

Classroom Neutral

In a statement issued this week, ASNMU President Harry Campbell asked that students participating in a class strike Wednesday not be penalized by instructors for "mere physical absence from class." The class strike was, incidentally, called to support six NMU black students currently on trial in the Marquette courts.

Said Campbell, in part: "I believe that a reduction in a student's grade, based upon his mere physical absence from class when participating in a political demonstration, is a violation of the students' right to free speech." Carrying his argument a step further, Campbell urges faculty members to "allow those of their students who feel that they are unable to attend classes *during the trial* to do so" without academic penalty (italics ours).

It should go without saying that we unreservedly condemn any effort on the part of an instructor to penalize a student academically for his stand on political issues. If attendance in a particular class is not normally required, an instructor has no right to penalize a student who joins a boycott just because he isn't in class.

But, on the other hand, if attendance in a class *is* normally required, the protesting student has no right to expect that the instructor will excuse him merely because his absence was motivated by political conviction.

It seems clear that, in asking for impartiality in one case, Campbell is actually encouraging arbitrariness in another.

It is essential that the classroom remain "neutral ground" when it comes to participation by students in protest movements of any sort. The student who is sincerely motivated can miss class if he wishes in order to participate in a political activity; the academic consequences of his absence, however, must not be altered either positively or negatively by political considerations.