

STATEMENT
by the
MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMITTEE
to the
U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The 1963 Report of the *Mississippi State Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights* issued in January carries this statement in its section on FINDINGS:

"We also find that the Commission on Civil Rights itself continues to have an unfulfilled obligation in regard to Mississippi." Therefore, the Committee is gratified that the Commission has sent a special report to the President with recommendations for executive action designed to force the leaders of this great sovereign State of Mississippi to face up to their responsibilities to protect and assure the basic individual rights of all citizens of the State.

It is with deep regret that we acknowledge the necessity for such action. However, we find that the existing conditions under which our Negro citizens must live are in the main intolerable, with a continuing deprivation of rights and an ever present threat of police brutality and economic reprisal directed against any citizen who attempts to break the established patterns of segregation in the State at whatever level. Furthermore, any citizen who so much as encourages such activity is likewise subjected to harassment and threats. If individual rights are not assured by the State government, citizens have no choice but to turn to the Federal Government for protection.

Our Committee experience convinces us that, contrary to many a political slogan, the Federal Government is most reluctant to intervene, even where Constitutional rights are concerned. Generally, it will and does so only when a State government abdicates its responsibilities.

The government of our State consistently has been guilty of such abdication. It has brazenly espoused racist mythology as official policy, thus serving notice on some 42% of the population that they are inferior in the eyes of the State. It has encouraged the people of Mississippi to disregard laws and judicial decisions of the United States, and to place State loyalty above National loyalty. It has fostered a spirit of enmity towards our duly constituted National Government, based on false ideas of Federal-State relationships in our American system of government. Unless the Federal Government, too, is derelict in the fulfillment of its Constitutional duties, it cannot forever ignore such gross irresponsibility, not to say subversion, on the part of a State government.

Mississippi should regard the Commission's special report as a warning signal. If we react constructively there may still be time to forestall the recommended Federal action, although the hour is very late. First of all, we need to re-think some of our basic ideas in regard to race and to Federal-State relationships.

Do we really believe that our State's Negro citizens are happy under a government that officially endorses racial theories relegating them and their children to perpetual inferiority?

Do we really believe that all of our trouble is caused by "outside agitators?" If so, how do we explain the fact that these outsiders continue to be so warmly welcomed by Negro Mississippians and develop such large followings here?

Do we really believe that the burdens of membership in the Federal Union outweigh the benefits?

Is Mississippi even conceivable as a political and economic entity outside of the Federal Union in this day and age?

We believe that the obvious answer to the four principal questions is no.

If our State leadership continues to act as if these questions can be answered with a resounding "yes," the Federal Government will be forced to answer this senseless challenge to its duly constituted authority with measures such as those recommended by the Civil Rights Commission. If, on the other hand, we can return to common sense, such highly undesirable consequences may still be avoided.

Finally, standing above all other considerations is the moral issue. President Kennedy spoke well when he said in his recent special message on Civil Rights to Congress: "Therefore, let it be clear, in our own hearts and minds, that it is not merely because of the cold war, and not merely because of the economic waste of discrimination that we are committed to achieve true equality of opportunity. The basic reason is because it is right."

Mrs. Wallis I. Schutt, Chairman,
Mississippi State Advisory Committee

April 17, 1963
Jackson, Mississippi

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