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Leadership At The Five And Ten

Now that the Negro sit-down strike at the downtown Woolworth lunch counter has persisted several days, and seems to be spreading elsewhere, a time has come for community leadership by both races to assert itself.

The impasse might have solved itself in a vacuum. But no racial dispute exists in a vacuum. The incident has become nation-wide and world-wide news. Ultimately, if not solved amicably, it could erupt into something worse, and that will reflect poorly on the community, including Woolworth and the colleges involved, not to mention individuals.

An effort should be made by leaders on both sides to seek each other out and discuss ways and means of dealing with a potentially ugly situation.

Much more could be said about the legal, moral and business questions involved.

As Attorney General Malcolm Seawell noted, North Carolina law neither shields nor coerces the principals: The state does not prohibit serving members of both races at a lunch counter. But neither does it force a business to serve those it does not choose to serve.

Legally, Woolworth might eject the sit-downers on grounds of illegal trespass and be perfectly within its rights. But that is a course of action, we are

sure, the management does not want to follow.

Negro patrons occupying seats at the lunch counter have a position which demands consideration. In downtown Greensboro there are few, if any, restaurants or cafes where they can be served. Resentment against this dearth of facilities is not without justification.

But the way to remedy such a situation is through petition and negotiation rather than through a sit-down strike. No effort has been made to contact the Woolworth management about providing such facilities. They are made available in Woolworth stores elsewhere. We suggest that a delegation of potential lunch counter patrons get in touch with the management and see whether something can be worked out.

The alternatives could be ugly: There could be violence. There could be outright ejection. Neither of these courses is desirable.

This is a problem for Greensboro's mayor or city manager, working on the one hand with the Woolworth management, and responsible Negro leadership on the other.

There is the proper way to handle such matters, and it ought be resorted to before something much more serious happens at the five and ten.