

EDITORIAL/OPINION



Education

by N. Fungai Kumbula

Apology in order

What an insult! Frank McNamara, chairman of the Board of Education, said to the press after a brief meeting to get the demands of the Black United Front that the BUF's demand of two-way busing is difficult, because the white community largely is not ready for such a move. If McNamara believes that he can remain a viable factor in the solution to this problem and still think of Black children with a double standard, he is far off base. He should retract this insulting statement.

McNamara, and the large segment of the white community to which he alludes, had better listen to BUF spokesmen who made it clear after the meeting: "We will no longer allow our children to be victims of a racist one-way busing program, abusive disciplinary practices, and we will no longer allow our children to be perpetual recipients of a second rate education."

The demands of the Black United Front are reasonable, they are consistent with problems identified long ago; and they have unquestionable support in the Black community as well as among many whites. If the larger white community is not yet ready, after 15 years of forcing the burdens on Black residents, then McNamara would be wise to come up with specific plans to get them ready—and in a hurry! The Black people have had enough of the discrimination and the insults.

Preach liberation

The boycott organized by the Black United Front and widely supported by individuals and groups in the Black community is gaining steam. To forge this new alliance, we must have the complete cooperation of the well-established ministerial community.

This struggle needs the blessings of the Black ministerial leaders. The struggle of Jesus was the struggle of the oppressed. The school system is oppressive, and there are few so well versed on the moral indignity of oppression than the Black ministers who preach for the uplifting of the poor, oppressed, and weak every Sunday morning.

The religious structure can provide a network of communication. Bulletins, newsletters, Sunday announcements, and pulpit references can spread the word and help this cause. The Black United Front recognized the importance of ministers, and cultivated their support with several meetings before the announcement of the boycott plans.

As boycott co-chairman, Reverend John H. Jackson of Mount Olivet Baptist Church, said, "If the powerful call of our respected ministers was given not only in celebrating the Holy Word on Sunday, but also for political organizing during the week, Black people would learn faster that their collective action will bring collective strides toward equality in education."

My folks were, and to some extent, still are very simple people, simple in the sense that their needs were very basic: a roof over their heads, food on the table, clothing and the like. Nothing fancy. But, there was one thing on which they were most uncompromising and that was education for their children. Living in an age of oppression, after our country was stolen, all our parents saw education as the one avenue left for us to realize what potential had been stifled by the onset of colonialism and the accompanying racism.

I remember many a day when there was no food on the table, when my mother wore the same pair of tattered sneakers she had been wearing for a year, when we walked around in clothing so patched up we may as well have been wearing nothing but patches and all the time mom and dad were saving to pay tuition for one of us. My folks always have had this fierce determination that, come what may, their children were going to get an education.

This fierce determination has fired me through the years. My parents, like parents everywhere, were far from perfect but, as long as I live, I will always remember, cherish and value this supreme act of love they bestowed upon us all. In the Black community at the moment is a group of concerned parents, fueled by the same love, same determination to see their children get the chance they never got. The group in question is the Black United Front, brought together by a number of problems that have simmered for much too long.

The BUF is proposing a boycott of classes next month as a way of forcing a number of changes. I have followed the demands and the development with a very keen eye because there is more to the class boycott than meets the eye. The parallels between the problems BUF is addressing and those that the parents back home have struggled with for the last eight decades are uncanny. The driving force, the motivation behind each is to see their children get a good education, a quality education.

When the Europeans came to rape Africa, steal the continent and make slaves of its people, they completely disrupted our way of life. By bringing a different kind of technology, it also necessitated a new form of education. To survive in this new form of society, Blacks had to adjust to this so-called formal education. Because the whites set the criteria for achieving the wherewithal for sur-

vival, they also decided what form the education was going to take. Needless to say, they did not want all Blacks getting the same educational opportunities because, if that happened, then they (the whites) would very soon become obsolete. Blacks would simply take over and start running the show according to their own dictates.

So, all over Africa only a few schools were opened and only so many Blacks could take advantage of them. That has been the pattern throughout colonial Africa. It has only been in recent years, with the overthrow of colonialism in most of Africa that this trend has been halted and, in some cases, reversed. Those Africans brought to this country found themselves also thrown in to a society that, on the one hand, demanded that they learn how to read and write and on the other, punished those who tried to learn.

After decades of agitation, of street demonstrations, marches, petitions, they finally wrested access to educational opportunities which, should have opened the gates to 'the land of opportunity.' Everything in this country hinges on education. From the day you are born, you are made to understand that, without an education, your options are very limited. Just about any job you can imagine, be it digging a ditch or operating a spaceship, requires some form of literacy.

For a while, it looked as if everybody could aspire to be anything: that everything was open to all, without regard to race or color. Lately, however, the facade has been lifted to reveal the grim reality beneath. While in Rhodesia and South Africa they blatantly limit educational opportunities for Blacks, in this country the same sinister plan is carried out in a slightly different manner: what is limited here is quality education. Hasn't it ever struck you as some form of conspiracy?

Year in and year out reading scores in the Black community keep plummeting. So when Black kids cannot read, write or articulate their thoughts properly, that's grounds for denying them decent jobs. Is it the fault of the kids that they cannot read? Is it the parents who are at fault? In either case I would have to answer in the negative. BUF has shown the parents' concern; the children have shown concern because they are acutely aware of the deficiencies of the education they are getting.

The fault has to be with the teachers and the school administrators. If the teachers were doing their

job, there would bound to be some improvement. I refuse to believe that all these children who spend so much time in school would all be too naive to realize that unless they get a real education then they are doomed to a life of failure, uncertainty and definitely no hope at all for the future. All these children go to school with one specific purpose in mind: to learn so they can acquire some marketable skill.

The school administrators are to blame because of their system of assigning teachers. It appears that those teachers who are assigned to the Black community feel like they are being unfairly singled out, as if its some form of punishment. As a result they do not identify with the students at all. They are there simply to draw a paycheck. The children can feel this and a teacher's attitude can make a world of difference to them. A teacher has to be interested in his job to be able to motivate his/her students at all.

This, however, is not a blatant condemnation of all teachers in the Black community. Some do make an honest effort while others are hampered by a lack of familiarity with the Black community and, consequently, the background of their students.

The demands of BUF have been documented numerous times in various news releases. I will, therefore, not go into detail about what they are. Instead, I shall just touch on one other demand which I consider very important: the establishment of a middle school in the Black community. At the moment, because there is none, Black parents are forced to send their children out to other areas even when they would prefer for them to stay in their own community.

The absence of the small number of Black teachers is another sore point that needs addressing. It would appear to me that where there is a 15% Black enrollment, there should also be a 15% Black representation on the faculty. By the same token, there should be a Black school board representation proportionate with the number of Black students.

Like a friend of mine said, Black parents, like everybody else, pay taxes and it is these taxes that support our public schools and colleges. So, why should Black students be shortchanged?

A move has successfully been made to provide Spanish speaking students bilingual instruction, an acknowledgement of their different culture. Why then is there a systematic effort to deny Black students their culture?

Emanuel Hospital wins discrimination suit

(Continued from page 1 col. 6) 1976.

Mrs. Mildred Barker, a nurses aide, said Mrs. Wrighten bore a heavier case load than other RNs in the same shift.

Mrs. Mildred Sie, a nurses aide, testified that she had been pressured to take "WOP" time and was "floated" to more areas than white aides were. Gloria Buggs, a practical nurse, said Mrs. Wrighten had a heavier total patient care load than white nurses. She charged that she had been discriminated against in work assignments.

Mrs. Leonora Morris, a registered nurse, said she believed she had been discriminated against while at Emanuel. Ger Vigon, a therapist, testified she was denied pay because of her national origin.

Millie Whitmore, a laboratory technician, said she felt discriminated against in pay and work assignment. Charlene Wilcoxson, an aide, testified that Mrs. Wrighten's work load was heavier than that of white nurses and that on the whole white supervisors were rude to Black employees.

Carol Bennett, a nurses aide, said Mrs. Graham bore more work than other LPNs.

Ms. Janette Andrews, Frances Odom, Herice Minor, Pauline Kinney, Buggs, Morris, testified that Black patients received inadequate and inappropriate care from white

staff and that certain personal and hygiene needs were not as well attended as with white patients.

For the defense, Ms. Barbara Weleber, medical coordinator, and white, said she promoted Evelyn Johannesen, also white, rather than Mrs. Wrighten because she believed Ms. Johannesen had superior nursing skills, relevant experience and "displayed a greater spirit of cooperation and potential for good staff relations."

Ms. Weleber and Margaret Nelson testified they did not know of a single time that staff had to take involuntary "WOP" time. Records submitted did not indicate whether "WOP" time was voluntary or involuntary. Burns determined, "It is clear that any such coercion in a routine manner directed at specific individuals or specific races was not the policy of the hospital."

Judge Burns ruled that although the plaintiffs presented testimony that Blacks had been denied transfers, forced to take WOP time, generally harassed about coffee breaks, slight tardiness and minor infractions in a discriminatory fashion. "There was very little credible evidence that white co-workers were preferentially treated. No specific incidence or written transfer request improperly denied, or an involuntary WOP time was actually proved. This, the plaintiffs' evidence, while probative of poor employee morale,

was not sufficient to meet plaintiffs initial burden."

The hospital presented evidence showing it employed more Blacks and minorities than are found in the work force. "There were enough inconsistencies, such as difficulties identifying individuals and their race in the different reports so as to vitiate any possible probative value the statistics, if correlated and verified, might have had."

Results of the survey showed 18 Blacks out of a total of 71 fired, and 210 Blacks out of 1,625 voluntarily terminated or retained. Blacks comprised 13.5 per cent of the staff. There were 80 per cent more firings of Blacks than would have been statistically probable. Judge Burns determined that the statistical analysis "is not itself sufficient to compel an inference that disparities shown for that year were produced by racial factors"... This, combined with other factors led the judge to conclude "that Wrighten and Graham do not meet their burden in establishing a pattern of practice of employment discrimination at Emanuel Hospital at the relevant time in question."

Jessie Blocker charged that he was terminated by Red Top Service, which contracts with Emanuel to do housekeeping services, in 1977. (Please turn to page 9 col. 3)

Union seeks social justice

(Continued from page 1 column 3) under civil service, and as often is the case, most decisions were made for us. Under a good civil service system, the system makes the decisions the employees should make. It is easy to sit back and let that happen." Lucy and his fellow employees organized a local of AFSCME, and in 1965 he became president of Local 1695, Contra Costa County Employees.

Lucy joined the AFSCME International staff in 1966, as associate director of the Legislation and Community Affairs Department

then served as Executive Assistant to President Jerry Wolf.

In May of 1972, he was elected International Secretary-Treasurer, the second highest national office.

Lucy is a vice-president of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, The Maritime Trades Department and the Department of Professional Employees. He also serves on the board of directors for the African-American Institute, Americans for Democratic Action, National Black United Fund, and is a member of the National Leadership

Conference on Civil Rights and several other labor and community organizations.

He was a founder and is the president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, an organization of union leaders and rank-and-file members dedicated to focusing on the needs of Black and minority group workers. At its third annual convention in Detroit in 1974, Lucy was elected CBTU's first President.

For the last four years *Ebony Magazine* has selected Lucy as one of "The 100 Most Influential Black Americans."



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