

Birmingham-Bloomfield Area

Fifth Estate Collective

1965

The first public meeting of The Birmingham-Bloomfield Committee on Open Occupancy was held at the Birmingham Unitarian Church on Sunday, November 14. An unexpectedly large turnout of 250 people responded to the speakers' demands for an end to the organized exclusion of Negroes by the realtors in the area.

Instances of discrimination were related as well as moving testimony by some of the committee members as to their reasons for becoming involved. One mother of nine commented that she felt that her children were socially deprived by not having the opportunity to go to school, play with, and have as neighbors children of other races. Another speaker said that he was not the type to join in protest movements and he might even get mad at a Negro who moved next door, borrowed his tools and did not return them, but that he felt obligated by his conscience to help change a situation he considered to be immoral.

The summing-up speaker said that there was fear in the community, but that instead of fearing one's neighbors' reactions, one should, to quote a poet, "rather fear the apathetic throng, the cowed and meek who see world's injustice and its wrong, and dare not speak."

A two-pronged program was decided upon. The first point was to meet with the real estate board to demand an end to discriminatory practices.

Verifiable progress and not verbiage would be insisted upon. The other point was to mobilize public opinion in the community so that there would be mass support for further action. It was pointed out that a climate had to be established in the community so that change could take place and that therefore there would be further calls upon individuals to extend the activity of the group. Clergy would probably be called upon to give special sermons.

The enthusiastic response to the meeting indicates that the new organization is bound to grow both in size and impact.

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