

All Alone With His Courage

A Dixie Mayor and Rights

By Walter Rugaber
Special to the Herald Tribune

ATLANTA.

For days the word went out from the big business men and civic leaders, the political pros and public opinion molders, the people in Atlanta who usually count the most.

"You're making a big mistake."

The message was plain, blunt and nearly unanimous. Ivan Allen jr., the 52-year-old merchant-turned-Mayor, listened very carefully.

Then, all alone with his courage, he flew off to Washington and went before the Senate Commerce Committee to read a carefully drafted 14-page statement

"Gentlemen," the Mayor said firmly, "If I had your problem, armed with the local experience I have had, I would pass a public accommodations law."

Mr. Allen thus became the first—and just possibly the only—Southern politician to win public approval of the racial portion of

father's multi-million dollar office supply firm he became president of both the city and state chambers of commerce.

But now the board room boys are a little on edge. None of that "Mau Mau" stuff, of course. While the Mayor's political life may be damaged, his personal stature is adjudged secure.

"It took a lot of courage to do what he did," one acquaintance said with a touch of awe, "and if that's his personal view—hell, I respect him for it."

Sure, the friend continued, segregation is wrong. But a Federal law against is something else. This was the crux of the worry: Mr. Allen had "deserted private enterprise."

The prominent owner of several cafeterias in town sent the Mayor a long, stinging telegram expressing shock and disappointment, then placed blown-up copies in his windows.

But in perfect illustration of the temper of things, the man's eating places were being picketed at the same time by whites whose signs branded him "leader for

Kennedy and was angling for a Federal job.

Mr. Allen denied it stoutly, insisting that he talked with no one in Washington except the committee official who invited him to appear.

He later received a short letter from the President which praised "a number of effective points" in the statement. Mayor Allen seemed genuinely surprised by it.

About his testimony he says simply that the nation's Mayors have been stuck out on a limb and left there to handle the whole racial crisis by themselves.

The Supreme Court has been striking down segregation laws for years, he points out, and yet no really solid legislation has taken their place.



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