Debate Over Silver Not Dead in State

Editorial comment has been made throughout the United States on the controversy of the charges made by Dr. Jim Silver, history professor at Ole Miss.

In Mississippi as a rule the question has not been asked, "Is Dr. Silver right or is he wrong?" On the contrary most Mississippians, particularly our political leaders, have responded to the charges with quips.

Statements such as the following have been made, "Old Silver should have been fired long ago."

If Dr. Silver is wrong in saying that Mississippi is a "closed society" and that academic freedom is not permitted at our state university then those who comment publicly on the controversy should say that he is wrong and why.

There is nothing wrong with controversy. Controversy indicates challenge. Challenge is essential to a vibrant society. It follows that such a challenge as has been made by Dr. Silver should be met with debate. And debate can be carried out to its fullest measure without becoming involved in emotionalism.

There is no question that Dr. Silver has challenged the status quo of political thinking in Mississippi. The fact that editorial comment on his challenge has reached millions of readers across the United States is proof that his challenge has been effective.

But this challenge has not been met in Mississippi. To ignore it is not a victorious means of meeting it. Meeting it with witty or sarcastic comments can serve to substantiate his charges. And in the end it will likely blossom out into the full vigor of forced debate.

When anyone attempts to dismiss Dr. Silver's charges of a "closed society" by saying he is an ingrate because Mississippi has provided him with a job as teacher for the past 28 years, the contention falls by its own weight. Any capable college professor who has served on a university campus at the rate of pay offered in Mississippi is not indebted to us. Mississippi is indebted to every capable professor who has remained in Mississippi despite attractive offers from other states.

If Mississippians are not conformists as Dr. Silver charges—and if this conformity is not imposed as he says—then he should be proved to be without the bounds of truth. But so long as he is answered with quips the truth is either ignored, side-stepped or twisted.

We should keep in mind that academic debate is healthful to a mature society. It should not be resented.

We believe that much of what Dr. Silver has charged is true. And the subject is by no means dead. It is likely that much will be said on this subject in the months ahead. And the answer to be sought should be. Is Dr. Silver right or wrong? It should be interesting to learn what unfolds when the debate gets under way in earnest.

Shortly after the turn of the century William Jennings Bryan delivered his famous speech before a national Democratic convention in which he said eloquently that man must not be crucified on a cross of gold. He was speaking in behalf of the silver standard. History is repeating itself. Once again in Mississippi we are debating the Silver standard.