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Berea Bars Civil-Rights Training

Berea College has canceled plans to furnish space for a summer program to train young civil-rights workers going to Mississippi.

The program, developed by the National Council of Churches Commission on Religion and Race will be held instead at Western College for Women at Oxford, Ohio a United Presbyterian school,

Dr. Francis Hutchins, president of Berea, said he made the decision to cancel Berea's participation. He did so, he said, "because we didn't think it was wise to proceed."

Dr. Hutchins said there was no critical reaction in the Berea region after the program was reported in the press, but he also said: "I heard from other parts of the country."

Berea's decision not to participate was made on the night of April 23, but neither the National Council of Churches nor the college made any official announcement of the change in plans.

The object of the program, basically, is to encourage Negro voter registration.

The National Council of Churches' Commission on Religion and Race is working on it with the Council of Federated Organizations, which coordinates major civil-rights groups in Mississippi.

The program's major role is to orient and screen the young civil-rights workers before they head for the potentially hot Mississippi situation. The Council of Federated Organizations also insists on the orientation.

The young people will work in various parts of Mississippi, teaching remedial reading, teaching how to canvass for voters, and aiding in voter registration. They will also teach other courses, from civics to handicraft.

The Council of Churches will provide the experts to orient and screen the young people. In Mississippi, the students will be working under the Council of Federated Organizations.

The Council of Churches agency is doing a second job for the program--recruiting older persons, particularly ministers and lawyers. They will work as counselors, and if necessary as legal advisers if students workers get involved in demonstrations and jail sentences.

A Commission on Religion and Race spokesman said he didn't think there had been any misunderstanding with Dr. Hutchins about what the national council's program would be. The Council was to furnish the experts to do the training.

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"I think the correspondence (between the commission and President Hutchins) indicated the exact nature of the program and the possible repercussions to Berea, and that these things were spelled out before any agreement was entered into," he said.

The Rev. Arthur Thomas, associate director of community action for the Council of Churches' commission, said, "Naturally, Berea's decision distressed us greatly. We felt it was not in keeping with the traditions of Berea."

Asked if he felt calling off participation was in line with Berea's liberal traditions, Dr. Hutchins said, "This doesn't disturb me. The college is still integrated, and we are still carrying forward our own program in our own way."

Rev. Thomas said that after word got around that Berea had canceled its agreement, several other colleges offered their campuses, and "the one at Oxford seemed most advantageous."