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The presence of "outside" ministers accompanying Black students to the closed doors of white churches in Jackson was not the only activity of "outside ministers" in Mississippi in the winter of 1964. As early as the summer of 1963 a group of ministers from several denominations had come to Clarksdale at the request of Aaron Henry to participate in demonstrations there (which were cancelled under pressure of a court injunction.) To open the new year of 1964 SNCC and COFO scheduled a major campaign of voter registration and demonstrations in Hattiesburg. The first day was announced as ~~Freedom Day~~ "Forest County Freedom Day." The goal was to have several hundred local Black people march together from a church to the courthouse to attempt to take the registration test and to protest the continuing discrimination of Theron Lynd, the resitrar. Although such marches and demonstrations were legal (and were necessary for the courage and morale of the local citizens) they Mississippi police, in the past, had always arrested all involved. This time SNCC asked for northern ministers to join the demonstration, hoping either that there would be no arrests--or that the publicity (because of the

presence of the white ministers) might prod the federal government into significant action against the voter registrar. Most of the ministers who came to Hattiesburg (almost 50) ~~had~~ were from the United Presbyterian Church.U.S. (the northern branch of another denomination that had divided during the slavery tensions and never reunited). Just as the Methodist ministers did in Jackson, these men visited white Presbyterian ministers and men of other denominations in Hattiesburg to explain their own purpose in coming South and to try to get a picture from the other side. The southern ministers always told the northern ministers that they should go home, that their participation would only destroy good race relations, etc. and etc.

The morning before the demonstration we gathered in a local Black church. There Bob Moses, Lawrence Guyot, Aaron Henry and other Black leaders spoke, welcoming them to the struggle, the Movement, and Mississippi. Then I spoke and said I understood what had been told them by the local white ministers but, as one white minister and native Mississippian, I wanted to add my welcomes. We laughed at that. Then we prayed and sang; then we marched. There were no mass arrests.

This use of northern ministers was so successful that the Movement decided to continue it. There were more "Freedom Days" in places like Canton. Sometimes the visiting ministers just lined up (usually wearing very visible clerical collars; sometimes carrying signs) where they could see (and be seen) how the white police treated Blacks standing in a voter registration line at a Courthouse. Each week a new group of ministers came to Hattiesburg which had developed the "ministers' project." A small store front in the Black neighborhood was converted into a clerical "freedom house" which was the base for the men who came to assist the local COFO Movement. W/ Two Presbyterian ministers, Bob Beech in Hattiesburg and Rims Barber in Canton, who first came to Mississippi with these voter registration projects stayed on in the state to work on the staff of the Delta Ministry when it was finally established and functioning in the fall of 1964.

Local white ministers, especially Presbyterians, did not approve at all. Although the Mississippi Presbyterians belonged to a separate denomination, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., they were still embarrassed by their northern brethren.

One Presbyterian minister of Forest County complained ~~that~~ that "... segregation is the only ^{sin} ~~sin~~ against which some of my brother clergymen are preaching or practicing."²⁶ (I thought this was significant progress since very few Mississippi ministers would dare say that segregation was a sin.) A group of Presbyterian ministers and laymen, including the editor of the ~~local~~ ^{local} newspaper, the "Hattiesburg American," made a special trip ^{to} Illinois to visit the communities from which a group of Northern Presbyterians had come. ~~The~~ The delegation tried to explain the Mississippi side of both race relations and the proper function of the Church. The Mississippians found some support from Illinois ^{some} laymen but not the ministers. This kind of effort--a trip to the north to tell the truth about the Mississippi way of life--was a popular venture at the time. Governor Ross Barnett loved to do this while in office and continued the practice upon retiring. ~~The~~ Civic clubs like the Junior Chamber of Commerce sent out literature and speakers defending Mississippi. The Citizens' Councils had done this for years (often with expenses paid out of state funds) and worked with the State Sovereignty Commission in spreading the word about Mississippi. The Sovereignty Commission also sent out its own

speakers, literature, especially written editorials for small weeklies to publish, ~~an~~ films, and special radio and television material. Almost all such ventures into the rest of America were reported by the Mississippi press as immense successes, creating the impression that only a tiny minority of Americans had any criticism of segregation or any aspect of Mississippi. But the trip by the Hattiesburg Presbyterian delegation was reported as a discouraging adventure. The editor wrote of his disappointment and the Jackson press reprinted the statement with the headline: "Report From Illinois Gives But Little Hope

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For Understanding."27 Below I will quote from the words of

Hattiesburg editor (and churchman) Leonard Lowrey:

We were encouraged by the warm and attentive reception we received from the large crowd which attended the Sunday afternoon meeting in Charleston, Ill, to hear "the Hattiesburg story" of voter registration demonstrations, told both by a minister from that area who had participated and by our group.

Conversations after the meeting indicated that there were many persons ~~per~~ present, particularly among lay members of United Presbyterian Churches in that area, who agreed wholeheartedly, or at least in large measure, with the statement written by our ministers as to the proper mission of the church as an organization.

On the other hand it was pretty obvious that among most ministers of the United Presbyterian Church the "social gospel" has top priority and it appears that little is being said in sermons or done in other activities to present Christ crucified as the only means of salvation for a sin-wracked world.

(That last statement was the expression of the newspaper editor; not one of the ministers. But in Mississippi no one would have found anything unusual in an editor or any other person speaking this way.)

§ The United Presbyterian is not the only Church to have changed its emphasis, we feel sure. It is reported that virtually all agencies of the National Council of Churches have turned their major attention to civil rights this ~~year~~ year, shifting most of their concern from fields in which they normally would be active.

Then the editor commented on the difficulty of explaining the Mississippi plan ~~of~~^{of} voting to other Americans and his honest shock at the attitude he discovered.

Especially disturbing was a statement made in private conversation after the Sunday afternoon meeting ~~in Decatur, Ill.~~ by a Decatur, Ill., minister who seems to be the No. 1 pusher of civil rights activities

in that area. He said in his opinion every citizen of the United States should have the right to vote.

In Mississippi in the winter of 1964 such an idea still seemed so horrible and so unlikely to ever happen that an editor could report the thought as an amazing thing that would shock the Mississippi readers--as it shocked him personally.

He would do away with all qualifications which the U.S. Constitution allows states to set up to try to see that the privilege of voting is properly and intelligently used. It should be obvious to everyone that in a pure democracy with majority rule and no voter qualifications, the uneducated masses would be manipulated by political bosses to gain control of the government and our Constitutionally federated republic as we know it soon would disappear.

Our hope is that lay leaders and members of churches in other parts of the country will awake and stem the surge being led by ministers toward civil disobedience, collectivism and rule of the masses without regard to their legal qualifications to cast an intelligent ballot.²⁸