

Sit-Downs Becoming National

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BY W. A. HILDEBRAND

WASHINGTON, April 23—The Negro sit-down movement continues to move, having, in point of fact, become all but national in its sweep. For example Walter Reuther, vice president of the AFL-CIO has been pictured as signing an agreement to join in boycotting the Woolworth stores.

The movement has been accentuated here and there by manifestations of lawlessness, dynamiting, fist fighting, heads bashed in with ax-handles and ball-bats, endless talk about jails, while Irate Montgomery has brought suit for damages against the New York Times for printing an advertisement for Negro ministers designed to raise funds for the defense of integration leaders.

In the midst of the turmoil some law violations, mild in form, of course, have commanded ecclesiastical support. The bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Alabama has asked the National Council of his church to repudiate a recent document expressing sympathy for the Negro sit-down movement. To no avail. Northern high church officials recall that Christian doctrine sanctions, under certain circumstances, civil disobedience.

Moral Cause

By this the churchmen mean when there is involved a supreme moral cause, each as is currently exemplified in the lunch-counter conflict, without reference to the quality of the food.

The churchmen, up North, go a long bow-shot beyond an expression of sympathy for sit-down activities. With the Alabama bishop in mind they refer, deprecatingly to the "chaplains of a dying order of the Confederacy," and quite obviously they harbor the hope that the Negro boys will very soon find themselves, with their Northern allies, in position to give to the alleged dying order the coup de grace.

This reference to a dying order in the South is meant what is left of segregation, and in this connection revelations are coming fast. Ultimate objectives are being laid on the line, are brought into the open.

Token desegregation in the public schools, under the aegis of the Federal Courts, was but a first tentative step. If store and restaurant owners can be driven to unconditional surrender by economic pressure—perhaps in the end with the aid of the same federal courts—the outcome will prove just a preview of the unfolding drama.

Integration forces are now being deployed for what they hope will soon be revealed as a decisive battle against the remaining barriers, segregation in some walks of Southern life that is still being observed.

In the meanwhile those actively engaged in the sit-down enterprise do not always find a place to sit, and they sometimes experience frustration. There are times when they would much prefer a term in jail rather than pay a fine imposed on trespass charges, since this would enable them to assume at once the coveted martyr role.

Yearn For Jail

They yearn for jail as the hare harried by the hounds panteth for a cooling brook, but the police sometimes decline to cooperate. Apparently in some cases the police operate under instructions to look the other way no matter how much damage bands of Negroes may do to law-abiding, tax-paying white merchants.

What the fates have in store for the South becomes increasingly clear, if the growing, geographically expanding integration forces can manage to bring it to fruition. Should this come to pass it would no longer be the South, in the social sense familiar to all prior to 1954.

This once familiar South would be transformed into a sort of lost province moving and having its being under federal supervision, a supervision that would include both the schools and election machinery.

At this juncture details of the sit-down strategy are being directed by the Congress of Racial Equality, a New York outfit.