

If The Schools Close

By Ray Jenkins
City Editor, The Alabama Journal

A GOOD MANY people seem to be under the delusion that one afternoon in the not-too-distant future Montgomery public schools will close under federal court orders to integrate and a system of private schools will open the following morning with hardly a ripple in the continuity of education.

These people would do well to brush up on their seventh grade arithmetic and take another look, because it's not going to be quite that simple. The very fact that no one from the governor down has thought about what to do on the morning after Judge Johnson's order is indicative of the head-in-sand attitude which the general public has taken on the school matter.

No reasonable person will deny the desegregation ruling is coming, be it in 1960 or 1980. But many people seem to be under the impression that we will simply cease to pay school taxes and begin to pay private school tuition and that will be that. One fellow I know even believes that he'll save money in the long run because he won't have to pay taxes to support Negro schools. My friend is in for a big surprise.

To begin with, when the schools close we will be immediately dispossessed and evicted from a school plant in Montgomery County worth \$13,818,767.46. Do not think for one moment that the federal government will permit us to use existing buildings on a "private" basis. The Virginia precedent has already settled that matter.

But the bonded indebtedness upon much of that plant here and even more of it statewide must still be paid on schedule. If we should default on school bonds and let the bond holders foreclose, we will never be able to sell another road, sewer, water work, or other type of bond.

Churches To The Rescue

SO WHILE we pay off the mortgage on school buildings we can't use, we decide that we will convert the churches into classrooms; the first hurdle is cleared. But we must equip our churches with desks, blackboards, laboratories, maps, and other instructional aids. The present evaluation of such equipment in Montgomery schools is \$1,118,553.02. This means that before we even open our private schools there must be an outlay of \$35.50 per student for furniture and instructional equipment.

Now let's consider operational revenue. Last year it cost \$883,809.49 to educate 31,492 Montgomery County children—roughly \$187 per child. Obviously only the wealthiest private property owners paid anywhere close to this amount in school taxes. To prove the point we need only to look at the source of school revenues.

The bulk of Montgomery's school revenues—\$3,816,774.46—come from the State Department of Education. Sales tax, income tax, and tobacco tax being the principal state source of school revenue, it is safe to assume that at least 30 per cent of this amount was paid by persons who do not have children in schools. Their support of course would be lost to private schools. Probably 60 per cent of the state income tax is paid by corporations and this also would be lost to the schools.

Also lost, without question, would be the \$486,093.65 which the federal government contributed to Montgomery public education last year, with the possible exception of aid under the school lunch program which is available to any school, private or public, which has an approved lunchroom operation.

No Help From The Corporations

THIS brings us to county participation. Last year a seven-mill county school tax produced \$1,096,519.08 for school purposes. Slightly less than half of this was paid by corporations

Gov. Patterson Must Deliver

The Greenville Watchman

ALABAMA is much concerned over the division in the ranks of segregation leaders which appeared recently with charges that such men as John Temple Graves and Tom Waring stood "for token integration." No such a thing. We have heard Tom Waring say that he is against violence and, in any event of token integration, do not despair; we may lose a skirmish, but not necessarily the campaign. Mr. Graves indicates in his writings that he feels the same way about it.

Gov. Patterson promises that not a single Negro child will be admitted to the white schools of Alabama. It is a fine stand which most of us applaud—but at the same time, we implicitly accept that Alabama will be able to continue its educational program on a public scale.

What will Gov. Patterson do if and when, after making promises even stronger than those made by the governor of Virginia, he is confronted with the same set of circumstances? Will he be forced to accept token integration, as Virginia has done, or will he pull down the shades of public education, close the doors and toss away the keys?

The Montgomery Advertiser is deeply concerned by all this. It wonders what happens after the schools are closed. We join The Advertiser in its worry, but we do not share with The Advertiser the idea that Gov. Patterson can get by with merely closing the schools, while he sits safely back and calls it a promise fulfilled. In Alabama today, there is a growing opposition to the closing of our public schools, we are already far enough back, without losing any more ground—and this opposition has largely been heartened by the Patterson promises. We have seen the political promises of Virginia turn to ashes, with Southern followers turning on Southern leaders with a bitterness usually re-

served for Yankees. But Patterson led us to expect something else. He may not have said precisely as much, but he has built up in the mind whether or not with forethought the idea that Alabama can turn back to integrationists, and still have the schools.

THE closing of public schools has become more unthinkable by the day, and it has been largely due to Patterson's position. The public has been led to believe that Gov. Patterson's position is not merely one of obdurate opposition; it has been led to believe, whether or not clearly stated, that we can have our schools and our segregation, too, and that the person who is willing to accept token integration, even without endorsing it, is a traitor to the cause.

He has championed his position strongly, hinting at interminable legalistic devices, and we have reached the conclusion that he has a large bag of tricks which will spare us indefinitely from integration. His promises in this field are vastly more important than the unkept ones about plugging the financial leaks without further taxation. He has told us that he can deliver; he has put himself in the forefront of uncompromising segregationists; he has asked us to put our trust in him, and this we have done. He had led us to believe even of the barest token variety, and that he can save us from integration; we have presumed that this meant, without any real harm to our schools—and these things we expect him to do.

We will not be satisfied with any kind of integration, nor will we be pleased with schools which fail to function. It may be a dilemma for the governor, but if he delivers us from it, even his most caustic critics will praise him. If he fails, at either end, he too will be in ashes.

and utilities who would certainly be under no legal compulsion to support private education. And once again, there is the 30 per cent of private taxpayers who don't have children in school.

And of course there could be no immediate cessation of school taxes, because bonded indebtedness would continue and teacher contracts would have to be fulfilled.

So it boils down to this: the average Montgomery resident with two school-age children, who owns his own home, smokes a package of cigarettes a day, and earns \$5,000 a year, is presently paying around \$86 annually in taxes to support education. If we are forced to convert to private schools, that same parent could count on paying at least \$400 a year for education that probably would be inferior to what his children had been receiving in the public schools.

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