

Alabama

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Council NEWSLETTER

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON HUMAN RELATIONS, INC. ROOM 206, MOORE BLDG. - 217 S. COURT ST. - MONTGOMERY 4, ALABAMA

"AN ORGANIZATION TO ATTAIN, THROUGH RESEARCH AND ACTION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL PEOPLE OF ALABAMA."

VOL. 2, NO. 2

December, 1955

NEW BLOW AT JIM CROW

Lending weight to the contention of a White Citizens Council spokesman that "they're gonna come down here and git us", a Federal administrative agency on Nov. 25th took a cue from the Supreme Court and struck down segregation on interstate railway and bus facilities.

In an order effective Jan. 12th, the Interstate Commerce Commission by an 8-1 vote ordered rail and bus companies to remove racial restrictions on interstate passengers in coaches and terminals. The originator of the "separate but equal" policy 62 years ago, the I.C.C. had ordered integration of Pullman cars in 1941 and dining cars in 1950. Reaction in Alabama came in two forms. Alabama Public Service Commissioner Jimmy Hitchcock quickly asserted that Alabama's transportation laws requiring separation of races will still govern Alabama's facilities. The other reaction came in the form of an unpublicized directive from the Southern Railway on Dec. 12th ordering removal of "colored" and "white" signs from waiting room entrances in at least Birmingham's Terminal Station and the Attalla station, which serves Gadsden.

This writer inquired of the change from an Attalla station agent who stated that they had been instructed to replace the old signs with "Interstate" and "Intrastate". The new signs had not been put up, he explained, because "the doors just aren't wide enough." Obviously, the plan would call for three waiting rooms, one for interstate and two for colored and white intrastate passengers. When asked how this would be managed with only two rooms available, the agent replied, "You figure it out!" This writer was then loaded with other passengers onto a mixed coach bound for Birmingham.

Compliance with the new I.C.C. order can be readily determined by the absence of the signs above train and bus station doorways on Jan. 12th. We ask recipients of the Newsletter to write the state office on what course their local services take at this time and a report will be carried in the next issue.

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PROGRESS OF THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSION SUIT

The appeal of the University of Alabama admissions case was argued in New Orleans before the Circuit Court of Appeals on Dec. 7th. The decision of the three judges is expected at any time. Barring a highly unlikely negative decree, Negro students are prepared to enroll in Tuscaloosa as well as in at least one of the outlying Extension Centers on Feb. 1st.

MOVE UNDERFOOT TO ABOLISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A reliable source has stated that for the past several weeks certain state legislators have been working quietly, building up support among colleagues for the Boutwell "Freedom of Choice" plan.

This plan which embodies as one of its features provision for the abolition of the public school system died on the House calendar at the end of the last regular session. In reviving the issue proponents hope to muster the support of a 2/3 majority of both Houses, which would enable them to introduce it in the special session of the Legislature opening on Jan. 3rd.

MONTGOMERY BUS PROTEST AT A GLANCE

On Thursday evening, Dec. 1st, Mrs. Rosa Parks, a Negro Montgomery seamstress, was arrested for violation of segregation laws when she refused to give her seat to a white person. Four days later, on Monday, approximately 50,000 Montgomerians protested, and the transit company suffered a loss of practically all of its 75% Negro patronage. Three weeks later the protest showed no signs of weakening.

For what is probably the largest Negro demonstration for civil rights in the history of the South, there is no simple explanation. However, with resort to question and answer form certain observations will be made without claim for comprehensiveness.

What caused the protest? Accumulated grievances against the bus company over a period of many years, with the arrest of Mrs. Parks serving as the precipitating emotional stimulus. To conclude that her arrest was the sole cause is a gross overstatement.

What accounts for the near unanimity? Doubtless each Negro in Montgomery has suffered personally from bus company practices, giving each an individual motivation.

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What do the Negroes ask? As adopted at the first mass meeting: (1) More courtesy from bus operators, (2) seating on a "first come, first serve" basis with "Negroes sitting from rear to front and whites from front to rear" without reserved sections for either, and (3) employment of Negro drivers on predominantly Negro lines as driver vacancies occur. The segregation law is not involved.

What is the bus company's answer to each? (1) No recent reports to the company of discourtesy, although they are welcome, (2) failure to reserve seats for whites or Negroes would not fulfill legal "separate but equal" requirements and, therefore, the company is "helpless" between the boycott and the law, and (3) the company will not hire Negro drivers within the next ten years or more.

What has been the role of the City Commission? It has appointed a "representative" citizens committee to make recommendations to it. This committee appointed on Dec. 17th was composed of eight Negroes and ten whites (reported in the press as 8 and 8). The protest group was permitted to select only six of the eight. They bitterly opposed the selection of one of the other two personalities. The white members include "a labor representative" (who turned out to be the president of the bus company local), a prominent minister (G. Stanley Frazier, famous as one of the founders of Methodism's pro-segregation faction) and Luther Ingalls (organizer of Montgomery's White Citizens Council).

What has been the role of the Alabama Council? When it became apparent during the first week of the protest that the bus company, the City Commission and the Negro leadership, each were hesitant to approach the other, Rev. Thomas R. Thrasher, of the Episcopal Church, Pres. H. C. Trenholm, of Alabama State, and Rev. Robert E. Hughes, A.C.H.R. Executive Director, offered the "good offices" of the Council to arrange negotiations. This resulted in the conferences subsequently held. One A.C.H.R. member, Lutheran Pastor Robert Graetz, has sent all ministers in the city weekly newsletters on factual developments. Other members are working indirectly.

What has been the result of the conference? Presentation of positions previously unclarified. Assurance of more courteous treatment by bus drivers. Release of frustration (the five instances of violence occurred during the first week before negotiations got under way).

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What is the prospect of further usefulness of the committee as presently constituted? Practically none. Participation by Negro leaders in this particular committee will probably end at any time.

How are Negroes getting to work? Negro taxis charge bus fare rates (10¢), some 200 car owners haul without charge from pick-up stations and cruise zones in early morning and late afternoon (one Negro service station donates gas), and white employers transport their maids.

What is the role of law enforcement agencies? Many instances of indirect and direct intimidation. Sudden and strict enforcement of minimum cab fares (45¢), closely "tailing" pick-up cars, etc. A college student was arrested for "pulling a Negro lady off of a bus." Actually, he was assisting her down from the curb as they were crossing the street, at which time a bus arrived on the corner. She was dressed in a housecoat and personally arranged for his defense. A sheriff's officer retained a minister at the jail for half an hour and when unable to prove he was operating a "taxi without a license" proceeded to preach a sermon on Biblical segregation.

Is the bus company suffering? Yes. It is losing an estimated \$3,200 per day. Ironically, all busses currently carry an advertising placard entitled "Ease that Squeeze". The Montgomery Citizens Council is running a daily newspaper ad asking whites to ride the busses to help the company out.

Is Montgomery suffering? Retail sales are 30-35% under season estimates, while merchants do not hide their concern.

Are the Negroes suffering? Yes. Many maids walk miles to work in the cold of early morning. Walking is not restricted to age, as 70 and 80 year oldsters have been known to walk to town from outlying residential areas. Characteristic of all is a clearly recognizable spirit of quiet determination. Hate is foreign to the whole protest.

How long will the Negroes continue? The answer was given at a recent mass meeting - "Until next summer or a year from now if necessary."

What are the attitudes of whites? Letters to the editor run 5 to 1 in favor of the Negro position on seating. Some think that white bus patronage has slackened somewhat. Whites have participated in the pick-up pool from time to time.

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What is the role of the press? You may answer this yourself by noting the differences between this account and those you have read in your local newspapers. The Advertiser is generally pro-bus company, but has not been bitter toward the Negro position editorially.

And finally, does the state law prohibit the Negro seating proposal? If so, the City of Mobile has been violating the law for 15 years. According to Mayor Joseph P. Langan, there have never been any complaints by whites or Negroes, that he is aware of, claiming unequal facilities because no section of seats was reserved for either race.

STATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEET

The second semi-annual meeting of the A.C.H.R. Board of Directors met in Montgomery on Dec. 7th with sixteen members plus five other representatives present. Several matters considered are being further developed and will be reported in our next issue. Two important items are announced here:

1. The adoption of an \$18,375 budget providing for a half-time associate director, funds for district work, consultants and reproduction of the Newsletter by multi-lithe. This will necessitate our raising \$5,375 ourselves. A full breakdown will be given next month.
2. The annual meeting was announced for Saturday, Feb. 11th at Alabama State College in Montgomery. A Committee has been working for the past six weeks on speakers and the program. The meeting is open to the membership and interested persons and will follow the theme "Mediating Community Tensions". The A.C.H.R. is a democratic organization and the membership will elect officers, Board members, etc. at this time.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

"The key to the situation we face is understanding - an attitude that not only inquiries into conditions by asking 'what', but goes on to seek causes by asking 'why'". - Alabama Council promotional folder.

What you can do during January

1. Send the State Office reports on compliance with the I.C.C. order by local train and bus stations in your locality after January 12th.
2. Send the State Office names of persons who would be sincerely interested in receiving the Newsletter free each month.
3. Jot down "Sat., Feb. ¹¹~~12~~th, Annual A.C.H.R. Meeting, Montgomery" on your calendar.