

Highland Park: The struggle continues

Fifth Estate Collective

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Highland Park Junior College and High School students went on strike April 13. They returned to school on the 25th, vowing to continue their struggle by other means. For two weeks the students and the Highland Park community have engaged in a non-violent demonstration, allowing those who wished to return to school to do so, though less than a quarter of the college attended classes.

This peaceful protest resulted in extensive police harassment and fourteen arrests. Among those arrested were Marie Wheeler, a student charged twice with trespassing in front of her own college. Mark Weiss was charged with interfering with an officer, when he attempted to advise Marie of her rights.

Other arrests included a white student supporter from Oakland Community College, an adult member of the community support group, and Larry Simmons, strike leader, who was busted three times—once for allegedly single handedly kidnapping two fully armed police officers.

Simmons is president of the Student Council and Chairman of the Black Student Coalition. He discussed the progress of the struggle at a noon rally on Thursday, April 24th. He explained that the college is 85% black and that the administration with one exception is 100% white. Less than 10% of the faculty is black.

This is the third time that students have used the strike tactic at Highland Park Community College. There was a negotiated settlement at the conclusion of the strike last May. It called for a Black Studies program, a student newspaper and the hiring of more black faculty.

Shortly afterward, the administration began to refer to this agreement as a “proposed agreement.” Up to the time of the present strike, the main move by the administration has been the firing of E.C. Cooper. Mr. Cooper is a popular black instructor whose evaluation stated that he seemed to be a good teacher with excellent rapport with students, but that he was not responsive (to whom?).

During the course of the strike, the administration announced the firing of fourteen more faculty members, including seven out of the present fourteen black instructors and seven white instructors who supported the strike.

The student demands at present are: a Black Studies program, a student newspaper, retention of E.C. Cooper, removal or resignation of three members of the administration, and amnesty for teachers and students involved in the strike.

The Highland Park community has shown support for the students by forming the Citizen’s Committee for Community Control. This organization of some two hundred parents is in agreement with the demands and some of the parents have been at the strike lines every day.

A meeting of the Citizen’s Committee for Community Control on Wednesday night (the 23rd) heard and supported the demands of the High School. These demands included the removal of police from the High School and the substitution of a parent’s patrol, the hanging of pictures of black heroes in the hallways and assembly rooms, the institution of a Black Studies program, the end of arbitrary suspensions and the assurance of improved sanitation facilities in the school.

On Thursday morning a parent’s committee paid a surprise visit to the school. They found that the conditions were as described by the students; floors unwashed, toilets over-flowing, hand towels unwashed and a general

stench pervading the school. They are determined to correct this condition and to struggle in support of the high school and college students.

The Faculty Senate of Highland Park College has issued a statement calling for an expanded Black Studies program, the hiring of black faculty, lower tuition, more black people in the administration and that the administration bargain in good faith with the students.

The Black Faculty Coalition has also issued a statement calling for “the elimination of the subtle and overt racism present in the staff and administration here at Highland Park College.” A faculty support coalition from Wayne State, Oakland University, Oakland Community College and Michigan State called for general support and participation on the picket lines.

The Highland Park Federation of Teachers filed a complaint protesting the use of the social science area as a police arsenal and protesting the use of counselors as police spies. Counselors were required by Dean Jones to stand at the doors and identify dissident students.

As of this writing, negotiations with the Board of Education have broken off again. The Citizens’ Committee for Community Control is meeting with Dr. Emrich, Superintendent of Highland Park Schools, in regards to the High School. The C.C.C.C. is also conducting a recall campaign against the Board of Education.

The struggle has not ended. It is growing. Call 867-0218 to offer your support.



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