Citadel of the Citizens Council

While other Southern states move toward at least token desegregation, in Mississippi the diehard white-supremacists are firmly in control.

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T HE roll-call of Southern communities which have begun at least token public-school integration in response to Federal court orders was significantly lengthened this fall with the peaceful desegregation of schools in Dallas, Memphis and Bil- l crumbling in the Deep South was shattered for the last time. For the first time in Mississippi history the centers of resistance involved were not impressive, the psychological effect on the rest of the Black Belt South was immense.

But one state, which shares with Arkansas and South Carolina the distinction of maintaining total segregation at all levels in the public schools, which show no signs of yielding to a process of terminal restaurants, and although invoked in every city to preserve segregation in the local waiting rooms will eventually be eliminated by a court order, no one seriously believes the commission will eliminate it altogether in the near future.

There are many other examples of the Council's influence in the state government. Perhaps most significant is the fact that William Simmons, editor of the Council's newspaper and admnistrator of the state Council association, has become a constant companion of Governor Barnett, traveling with him when he makes out-of-state talks (many of which Simmons repeatedly writes and sitting in as an "observer" at most meetings of the Sovereignty Commission).

During the last regular session of the legislature in 1959, that body acted as little more than a rubber-stamping body which had Council endorsement. One gave local Negroes a chance to recite from their church parables, taking church property to them, if they found themselves in conflict with the national denominations' doctrines. It was passed despite claims that it violated the constitutional separation of church and state. And that Governor Barnett's major appointments were of men who were on the Council's payroll.

Individual Councils vary from town to town, but the general pattern is much the same. One may screen new members, more rigorously than another; some are relatively inactive. Most hold annual membership drives during which they make heavy use of newspaper advertising. One Council advertised that prospective member need merely "walk into the back." In another town, a membership application could be filled out at the local hotel.

In countless restaurants across the state, Citizens Council literature can be picked up with the toothpicks at the checker's counter.

The local organization's president is invariably a prominent citizen, and the board of directors is drawn largely from the community's "Who's Who." When meetings are held, which isn't often, the same rough form of Rob- ert's Rules of Order followed in most civic clubs is observed. The chairman begins by calling the meeting to order—most often a Baptist—for a prayer. Committees report, if any, are heard, and the main busi- ness of the evening follows.

As often as not, the meeting will be open to the public, and will feature a main speaker and several lesser lights. The featured attraction of the evening is the consideration of "negative" resolution of the Sovereignty Commission. It is usually a Baptist minis- ter—most often a Baptist—seeing a prayer. Community members are held to a call for a united effort. The process of the Council's publicity department is to show the difficulties of collecting dues to the formulation of a plan to deal with a local white or Negro "troublemaker." One or two hecklers will jump up and let loose with impassioned speeches calling for radical and immediate action—usually a midnight call on the offender. The conservatives then will make themselves heard, calm down the fire- brands and propose the same old resolutions, ad infinitum.

Perhaps the most pervasive of all and invariably grist to the mill of the Citizens Council's public relations programs is the formalized in August, 1959. Since that date, membership in the Homestead Citizens Council has come to be akin to membership in the Rotary or Lions Club. Membership figures meeting furtively in back of the pool hall but from the country clubs, or despicable its role in the community's control of the state, its tax-dues-paying members any deviation from the status quo. Blind adherenee to the court's control. It is the unending re- frain of the citizens Council's literature can be picked up at the docks at the noontime of the Council's daily newspapers, but with the all-out support of the Council—won a landslide victory in the Democratic primary race for Governor.

Since then, the Council has all but completed the construction of a political formula whose power is publicly unchallenged by any major state organization. One of its dramatic accomplishments was the narrowly victory of Mr. Barnett over Mr. Nixon in November, by a state of Presidential "free electors" who eventually cast the state's eight Electoral College votes for Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia.

NEGRO STUDENTS AND NAZI GERMANS ON FREEDOM RIDES THROUGH MISSISSIPPI

"Mississippi shows no signs of yielding to a process most white Southerners have grudgingly begun to accept as inevitable." 

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