

Need Accommodations Law To Hold Gains, Mayor Says

As perceptive men of wide experience I feel confident that you will agree with me that this is as serious a basic problem in the North, East and West as it is in the South. It must be defined as an all-American problem, which requires an all-American solution based on local thought, local action and local cooperation. The 500,000 people who live within our city limits consist of 300,000 white citizens and slightly more than 200,000 Negro citizens. That makes the population of Atlanta 60 per cent white, 40 per cent Negro. That 60-40 percentage emphasizes how essential it is for the people of Atlanta, on their local level, to solve the problem of racial discrimination in order to make Atlanta a better place in which to live.

As the mayor of the Southeast's largest city, I can say to you out of first-hand experience and first-hand knowledge that nowhere does the problem of eliminating discrimination between the races strike so closely home as it does to the public official. He is the man who cannot pass the buck.

From this viewpoint, I speak of the problem as having been brought into sharp focus by decisions of the Supreme Court of

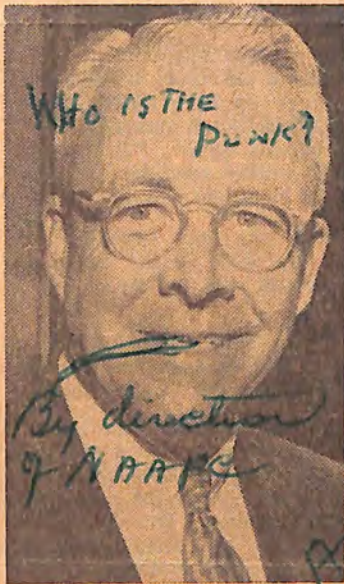
(This is a portion of the text of the statement made to the Senate Commerce Committee last Friday by Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. of Atlanta.)

the United States and then generally ignored by the presidents and congresses of the United States. Like a founding baby, this awesome problem has been left on the doorsteps of local governments throughout the nation.

It is true that Atlanta has achieved success in eliminating discrimination in areas where some other cities have failed, but we do not boast of our success. Instead of boasting, we say with the humility of those who believe in reality that we have achieved our measure of success only because we looked facts in the face and accepted the Supreme Court's decisions as inevitable and as the law of our land. Having embraced realism in general, we then set out to solve specific problems by local cooperation between people of good will and good sense representing both races.

Given Rights

Atlanta's steps have been taken in some instances in compliance with court decisions, and in other instances the steps have been voluntary prior to any court action. In each instance the action has resulted in white citizens relinquishing special privileges which they had enjoyed under the practices of racial discrimination. Each action also has resulted in the Negro citizen being given rights



Mayor Allen

that responsibility of the press (and by this I mean radio and television as well as the written press) is inseparable from freedom of the press.

We are fortunate that we have one of the world's famous editorial spokesmen for reason and moderation on one of our white newspapers, along with other editors and many reporters who stress significance rather than sensation in the reporting and interpretation of what happens in our city.

As I see it, our Negro leadership in Atlanta is responsible and constructive. I am sure that our Negro leadership is as desirous of obtaining additional civic and economic and personal rights as is any American citizen. But by constructive I mean to define Atlanta's Negro leadership as being realistic—as recognizing that it is more important to obtain the rights they seek than it is to stir up demonstrations.

So it is to the constructive means by which these rights can be obtained that our Negro leaders constantly address themselves. They are interested in results instead of rhetoric. They reach for lasting goals instead of grabbing for momen-

Constitution of the United States. Under this Constitution we have always been able to do what is best for all of the people of this country. I beg of you not to let this issue of discrimination drown in legalistic waters. I am firmly convinced that the Supreme Court insists that the same fundamental rights must be held by every American citizen.

Atlanta is a case that proves that the problem of discrimination can be solved to some extent, and I use this "some extent" cautiously, . . . as we certainly have not solved all of the problems; but we have met them in a number of areas. This can be done locally, voluntarily, and by private business itself!

On the other hand, there are hundreds of communities and cities, certainly throughout the nation that have not ever addressed themselves to the issue. Whereas, others have flagrantly ignored the demand, and today, stand in all defiance to any change.

The Congress of the United States is now confronted with a grave decision. Shall you pass a public accommodation bill that forces this issue? Or, shall you create another round of disputes over segregation by refusing to pass such legislation?

Might Slip

Surely, the Congress realizes that after having failed to take any definite action on this subject in the last ten years, to fail to pass the bill would amount to an endorsement of private business setting up an entirely new status of discrimination throughout the nation. Cities like Atlanta might slip backwards. Hotels and restaurants that have already taken this issue upon themselves and opened their doors might find it convenient to go back to the old status. Failure by Congress to take definite action at this time is by inference an endorsement of the right of private business to practice racial discrimination and, in my opinion, would start the same old round of squabbles and demonstrations that we have had in the past.