

M E M O R A N D A

a b o u t

* * * THE NEW CAUCUS

* * * RACISM IN EDUCATION CONFERENCES

What's going on in your area?

Send information, suggestions,
questions, notes to:

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RACISM IN Education

In December, 1966, the American Federation of Teachers held a Racism in Education Conference in Washington, D.C. On May 11 - 13, 1967 a similar Racism in Education Conference, sponsored by the Michigan Federation of Teachers and the Detroit Federation of Teachers, was held in Detroit. About 2600 black and white teachers and interested persons from southern Michigan and nearby areas attended.

Speakers included Floyd McKissick, John O. Killens, Vincent Harding, James McPherson, Arna Bontemps, Ashley Montagu. Kits were given out; they included bibliographies on Afro-American history and culture, studies on racial attitudes of very young children, etc. Displays emphasized Afro-American history.

The mood of the Conference was black nationalist and the basic racism in America was repeatedly exposed. Very excited discussions took place over the questions of black power, black control of schools, using "Negro" versus Afro-American.

Below are quotes from a letter recently sent to Detroit teachers who indicated at a union meeting that they were interested in further activities to combat racism in the schools:

"As a follow-up to the Racism in Education Conference the Detroit Federation of Teachers has established a standing COMMITTEE AGAINST RACISM IN EDUCATION. We plan to implement an action program designed toward the improvement of quality education.

"This fall the Committee will assist classroom teachers by developing and distributing bibliographies, supplementary materials and sample lesson plans on Afro-American history; insuring the availability of textbooks and the planning of regional and city wide programs of interest and help to teachers in providing quality education."

An attempt is being made to get a Committee representative in each school who will publicize materials and announcements from the Committee, assist in surveys of materials and course offerings and forward teachers' suggestions and requests. A questionnaire will soon be circulated throughout the schools (prepared by the Committee) in order to determine whether Afro-American history is being taught in classrooms.

Interested in setting up a Racism in Education Conference or Committee? Write: Maria Williams, c/o Detroit Federation of Teachers, 8845 Puritan, Detroit, Michigan, 48238.

Interested in getting tapes from the Detroit Racism in Education Conference? Write to same person as above.

Interested in obtaining a pamphlet containing the major addresses delivered at the AFT December Racism in Education Conference held in Washington? Write: American Federation of Teachers, 1012 14th Street N.W., Washington, D.C., 20005. Ask for pamphlet entitled, "Racism in the Schools."

THE NEW CAUCUS IS A SPONTANEOUS COMING TOGETHER OF UNION TEACHERS TO URGE THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS TO ADOPT AS POLICY ALL ITEMS CONTAINED IN THE FOLLOWING PLATFORM.

The NEW CAUCUS firmly believes in free and open democratic discussion of all issues and will permit all persons the right to have their opinions heard and considered, including those persons with dissenting views.

The NEW CAUCUS believes that practices based on this philosophy will permit our Caucus to effectively respond to the pressing needs of our constantly changing contemporary society.

P L A T F O R M
(Adopted - Washington, D.C.)
August, 1967

207. of delegates

- THE NEW CAUCUS - supports those programs and policies advanced by the American Federation of Teachers for the improvement of salaries and working conditions for all American teachers.
- supports the expansion of collective bargaining rights for teachers.
 - supports the right of teachers to strike, when necessary, to achieve their legitimate demands.
 - believes that membership in the American Federation of Teachers should be open to all teachers regardless of race, religion or political belief.
 - urges support for programs and policies designed to guarantee full and equal educational opportunity for all.
 - urges that the American Federation of Teachers require all of its locals with the right of collective bargaining to negotiate contracts including courses in the school curricula on: Afro-American History, American Labor History, and History of the Civil and Human Rights struggles throughout the world.
 - urges the American Federation of Teachers to call upon all federal, state and local governments to provide fund and implement programs that will guarantee free health care to all children.
 - urges the American Federation of Teachers to call upon federal, state and local governments to provide and fund programs which will eradicate the social and economic injustices which have set off the civil insurrections across the nation and insure maximum participation by those who suffer these injustices in the planning and conduct of such programs.
 - believes the American Federation of Teachers has the responsibility to assume a leadership role in the AFL-CIO in order to press for the necessary revitalization of the American labor movement.

(more)

- THE NEW CAUCUS** - opposes the growth and strength of conservative leadership and policies within the labor movement which have led to an increasing gap between white and black trade unionists.
- urges the American Federation of Teachers to call upon the AFL-CIO to expel from membership those affiliates which continue to exclude black people and other minorities.
 - demands that the American Federation of Teachers call upon the AFL-CIO to devise and support programs which will guarantee:
 - (a) A job for every person able to work,
 - (b) Adequate housing for all citizens,
 - (c) An end to de facto segregation in the United States, and
 - (d) Special programs for improving the economic and social status of all minority groups, including American Indians.
 - urges the American Federation of Teachers to call upon the AFL-CIO to organize rural workers, particularly sharecroppers, migrant workers and other farm workers.
 - urges the American Federation of Teachers to guarantee to smaller locals adequate representation within their state and national bodies and necessary services for their continued growth and expansion.
 - believes that the American Federation of Teachers should work cooperatively with teacher training institutions and Boards of Education in establishing in-service training programs for teachers for the purpose of confrontation of racist views of many teachers and means of modifying same.
 - urges teachers to exercise their responsibility to work with the grass roots organizations which support our goals within the communities in which they live and work.
 - recognizes the right of black people to self-determination.
 - further recognizes the right of black teachers within the American Federation of Teachers to determine policy and take leadership in the implementation of programs affecting education and social welfare of black pupils and the black community, which leadership is urgent for the purposes of:
 - (a) improving the self image of black pupils, and
 - (b) clarifying and properly orienting programs within black schools.
 - urges the American Federation of Teachers to devise policies and programs which will confront the issue of racism in both urban and rural areas with the aim of eliminating racism in education throughout the United States of America, and charges its own membership with the responsibility for direction to the American Federation of Teachers in this all important program.

(more)

THE NEW CAUCUS - believes that the war in Vietnam is destroying our youth, diverting funds from the battle for quality education and the war on poverty, and is furthermore and unjust and illegal war and should therefore be opposed by the American Federation of Teachers and all of its affiliates.

(End of program)

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Detroit Leads Dissent

Article appeared in 8-26-67
Detroit News

Teachers Union Split

By HARRY SALSINGER
Detroit News Education Writer

WASHINGTON — A split in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) here — with a Detroit man leading the dissenters — may reflect growing turmoil in the AFL-CIO Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT).

Edward Simpkins, full-time vice-president of the DFT, is chairman of a newly organized caucus, announced as the AFT convention closed here yesterday, which is opposed to the current AFT leadership. This leadership includes Charles Cogen, AFT president, and Mrs. Mary Ellen Riordan, DFT president, who is a powerful voice in the dominant Progressive Caucus, which elected Cogen and other AFT officers.

Asked whether his split with Mrs. Riordan on national union policy reflected a difference at the local level, Simpkins said:

"We are as united in the DFT as we have been.

SIMPKINS SAID the New Caucus — its formal name — was formed because union members who tried to voice an opinion "were stifled and oppressed" both in Progressive Caucus meetings and on the floor of the convention.

One basic area of difference was on the question of whether the convention should condemn the war in Vietnam. It was a question that caused a three-hour parliamentary wrangle, marked by flaring tempers, on the floor of the convention.

Simpkins sided with the minority, demanding the AFT take a stand against the war while Mrs. Riordan was on the majority side — that the AFT should express no opinion.

ANOTHER DETROIT delegate, David Herreshoff, a Wayne State University faculty member, was a leader in pushing for condemnation of the war. Herreshoff also is a supporter of Simpkins in the New Caucus.

The New Caucus is deeply concerned with the rights of Negro teachers and pupils and wants to "modify the racist views of many teachers."

"A teacher can be black without being a black-thinking teacher," Simpkins said. "We want black-thinking teachers."

Simpkins said the New Caucus is not a Black Power

group, although some of its ideas might agree with those of Black Power advocates.

THE NEW CAUCUS also is critical of the "growth and strength of conservative leadership and policies within the labor movement which have led to an increasing gap between white and black trade unionists."

Simpkins said this leadership included Mrs. Riordan, Cogen and Dave Selden, a former Detroit and AFT vice-president.

The New Caucus, Simpkins said, now has 150 members out of the 800 delegates attending the convention. The Progressive Caucus has about 450 members.

In the internal politics of the AFT, the caucuses are formal organizations supporting various candidates and issues and delegates pay dues to join.

THREE YEARS ago the Progressive Caucus, with Mrs. Riordan playing a leading role, upset the conservative National Caucus candidate and elected Cogen. Since then it has become the dominant caucus.

"The Progressive Caucus has become the conservative caucus," Simpkins said. "The New Caucus will grow and replace the Progressive Caucus as the organization of union liberals."

HE SAID the caucus membership now comes from 20 locals with most coming from New York, California, Illinois and Michigan.

Simpkins said about half of the 48 members of the DFT delegation to the convention had joined the New Caucus but he did not know how many of these also maintained their membership in the Progressive Caucus.

The Detroit NEW CAUCUS (which includes teachers from all over southeastern Michigan) has begun organizing for the AFT convention of 1969. Two committees have been set up: Steering Committee and Newsletter Committee.

Simpkins reported receiving many messages of interest in the NEW CAUCUS and it is hoped that relations with teachers across the country can be cemented through the Newsletter.

You can write to:
Ed Simpkins, c/o Detroit Federation of Teachers, 8845 Puritan, Detroit, Michigan 48238