

MARCH ON CITY HALL FOR OPEN HOUSING

1 PM TODAY
MEET AT UNION - 2ND FLOOR - NOON

CIVIL RIGHTS REPORT

Michigan State University, EAST LANSING, Michigan

May 18, 1965

70 SIT IN, SIT OUT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Monday night's City Council meeting in East Lansing was not just another meeting. More than 70 persons, mostly MSU students, went into the meeting to persuade the council to adopt proposals for open occupancy in East Lansing. We did not expect a complete victory and did not get one. But we did want action.

We sat in because the council refused to do anything more than adopt a resolution against prejudice and agree to talk about the problem. After three and a half hours in the corridors outside the council room "the 70" were carried out one by one by police and dumped on the lawn behind City Hall.

Outside City Hall, up to 400 marchers carrying torches and singing freedom songs supported the sit-in for over five hours. They cheered each participant in the sit-in as he was carried outside and dumped.

This was not an isolated incident. Monday night's demonstration was just one battle in the continuing war against prejudice.

The long history of housing discrimination in this city must end, and now is the time to end it.

The city has the power to insure equal opportunity in housing for all its citizens. It must act now to eliminate discrimination or face continued pressure from all those interested in civil rights and human dignity.

That is why we demonstrated Monday night, and that is why we ask everyone concerned with equal rights to demonstrate with us at 1 p.m. today.

NATIONAL ATTENTION FOCUSED ON EAST LANSING

The civil rights struggle in East Lansing is not being worked out in isolation from the rest of the world. This struggle is part of a national movement, and national interest has been attracted to it.

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JOHN LEWIS and JAMES FORMAN of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee WILL BE IN EAST LANSING TODAY to support the campaign for open occupancy. JAMES FARMER of the Congress of Racial Equality, the REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and author LOUIS LOMAX have pledged to repeat their visits to East Lansing if called upon to help in the fight.

EAST LANSING'S CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS ARE NOT ALONE; EAST LANSING CAN NO LONGER PRETEND TO BE ALONE.

This afternoon's rally must be a massive show of student and faculty interest in the very vital problem of housing discrimination in this city.

LEGAL QUESTIONS NOT THE ONLY ISSUE

Two weeks ago, when nearly 100 students asked the City Council to begin developing a program "to eliminate discrimination in the area of sales and rentals with a legal statement embodying this program," the council merely referred the proposal to the Human Relations Commission. Monday night, we went back to the council to see what it had done about our proposals.

Early in Monday's meeting, a resolution was introduced and passed unanimously stating that the City Council disapproves of racial prejudice.

Byron Peterson, Campus NAACP president and civil rights spokesman, praised the statement, but told the council it was still only words. He then read a prepared statement calling for several specific legal measures in the area of human rights and an aggressive publicity program indicating that East Lansing welcomes persons of all races, religions and nationalities.

The council refused to consider any proposal for punitive measures against realtors and landlords who discriminate. It based its position on the decision of the state attorney general that municipal ordinances dealing with human rights are unconstitutional. Moreover, some councilmen seem to feel that even if an ordinance were legal, it might not be desirable.

We contend that not only is an open occupancy ordinance needed, but that its constitutionality is yet to be decided in court. East Lansing can lose nothing by proving now that it is truly an open city by passing such an ordinance, even if it might later be stricken down by the courts.

The council concentrates on its "achievements" in human relations, and brushes aside recurring cases of discrimination. It argues that the "atmosphere" of East Lansing has changed in the past few years. We say such a change is insufficient to help Negroes seek homes in East Lansing on an equal basis.

The council's position that change must be gradual and not antagonize certain white residents of the city may be fine for those white residents, but not for the minorities who suffer from discrimination.

East Lansing must act to protect the rights of the minorities as well as of the majority.

MSU Chapter, National Association for
the Advancement of Colored People
MSU Friends of the Student Non-Violent
Coordinating Committee
Committee for Student Rights
Canterbury Club

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COME TO CITY HALL AT 1 P.M. TODAY--DEMONSTRATE FOR OPEN HOUSING

LETTER FROM JAIL

On the night of May 25, 59 students were arrested for committing an act of civil disobedience. Many of the students were troubled. Even though they had demonstrated the total nature of their commitment, they felt their message still hadn't gotten through. The result was the following statement of conscience written at Ingham County Jail, Mason.

The problem of civil rights is that the gulf between those who have experienced humiliation as a people and those who have not is the deepest and most significant we have to face; contemplation of this gulf and awareness of its meaning are the chief essentials for dealing with this problem.

This gulf exists in East Lansing.

We, and others before us, through discussion and demonstrations have tried to impress upon the people the growing seriousness of this gulf that has divided Americans from each other.

Despite all their protestations of good faith, the leaders of this community have failed to grasp the moral urgency of this problem. They are men of good faith, but their moral vision is blinded. Our discussions and demonstrations have not given them the new vision these times require.

Stronger action was necessary.

Civil disobedience is a dramatic force. But we are not trying through such action to force those opposing us to their knees. We are trying to force them to look at the situation in a new way. And our message is too urgent and has been ignored too long — a message about dangers and hopes that should involve all men. Respect for the law must not obscure what is morally right.

Because they failed to realize the basic human issues and its sources, the leaders of this community have so far failed to take positive action. The most obvious action a community such as East Lansing can take is the passage of legislation guaranteeing open occupancy and rentals.

More than a year after the need for legal action to cope with housing discrimination was brought to the attention of the City Council by East Lansing citizens, no action has been taken. No legal report has been made, and the mayor of East Lansing is, by his own admission, still uninformed about many aspects of the problem. Despite resolutions expressing concern, despite the existence of guarantees in the State Constitution, there

is no rapid justice for members of minority groups denied rental on the basis of race, and discrimination still exists in the sale of housing.

The meeting Tuesday night was the culmination of three weeks of discussions. Despite previous statements that the resolution of legal obstacles was the chief problem, Mayor Thomas revealed that he was unequivocally opposed to an open occupancy ordinance, even if it proves to be legal. While he expressed qualified support for an ordinance banning discrimination in licensed rental, he would promise no immediate action.

In a responsible community, moral leadership cannot be founded on the basis of equivocation of this kind.

Negotiations had yielded nothing but exposure of hypocrisy. The only action left -- action we had discussed for weeks -- was civil disobedience.

At 11:00 P.M., we confronted the community with a plea to search their hearts. The gravity of our action, jeopardizing our futures and suffering the indignities of jeers and jail, is testimony to our commitment and the immediacy of the issue. Some will be deterred by our action, but few will remain indifferent. We have made our commitment. We ask those deterred by our action to re-search their hearts. We beseech those who with us realize the seriousness of the situation to take action also -- to take the risk of speaking out and acting for that which they know to be good and right.

East Lansing
Civil Rights
Movement

CIVIL RIGHTS RALLY
THUR. JUNE 3
UNION BALLROOM
8 30