

Miss. file

A MINISTER COUNSELOR IN JACKSON

When a Mississippian said to the Rev. Lee E. Ball, "If you outside Northern agitators stayed home, we'd solve our racial problems," he would quietly reply, "I was born in Florida."

Now executive secretary of the Methodist Federation for Social Action with his office in Ardsley, New York, the Rev. Mr. Ball was one of scores of clergymen to respond to the call of the National Council of Churches for "minister counselors" to assist as volunteers in its summer program in Mississippi.

Arriving in Jackson, he found himself one of a group of twenty-two clergymen that included Episcopalians from Massachusetts and California, and a number of United Church of Christ pastors from Iowa. They were given a thorough briefing by field workers, lawyers and doctors as to what they could encounter. The preparation was more than precautionary, for one of their number, the Rev. Edward K. Heiningen, aged 45, pastor of the United Church in Des Moines, was savagely beaten in the office of a local doctor where he had gone for medical assistance.

The purpose of this ministerial participation was to show to Mississippians that the national church bodies in the United States are concerned about the Freedom Struggle, to indicate to Negroes on the firing line that they are not alone, and to encourage the members of white churches to transform their congregations from dissident groups into loyal member-bodies carrying out the "open door" policies of the national parent denominations to which they belong.

The clergymen in the Rev. Mr. Ball's group were assigned as "minister counselors" either to chapters of the N.A.A.C.P. or to the Freedom Schools established by COFO—the Council of Federated Organizations. The immediate project of COFO is the obtaining of 100,000 Negro signatures

in support of the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party which is challenging the right of a "lily-white" delegation to represent Mississippi at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City.

The N.A.A.C.P. cooperates with COFO in its projects but is making its own main concern the local voter registration drive. The Rev. Mr. Ball found himself assigned to the Jackson office of the N.A.A.C.P. where he found ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Charles Evers as the executive secretary with a small staff of clerical workers and a score or more of active high school students engaged in a daily door-to-door campaign to encourage Jackson Negroes to register at the County Court House. The response to the campaign has been warm but the Negroes need careful coaching in order to pass successfully the questions put to them by the registrar, as well as infinite patience along with the willingness to return again and again to the Court House, as the local policy is to pass only a small quota of registrants each day.

The Rev. Mr. Ball was asked to interview prominent citizens in the Jackson Community: ministers, lawyers, publishers, realtors, business men—especially with regard to their attitude towards the new Civil Rights Act. Nearly all were outwardly courteous and a number insisted that Mississippians were basically law-abiding; that, whereas previously they had observed the state's segregation statutes, now that these were supplanted by federal law, however un congenial they might find it, this they would obey.

On the positive and hopeful side were such developments as a resolution of the Mississippi Bar Association placing the resources of the Bar at the disposal of every citizen of the State in any court, state or federal; a recommendation by the Jackson Chamber of Commerce recommending conformity with the public accommodation section of the Civil Rights Act; and the development of a Committee of Women to assist in the integration this fall of the first grade in the public schools, as ordered by Federal Judge Wise. Some 200 Negro children have been readied by the N.A.A.C.P.

to enroll in the various white schools to give substance to the court order.

Others whom the Rev. Mr. Ball interviewed showed an intransigence that indicated all too clearly the intensity of the struggle that lies ahead in Jackson before the segregation front is really breached. The owner of two newspapers attacked the THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE HERALD TRIBUNE, THE WASHINGTON POST and other national dailies, for printing "fiction" and "fantasy" about Mississippi; he denied that there was either violence or terror in the state; and when the Rev. Mr. Ball asked him about the ten or more Negro churches burned within the past fortnight, he replied cynically, "They were burned by the Negroes themselves for the sake of publicity."

A high Methodist Church official charged that the civil rights workers had come to Mississippi as a "stunt," ~~and~~ declared that the disappearance of three workers in Philadelphia was a ruse to bring in federal troops, and stated that resentment among Methodists was so great that this year the Methodist Conference would undoubtedly refuse to make good on a \$100,000 pledge to the World Service Fund of the denomination, so as to prevent any payment going to the National Council of Churches.

On the other hand, an official in the Chancery of the Roman Catholic diocese told of a Methodist layman who did not feel free to speak to his own pastor yet felt compelled to come to the Chancery to discuss with some one his intense sense of involvement and guilt. What finally prompted this unprecedented act was his coming upon the smoldering ruins of a Negro church, where the church bell lay in the smoking ashes; the sight made him sick, and drove home the ineradicable impression of the terrible end to which race prejudice was leading. This Roman Catholic official expressed optimism that an increasing number of white Mississippians, especially in

the Jackson area, believed in reason, wanted a fairer image of Mississippi in the eyes of the rest of the nation and the world, and realized that a more hopeful economic outlook was dependent upon the peaceful resolution of the racial tension.

For some time the Jackson N.A.A.C.P. has been conducting a "selective buying" campaign which has resulted in the closing of many stores on Capitol Street. At the end of July the N.A.A.C.P. made a test of eating places and has filed 8 suits for \$100,000 each against seven such establishments and one large department store. A "stay off Capitol Street" campaign is under way. It is this pressure that underlies the call of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Jackson for compliance with the public accommodations section of the Civil Rights Act but all such recommendations have drawn fierce opposition from the White Citizens Councils.

In the Federal Building in Jackson on July 29, the Rev. Mr. Ball attended a hearing of the Mississippi Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights, when a white COFO worker from Iowa, Stephen Smith, related the grim experience of being pistol-whipped by a profane and scurrilous deputy sheriff. Negro men and women from Leake County, Canton and Jackson related heart-breaking experiences of economic reprisal when they tried to register to vote, and when they provided hospitality to COFO volunteer workers. A young Episcopalian minister, who had worked in a small town, told how the Negro lady, in whose home he had stayed, had said anxiously, "We don't know what will happen to us after you all go home." Many testified that they had heard threats of bloodshed in the fall.

"It is impressive," commented Mr. Ball, "how undaunted these Negro men and women appear to be in face of such harassment. Among the white people there are the apathetic, the stupid and the mean, but there are also the objective and the truly concerned. It is difficult to say whether these latter comprise a majority—today in Mississippi even the

label 'moderate' has become a dirty word. Yet one somehow feels there are enough in this middle position to achieve peaceful integration of the schools and churches, and to bring an end to the violence and terror."

A white lawyer in Jackson told Mr. Ball, "You keep coming here from New York and Chicago and California, because we need you." He expressed the conviction that the presence of nearly 900 students and 200 doctors, lawyers and ministers from all parts of the country was making an ineradicable difference. It has subjected Mississippi to an intense national scrutiny. It has indicated to the Negro people that many white people not only care but care enough to run great personal risks, and not a few are quick to express their appreciation.

Henry Bird, sheriff of Shaw, Mississippi, said to one of the ministers, "I'd let 'em kill you, except I don't want the F.B.I. swarming all over town."

"It's going to be nip and tuck this fall," concluded the Rev. Mr. Ball, "but I am glad I was part of this summer project, and I am convinced if it can be extended into an all-year-round campaign, it will ultimately succeed in changing the face of the whole state."