



The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity

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July 16, 1963

TO: Society Members and Others in the Atlanta Area.
FROM: The Rev. John B. Morris, ESCRU Executive Director.
RE: Protest of the Lovett Trustees' Action.

In my letter of July 3rd to Dean Hardman (copies of which have been sent to recipients of this already, or which may be obtained on request) I said in part:

"I have consulted the President of this Society and it has been decided that steps will be taken in the fall at the opening of school to protest the Trustees' decision.... Encouragement and support will be given to direct action protest aimed at both the school itself, as well as to the members of the Board who are Episcopalians. Most likely this will include the placing of pickets at the school and at other points appropriate to the respective Trustees, as well as some form of mass pilgrimage to either the school or the Cathedral for the saying of the Penitential Office."

This memorandum now is to discuss the rationale and possibilities for protest, as I see it, and to invite your reactions. You may convey your feelings on the subject if you wish by way of the accompanying form, or by other means, and use the enclosed return envelope. If you do not wish to record your reactions, this is entirely all right. This memorandum is for private circulation, but may be shared with others who are concerned, and we will treat any response you make similarly.

Why Protest?

1. To protest the enormity of the Trustees' action and define it as such. The applications of three Negro families have been rejected by Lovett solely on the basis of race. That the father of one is Atlanta's most well-known citizen does not affect the basic immorality of their action, but certainly highlights it. In and of itself, the action alone merits a lively protest and seems to provide a viable opportunity for focusing on the sin on the one hand and the teaching of the Church on the other both for the sake of the issue here as well as for the illumination of it elsewhere.

2. Protest that is not meaningful and directed to a specific situation has little value, but where the history and circumstances of a situation validly demand it, there is, I believe, value for the Church in facing its "dirty linen" openly and forthrightly as suggested later in this memorandum. It is not often that we are provided the opportunity for the 'creative use of conflict', which, after the agony and embarrassment are over, generally leaves us stronger. Cut of the painful encounters of Churchmen with Churchmen at Sewanee and before St. John's Hospital, Brooklyn, last summer, there arises greater integrity in the Body. This is not a rationale for protest for its own sake, without direction, but a recognition of derivatives which come out of the cathartic experience that direct action entails. At the same time, I am the first to acknowledge that such confrontation does not come easily to most people and least of all, I suspect, to we Episcopalians whose tradition does not encourage direct action as a means to accepted goals. Although

I have been involved in it before, and am convinced of its worth under certain circumstances, I shall feel as awkward and out of role as anyone when I pick up my sign before the Lovett School next fall.

3. While the Bishop of Atlanta has acted forthrightly in announcing that the Lovett School does not enjoy any official approval by the Diocese, this does not alter the fact that the Church is at work through the fourteen Trustees who are Episcopalians, albeit in a fashion contrary to the official position of the Church. The respective fourteen were not chosen for the Board at random but, in part, as Episcopalians. Several hold other significant offices in the life of the Church. Whether approved or not, they remain, as I see it, a group of Churchmen whose action involves all of us and for whom we are all responsible so long as they individually and collectively remain attached to the Body of which we are all members. They cannot escape the origin and history of the Lovett School, nor their designation to its Board as Churchmen, nor can we, although they have no sanction from the diocesan office. If any resign from the Board, indicating thereby their dissatisfaction with the Board's action, there would be no cause for punitive protest which did not encompass the possibilities of change or witness in the face of failure. However, to date only the single Jew on the Board (from amongst the one-third of the Trustees who are not Episcopalians) has resigned. None have even announced that there was a minority viewpoint or dissent amongst the Trustees as a panel of judges would do in a split decision. One vote was reported to be unanimous, and the other was not described. Without other information publicly available, each Trustees must, and presumably does, assume responsibility for the stated position of the entire Board. As such, then, this is, I believe, the Church at work in distorted form which other Churchmen must protest for the sake of the integrity of the Body of Christ. Although more elusive than reasons for protest which follow, this reason is of paramount importance, resting, as I believe it does, on an understanding of the nature of the Church largely overlooked thus far. Pursuant to this, it might also be noted that the concept of the Church and its ministry has been seriously undervalued in the Trustees recognition of the Headmaster's "prior loyalty to the Church" as a priest, which does not seem to rest on them with any weight at all because they are laity.

4. Many ties with the Church remain, notwithstanding the bishop's announcement that Lovett can no longer be considered as approved by the Diocese of Atlanta. The Charter still requires that the Cathedral Chapter approve the selection of one-third of the Trustees from the Cathedral itself, and stipulates that another one-third are to be other Episcopalians. Also, the Dean of the Cathedral is, by Charter, always to be on the Board and, of course, presently serves as Chairman; and the Charter states that the "Episcopal Faith" is to be taught as "contained in the Book of Common Prayer." It is clearly indicated that the Board intends for these ties to remain in view of its announcement through a letter to parents dated July 2nd that Lovett's "...religious teaching will continue without change and (they) will continue to have Episcopal services in chapel and at other religious exercises." It seems that this amounts to a prostitution of the Prayer Book and an insult both to the Bishop and the whole Church. Having been spanked, they indicate that business will be as usual and they even thank the bishop for the time he has spent on the matter. Throughout they have ignored the possibility that the teaching of the Church had any claim on them as Churchmen; only, at best, acknowledging that their policy was in conflict with that of the Church. The recognition of this obvious fact has been seen by some, erroneously I believe, as some enlightenment on their part when they have said, in effect, 'So What!' Their intention to continue having Episcopal services, finally, remains as the most flagrant flaunting of the Christian community to which they profess attachment.

The Goals or Purpose of Protest.

I do not know what possibility exists for the Board to reverse itself at this late date but assume that it is most unlikely. The number of Trustees who at any point in the last several months voted, reportedly, to desegregate or move in this direction was always very small. The Headmaster is leaving, parents have twice been assured there would be no desegregation, the Bishop has acted with regard to the official position of the Diocese.....it appears plain that the issue is settled. While the possibility of some reversal coming pursuant to a sustained protest should not be ruled out, it is my understanding that protest at this point is over what has been done and not by way of pressuring or threatening the Board. I would not be opposed to the use of pressure on the Board, but it seems that protest now is symbolic in nature, especially in terms of the basic action that is to be protested. As far as the maintenance of Episcopal services and such go, protest could and might be seen as aimed at the elimination of this. I favor directing the protest primarily to the action of Churchmen in ruling against Negro citizens and fellow Churchmen because of their color. I don't think that some announcement that no Episcopal services will be held, were this to come, would alter the basic need for protest. The only thing that would change the basic situation would either be for the Trustees to be faithful and abide by the teaching of the Church, or unashamedly acknowledge the other loyalties they have been obedient to and get out of the Church.

The Extent of Protest.

Because of its more symbolic nature, protest could be limited in duration, although the possibility of sustaining it should not be ruled out in advance nor any announcement made as to how long it would be carried. Several days within the same week would be seen to be sufficient for a symbolic protest; with even one day sufficing if it were done thoroughly or with sufficient personnel. No threats would be made to Lovett authorities as to how long it would be sustained in lieu of remedy, but a keen ear to the ground should be maintained as to the effect it was having in course. One basis for a sustained or reoccurring protest would be in connection with the holding of Episcopal services if this were deemed necessary after the initial protest directed toward their discriminatory practices. Protest of continuing ties with the Church, violating the spirit of the bishop's action, could be made on a periodic basis - weekly, monthly or even annually so long as the worship of the Church was misused.

The Means of Protest.

The picket sign is an extension of the spoken and written word and is recognized constitutionally as falling under freedom of speech principles. In that it involves the whole person, it speaks as loudly as most any means of public communication. There is no doubt but that the man carrying a picket sign believes and feels deeply about that which his sign says (unless he is paid!). He is willing to risk censure and confrontation with persons who will see the sign and indicate by expression or voice their disapproval. By going to the place where the issue and/or person being reached resides and by there taking his stand, the picket says in unmistakable terms what he wants communicated. Because of the bodily and dramatic fashion of communication, widespread attention is given the protest through the various media.

I suggest that on a day soon after the opening of school in September a group of 14 or 28 Episcopal laity and clergy, duly prepared beforehand, assemble at the Cathedral of St. Philip for the saying of the Penitential Office and other suitable prayers before going then as pickets either to the places of business of the respective 14 Episcopal Trustees or to the school itself, with the other following. If the larger number were involved, the two assigned to each place ideally would be interracial, although some trustees occupy the same office buildings and could be covered by one team. Those who remain at the Cathedral should endeavor to focus upon the Dean's office in some fashion and stay clear of diocesan offices. The signs could be replicas of the "Capetown placard" (the crucifixion scene where Our Lord's Body is pierced by the barbed wire fence carrying the words 'Segregation and Separation') with a fragmented representation of the Lovett seal added and the names of the fourteen Churchmen. This says all that is needed, I believe.

The Personnel and Initiative for Protest.

We have said that "encouragement and support will be given to direct action protest". The President of the Society and I made this decision, being authorized by our Board to proceed in such situations as we deem best. Were there a local Chapter of the Society in the Diocese of Atlanta it naturally would have had the prior responsibility in the matter, as in the case of the Chapter's protest in the Diocese of Long Island last summer which I joined at their invitation. In other situations, though, I have taken the initiative in consultation with our President and others as at Sewanee, etc. We are now committed to seeking, encouraging and supporting protest directed to Lovett and its 14 Episcopal Trustees. We are flexible as to whom should or will effect the protest. I have already been advised by a white priest from a deep South diocese nearby that he would like to assist, as well as by other ESCRU personnel elsewhere. If it is necessary to recruit assistance from beyond Atlanta, I would look first to Negro clergy elsewhere in the South, as well as to key ESCRU officers. Our President, the Rev. Joseph Pelham, has already advised me that he is ready and prepared to come. If the protest is chiefly composed of persons not resident here, the planning will fall largely in my hands as one who knows the situation, etc.

However, if there are sufficient persons, clerical and lay, in Atlanta who are able and willing to take part in a protest action, it is my belief that they should be involved in the planning of such or at least be invited to assist. Indeed, if there is sufficient local involvement and it is deemed wise for me to withdraw because of our 'image', etc., I would respect the wishes of the group if I were confident that it was in the interest of a more effective protest.

Therefore, the chief burden of this memorandum is to survey the extent to which Atlanta Churchmen can and will be involved in protest action at Lovett. I have gone into considerable detail on how I presently see it if the responsibility remains with me to effect such protest. However, for the sake of a viable and effective protest, projected in terms somewhat comparable to what I've outlined, I am willing to forego specifics described here if it will increase the extent of local involvement. A final decision on where the initiative and planning would reside would have to be made after feedback on this memorandum were in.

I appreciate the fact that participation in direct action protest may be difficult or impossible for some who would otherwise approve, either because of their situation or because of a personal inability to be thusly involved. In this area of direct action it is often necessary for persons from elsewhere to assist in or do for us what we are circumscribed from doing.

I shall welcome your reactions if you would like to express them.