

Gertrude Wilson Reports:

The Will And The Way Of Boycotters

By GERTRUDE WILSON

This is what I saw.

In the rooms of the Siloam Baptist Church in Brooklyn, and in the offices of the Lenox Terrace Tenants' Association, donated as headquarters of the City-Wide School Boycott Committee, I saw the will of a people. A whole people.

I didn't see Negroes, I saw a mixed group of people. White, Negro, Asian. I saw middle-aged housewives; stunning young women, registered nurses, teachers, actors, and playwrights.

I saw college students with their faces streaked with ink from the mimeograph machines.

In Brooklyn

I saw Victor Newton, age 5. He walked into the room, over television cables, past twelve desks where phones were shrieking.

One foot caught the cable of a

phone waiting for the Rev. Galamison, but he just turned and plugged it in again. He was a man of business.

He must have learned to say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven", in that room, because he knew exactly where to go to hang his hat.

He hung it behind the Rev. Galamison who was then talking on the phone. Young Victor, with the symbolic name for the chaos of this drive was then ready for business.

He turned, made his way back

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across the room, and climbed into his mother's lap — a lady who cared that Victor should be victorious. As she gave him a welcoming hug, she answered the 'phone. "BOYCOTT!", she said.

Fighting City Hall

I saw organization in the heart of chaos. These people were fighting City Hall. But they either hadn't heard, or didn't care about the old cliché that "you can't fight City Hall!"

They were organized, despite the fact that they were informed daily by professional educators that they didn't understand the problem.

Lurie and Johnson

They understood their problem well. I saw Mrs. Thelma Johnson, 600 West 150th St., Manhattan coordinator, direct activities in the Lenox Terrace headquarters. It would be hard to believe what she did.

You'd have to see it. Perhaps her greatest single achievement was the serenity she imparted, the consideration and kindness which marked the relationship these people had with each other.

Ellen Lurie, of 180 Cabrini Boulevard, carried out the details and policies set up by Mrs. Johnson. "I'm Manhattan coordinator," said Mrs. Johnson, "but Ellen does all the work."

Like a Machine

Work Ellen Lurie did. I never saw anything like her. I watched her myself. All day Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday Ellen Lurie worked - like a machine.

She instructed picket Captains. She organized every line, she sent out orders, and answered phones. Mother of five children, ranging in ages from 1 to 10. Mrs. Lurie is also Secretary of the Local School Board, 12, 13, and 14.

Others

With Thelma Johnson and Ellen Lurie was Helen James, of 1430 Amsterdam Avenue, coordinator of food for the children in Freedom Schools, as well as chief of the Speakers' Bureau of the City-Wide Boycott Committee.

She and about 20 other speakers filled over 100 speaking engagements in the weeks preceding the boycott.

Jack Schwartz, of 4320 Van Courtlandt Park East, Bronx, sat at the right hand of Mrs. Lurie as she said, "Get this young man's story. He has slept here all week, and we don't know how we would have managed without him."

It's What You Believe In

But there were hundreds of them, each with a personal sacrifice, and concern. Charles Saun-

ders, a Senior student at Charles Evans Hughes High, who has applied to NYU, said, when asked about the time he spent in Manhattan Headquarters instead of on his studies, "It is no longer a question of what is good for you, it's what you believe in."

There was Bill Gross, of 511 West 113th Street, answering the telephones; Elena Kehoe, who lives in Brooklyn, and attends the High School of Music and Art; Jack Fisher, of 659 West 162nd Street, also from Music and Art.

There were kids in trench coats, and ladies in mink. You sit there and watch and you see people not feeling fatigue. You wonder why the Board of Education, and the Superintendent of Schools don't understand that these are people who care, fighting for something good. They want good schools, and they're entitled to them.

This is a City of turbulence, and you feel it here. You see a cross-section of the city's people - not all poor, not all middle-class, and not all privileged.

But the one thing you see above all, in this myriad group of races and religions — you see Americans together, working for a common goal.