

Conversation between President John X. Jamrich and Mr. Leon Atchison, Congressman Conyer's Aide, Detroit, January 8, 1970, 4:30 p. m.

A. . . . who is in the hospital down at Bethesda phoned me this morning with reference to some problems that you are having up there with some students, and apparently someone called him in the hospital there and he asked me to talk with you to find out just what was going on -- what the problem was, and where we were at now in its solution with the students that were to be expelled or arrested or whatever the case may be.

J. Yes. Well, where we are as of this moment, let me go back just a little bit. The sit-in occurred on December 17 and lasted into the 18th during which time proper deliberative hearings were being conducted on a case of rule infractions by one of the black students. The appeal body -- the Faculty-Student Judiciary -- found Mr. Griffis (that's the student's name) not guilty, and that dissolved the sit-in at about 4:00 in the morning on the 18th of December. In the last moments -- that sit-in lasted about 19 hours -- and in about the last 30 or 40 minutes, there was considerable damage done in the office they occupied, and they also forcibly detained Dr. Niemi, a member of our staff, for a period of 40 minutes under threat, as he put it, of bodily harm with a 2 x 2 stick of wood and a broom handle. Something of that sort. Of course, that was the 18th, and school was closing for the holidays on the 18th and 19th, so most of the students left. They inquired as to what was happening, and I simply told them that the matter would be turned over to our university Student Personnel Office to investigate.

A. Are the students without the university filing charges against them?

J. Well, I don't know how --

A. You don't plan to file criminal charges against the students, do you?

J. Well, this is something that's . . . Well, let me ask you the question in reverse. What or how would you react as Dr. Niemi, the University staff member who was forcibly detained? I guess I'd have to say, as far as the forced detention is concerned, I'd have to leave that to him. As a university President, I would say to Dr. Niemi that he is the one who would have to determine. If there is somebody who has to sign a complaint on the forced detention, I guess it would be he. I've not talked with him again specifically on whether he would or would not sign a complaint.

A. I see. All right, now the due process that you spoke of earlier. What does that involve? Will that be some kind of hearing in front of the Student Faculty Senate?

J. Yes, sir. Student-Faculty Judiciary, it is called. This is a body of four students and four faculty -- the same body, by the way, that heard the Charles Griffis case December 17. They would take each of the students and conduct a full-dress hearing on the charges as they are presented by the Office of the Dean of Students. They would on the basis of evidence presented conclude whether the student was guilty or not and recommend specific action to be taken.

A. When will this take place?

J. This should begin Monday. Not the hearings necessarily; they will be presenting the charges to the individual students on Monday.

A. I see. How many students are going to be charged? Was it 18?

J. I think it is 24.

A. Twenty-four.

J. Yes.

A. I see.

J. Now the black students this morning presented me with a list of 94 students who signed and said they were all over there and they all wanted to be charged. Well, the way the things worked out, the people in the Dean of Students Office are firm in recognizing names and faces of 24 students, and those are the charges that are going to be presented.

A. I see. OK. Well, I'll check with the Prosecutor and see if I can get an indication from him as to what his intentions are.

J. Yes. There has been some misunderstanding on the part of the students apparently because I talked to Mr. White who is an attorney in Detroit, and he has a daughter up here, and they apparently called him and said, well, they are going to be arrested today and they are going to have only one phone call that they can make, and this sort of thing. There isn't any dramatics going on, as far as I know. The fact is, as I say, I don't think the prosecutor has made up his mind yet. But you can ascertain that I'm sure he will be glad to talk with you.

A. OK. I appreciate your returning the call and --

J. I'm sorry that I got back to you so late, but that meeting just broke up a little while ago, and I had a call from Congressman Diggs also on this. You may know or may not, but he did call.

A. No, I didn't know that he had called.

J. Yes.

A. OK. Well, thank you very much for returning the call, and we'll be keeping an eye on the situation and hope that it can be minimized and it doesn't erupt into, you know, keep going and like topsy grow into a nasty situation.

J. Yes, sir. That's the concern that I have and have had -- I should emphasize to you personally that -- the kinds of things I've established here, the Human Rights Commission, we have established a black tutorial program, we have established a resident assistant program that involves black students, we have provided over the year work-study employment and scholarships for blacks. I'm committed and have been committed to assisting within the resources -- the black students and minority students in general. This thing really tears at me when I see that we have a potential of an escalating problem as a result of what really should never have happened if they would have waited patiently. And I realize that impatience is a characteristic here, but the thing came out properly in the first place, and the sit-in would not have been a problem had it broken up an hour earlier. We would have had no problem, but we have what we have, and we'll have to do the best we can. And, like you say, we have to be careful to keep it within bounds and within reason.

A. All right. Let me ask you one other question. Did you know a Michael Caldwell? Was he on the faculty there? Do you have another campus in Houghton, Michigan?

J. No, it is not our campus at Houghton. Michael Caldwell is not on our staff. Michigan Tech University is at Houghton. That's another institution, and it may be that he is there.

A. I see. OK. All right, then, and thanks again for returning the call, and we'll be watching the situation and hope that everything comes off for the best.

J. Very well, sir, and thank you.

A. OK.

J. Goodbye.