

Black Students Protest

Dena Clamage

1969

Black high school students escalated their Spring Offensive March 26 in a city-wide demonstration at the School Center Building, headquarters of the Detroit Board of Education.

The demonstration was sponsored by the Black Student Voice, a black junior and senior high school newsletter dedicated to the complete liberation of black people.

Carrying signs which read "Black-Students and Community Unite and Fight!" and "Black Community Control or No Control," about 80 students gathered outside the second-floor conference room where the Board was meeting.

The students demanded to enter the meeting to present their demands, calling for an end to "the unspeakable amount of atrocities which the Board of Education has committed on the Black student body over the years on psychological and physical planes."

The demonstration was one of a whole series of resistance actions which have been taken by Detroit black high school students this past winter and spring, ranging from organized walkouts and picket lines to spontaneous acts of sabotage in the schools. All of these actions have met with brutal suppression by the racist Board of Education and the Detroit pig force.

Just last week 70 students tried to gain admittance to a Board of Education meeting to which they had previously been invited. The Board of Education called out the pigs who beat and arrested six of the students, one of whom is being held on a trespassing charge.

The students, however, refused to be intimidated by this type of treatment; they tried again. But the Board was up to its old tricks, refusing to let the students in on the basis that they would constitute a fire hazard in the meeting room (even though their presence in the cramped lobby was apparently considered safe). As the students waited, they grew more and more angry.

At various times, a spokesman leapt up on a desk in the center of the room and cautioned the group, "Keep cool. They have us pinned in here and they have policemen all through this building waiting to beat our ass. They are just waiting for us to make a mistake."

Another student responded, "We've been waiting 400 years; we can wait a half hour."

Finally after an hour the Board was forced to seek a compromise; it offered to allow three students in to present the demands. The students accepted, even though some of them yelled out, "Fuck no, everyone go!"

It was decided to allow the Board 48 hours to consider the demands. "If there is no response from the Board of Education about when they will meet all our demands, we will be forced to take further action."

After 45 minutes the student negotiators came out. "We went in and talked to them. They fooled around. We read off our demands. They said they would study and analyze them. (Jeers from the other students.) We said these are the cold hard facts and you've got 48 hours. Then we left."

The demands presented at the Board meeting came both from the students and from the black community. The community demanded control over expenditures of funds; hiring and training of all staff; site selection and

naming of schools; design and construction of schools (including contract awards); purchase of texts and supplies; and educational policy and curriculum.

The students demanded that their schools give them a “Black education.” This includes the instituting of Black Studies programs, the removal of books which honor “white ideologies” and their replacement with those of a “Black orientation and reflection,” and “the removal of teachers and administrators (black or white) who prove to be detrimental to the aims and goals of a true ‘Black’ education.”

The students also demanded an immediate end to R.O.T.C., the reduction of class sizes and the free issuance of supplies to students, and the removal of all police officers from black schools.

Finally, they asserted the principle that the black community must control black schools; in line with this they demanded that the “Black Nationalist flag of Red, Green, and Black replace the American flag which now flies over Black schools.”

After the three student representatives gave their report on the Board meeting, the students decided to leave. They left as a disciplined group, quickly and efficiently, leaving no stragglers to be picked off by prowling pigs.

But they left behind a reminder for the Board of Education. Written on the lobby desk in indelible ink were the words “Year of the Heroic Black Student.”

fifth Estate

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<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/76-april-3-16-1969/black-students-protest>
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