professor McClellan in accordance with the procedures stated on page 10 of the Faculty and Staff Administrative Guide. On the basis of our understanding of what has transpired, we deeply regret the apparent departure from accepted procedures in the evaluation of Professor McClellan and what has occurred at Northern Michigan University as a result.

Aside from the procedural aspects of Professor McClellan's case, the substantive reasons which have been given for the decisions of July 28 raise questions of deep concern to this Association. The Association does not take the position that, as a general practice, reasons need be given for the termination of a probationary faculty member. Also, the Association does not generally concern itself with decisions involving increment of salary. However, in those instances where prima facie evidence exists that the reason for termination, or for denial of salary increment, may have involved elements which constitute a violation of the faculty member's academic freedom, the cause for such action can become a matter of high Association interest. In the case of Professor McClellan, some very serious questions regarding the reasons for the July 28 decisions appear to exist.

We have carefully examined the reasons for the July 28 decisions as announced by the President on October 17 and as reported that same day in The Mining Journal. We have also studied the Faculty Senate's October 20 statement of response to the October 17 announcement, also as reported in The Mining Journal. The four announced reasons -- remarks by Professor McClellan critical of "the four course plan" reportedly made in a classroom (during the 1965-1966 academic year and prior to Professor McClellan's re-appointment to the faculty for the following academic year); comment in relation to complaints over the adequacy of certain dormitory accommodations reportedly made by Professor McClellan following a talk by him in a dormitory on another subject; statements reportedly made by Professor McClellan in support of the position of property owners affected by the University's expansion plans; and a student project, reportedly undertaken by one of Professor McClellan's classes during the summer of 1967, calling for study of the expansion issue as a problem of conflict between private and public interest -- would, as prima facie cause for the July 28 decisions and coupled with other remarks by the chief administrative officer which question Professor McClellan's "loyalty" to the institution, appear in a very serious and direct manner to pose the question of a violation of Professor McClellan's academic freedom.

This Association is not now offering judgment on whether a violation of Professor McClellan's academic freedom has in fact occurred. We render such judgments only when a full investigation has been conducted and when the report resulting from such an investigation has been thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate bodies of the Association. We recognize that, aside from the voluminous public record of Professor McClellan's case which has thus far accumulated, you may yourself be in a position at this time to provide additional information relevant to our evaluation of the case, and we invite you to submit any such information to us.

In the absence of compelling evidence which would serve satisfactorily to answer the highly serious questions relating to Professor McClellan's academic freedom which have been raised by the faculty of Northern Michigan University (and which have been reflected in student body statements and in the statements of certain administrative officers) in connection with the announced substantive reasons for the July 28 decisions, and in the light of the apparent major irregularities in procedure discussed in an earlier portion of this letter, we would urge the administration and the Board of Control of Northern Michigan University to reconsider its present position,

Mr. Ogden E. Johnson

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to rescind the decisions of July 28 and the reaffirmation of October 26, to offer Professor McClellan appropriate salary increment and reappointment to the faculty of Northern Michigan University, and to move promptly in taking other steps, in accordance with the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure and the Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, which will aid in resolving the current crisis and in restoring the confidence of the faculty of Northern Michigan University in the administration and in the Board of Control.

Sincerely yours,


Bertram H. Davis

cc: Members of the Board of Control
of Northern Michigan University
Professor Robert F. McClellan
Professor Edward C. Monahan