

STATEMENT CONCERNING THE SIT-IN DECEMBER 17, 1969

The following statement was prepared under the auspices of the Academic Senate for the purpose of informing the faculty about the events pertaining to the sit-in in the Dean of Students' Office on December 17, 1969. Included are a chronological description of those events, a description of the role of the Academic Senate and its Executive Committee and several pertinent documents.

The University News Bureau on the basis of President Jamrich's account of the events prepared the following release which is presented in full.

"A sit-in in the offices of the Dean of Students by members of the Black Students Association, protesting a ruling of guilty given by the Student Judiciary Committee against Charles Griffis, a senior from Grand Rapids, for allegedly having a girl in his dormitory room after hours, began at 9 a. m. Wednesday, December 17.

The black students participating in the sit-in demonstration, which according to Fat Williams, the BSA president, involved 140 in total, were peaceful throughout most of the 19 hours of the demonstration. They allowed business activities to continue in the office, while conducting their demonstration in a friendly and orderly procedure. While the BSA contends that the total number involved stood at 140, it appeared that no more than 85 members were ever present in or around the office at any one time.

The Student Judiciary's ruling against Griffis was announced at 9 a. m., along with their recommendation that he be suspended from the University for the remainder of this semester and the Spring Semester of 1970.

The BSA and Griffis charged that he had been discriminated against by the all-white seven-member Student Judiciary Committee, that there was no legal right for the Resident Assistants to enter his room without a warrant, and that there was no real evidence presented to find him guilty.

Northern's President, John X. Jamrich, informed of the situation, asked that the University's Human Rights Commission conduct a study of the procedures used in the original hearing. This study was started that morning and lasted into the afternoon

Upon hearing their recommendations, Dr. Jamrich requested that the Faculty-Student Judiciary Committee, the first step open to students for appeal, meet as soon as possible to review the case against Griffis. This meeting was arranged for 8:30 that night.

Dr. Jamrich then issued a statement stressing that Northern, and he as its President, would take a back seat to no institution of higher education in the degree to which we have strived to provide the basic principles of personal freedom and faculty and student participation in campus governance or in the direction of providing the fullest support and consideration of minority groups within the student body and the faculty.

He went on to say that 'the procedures developed through our labors cannot be abandoned at the whim of an individual or a group.'

Noting that the accused student was now in a position to appeal the decision to the Faculty-Student Judiciary, the President stated that 'force and coercion do not have a place in this setting.'

'I have indicated to the black students the above commitments on my part and they are fully aware of these procedures being utilized. Their decision to demonstrate a coercive force in an effort to modify the decision arbitrarily is not acceptable.'

As the black students had not left the office at 5 p.m., the President also had the University attorneys flown to Marquette from their Detroit offices for possible legal action against the demonstrators. The legal papers for an injunction were reviewed with Judge Davidson at 10 p.m. that evening.

The black students gathered in the office refused to discuss the situation with members of the news media present, or to have their pictures taken, though one member admitted that one or more had given calls to the news media throughout the state, using the alias of David Arnold.

The Detroit Free Press accepted this information and the quotes were picked up by both news wire services. When notified by the University News Bureau that there was no student by that name at Northern, and of the black student's statement, the wires dropped Arnold's quotes and vowed to investigate as to why this information was originally accepted.

Near midnight, the President came to the Dean of Students' Office and explained to the students that the Faculty-Student committee was deliberating on the appeal. He indicated that he was hopeful that the committee would reach a decision on the Griffis case in the next few hours.

At that point, the President went back to his office to further examine the situation and the possible use of an injunction, before retiring to his home shortly before 3 a.m.

At approximately this same time, Harry Campbell, Student Body President, notified Dr. Allan Niemi, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Lowell Kafer, Dean of Students, of reports of shattering glass coming from the offices.

✓ Niemi walked into the office to investigate and was held by the black students, who refused to let him leave.

✓ After Kafer tried unsuccessfully to reach Niemi by phone and was pushed out after entering the office, he asked Campbell to notify the President of the situation.

Jamrich immediately returned, and tried twice to enter the office, but was pushed back each time. He then asked the students to release Niemi, but to no avail.

The President then went to the Campus Security Office and called the University attorneys to have them prepare to have the injunction authorized and served and was in the process of notifying the local law enforcement agencies to be prepared to take action, when word was received that a verdict of not guilty had been handed down by the faculty-student committee.

Pat Williams, president of the BSA, informed of the committee's decision, announced it to the black students. They then released Niemi and began to file out of the room.

Several of the black leaders remained behind to argue with Jamrich about his decision to take the matter to court. Others stayed to help clean up the office complex.

Investigation of the office showed that considerable damage had been caused by the students during the final hour of their sit-in. This included broken panes of glass, broken chairs, two damaged typewriters, broken Christmas tree bulbs, and the writing of slogans on walls and desks.

At 10:15 a.m. Thursday, President Jamrich held a press conference, at which time he reviewed the events of the past day.

He stated that a suit for damages to University property would be issued unless the BSA should volunteer to pay for the damages on their own.

He also stressed that 'it must be made clear that the leaders lost control of the BSA membership and that leaders are responsible for an organization and its actions. In light of this, the leaders of the BSA may be brought to a hearing before the Student Judiciary Committee, because of the sit-in and damages resulting from it.'

The campus appeared calm throughout Thursday and on into Friday, with no apparent counter-reactions to the sit-in.

President Jamrich wrote to the BSA to inform them that they will be expected to pay for the damages, which were being assessed Friday.

He also informed the Office of the Dean of Students to conduct an in depth investigation into the entire incident for the University's use.

Jamrich also contacted Marquette's Prosecuting Attorney, Ed Quinnell, to look into the forcible holding of Dr. Niemi to determine what legal actions might be taken for the offense.

The President received the full support of the Executive Council of the Associated Students of NMU and the Academic Senate for his handling of the situation, in written statements handed out late Thursday. He also received a wire from Mr. Joseph Gross of NMU's Board of Control,

early Thursday, stating that 'I know of no person who has been more under standing of the needs of the black students than Dr. Jamrich. I stand be- hind him as a man who has been fair to all from the word go.'"

The faculty became involved when President Jamrich asked the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate to meet with him at 3:00 p.m. December 17 to discuss the sit-in which was then in progress. Because of the emergency nature of the situation, it was felt that there was insufficient time to assemble the entire Academic Senate. After two hours of discussion first with the President and then in separate session, the following motion (Baker, Roine) was passed unanimously. "Professor McClellan is designated to act as a representative of the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate to indicate its concern (in the pending sit-in). He is not to be considered as acting as a spokesman for the faculty."

This action was viewed by the Executive Committee as a proper expression of faculty concern for students and for the general University environment. Professor McClellan, accompanied by Professors Meneghel and Watanen, remained on campus throughout the duration of the sit-in to provide what assistance they could and to implement the intention of the above motion.

On December 18, the Academic Senate met in special session to consider the sit-in, and after discussing the events of the preceding day, resolved unanimously to issue a resolution supporting the President's action. A copy of that resolution was distributed shortly thereafter to the faculty.

The attached documents illustrate some of the more important aspects of the sit-in and succeeding events. The memorandum from the Human Rights Commission is self-explanatory. The letter from Robert Maust, Assistant to the Dean of Students, describes the decision of the Student-Faculty Judiciary. The letter from the President to the same committee and the subsequent reply are concerned with the question of whether the Student-Faculty Judiciary deliberated under undue pressure.

The Academic Senate hopes that this material will be helpful in providing the faculty with sufficient information to arrive at a competent and rational understanding of the events. If further questions arise, please contact your departmental senator or any of the officers of the Academic Senate.

Robert F. McClellan
Vice Chairman
The Academic Senate

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