

Delayed Crisis

Suddenly There Is Concern About Negro Schools' Accreditation

By Karl Portera
Of The Advertiser Staff

AN "EMERGENCY" session of the State Board of Education last Tuesday presents two puzzling and perplexing questions without ready answers.

Reasons given for the called meeting were for determining what action



is necessary for getting accreditation for Alabama's two tax-supported Negro institutions of higher learning. During the meeting Gov. John Patterson set a time limit of 60 days for completing a study of Alabama State College for Negroes, Montgomery, and Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College, Huntsville, to ascertain what must be done to get the colleges accredited.

Although both institutions have been carried on the approved list of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the accrediting agency, it is a matter of fact that neither school has ever held full membership in the association.

For a period of four years, 1957-61, both colleges were listed on the association's separate approved list for Negro colleges and universities in the South. As of last December the approved list was discontinued by the association. Since that time neither school has appeared on the roster of member institutions.

Certainly the state government knew that neither State nor A&M has ever been fully accredited, but only approved conditionally, and that neither has been listed with the association since December.

Another move by the board to replace, as soon as possible, A&M President Dr. Joseph F. Drake has become a controversial incident.

NO REASON TILL NOW

Although Drake had requested a leave of absence because of poor health almost a year ago, no specific action was even hinted until Tuesday's meeting.

And coming on the heels of a series of sit-in demonstrations in Huntsville, in which some A&M students were involved, some sources have construed the action to mean Drake was being ousted because he was not strong enough to put down the demonstrations against Alabama's segregation laws.

Both Patterson and State Supt. of Education W. A. (Bing) LeCroy said Drake was being replaced at his own request. They claim this move was in no way influenced by the sit-in demonstrations.

Alabama has been basing its arguments for segregated schools on the premise that both white and Negroes are given equal facilities, and in some cases Negroes have better school plants than the whites. Yet every white school in the state holds full membership in the accrediting association, while neither of the two Negro state colleges are even carried on the agency's roster.

Thus the basis of Patterson's concern in getting State and A&M accredited. He told the president of Alabama State during the meeting to "take whatever steps necessary" to meet the qualification requirements of the association "even if it means going to the legislature."

A period of four years elapsed while both Negro colleges hung in the association's "limbo" and two months have gone by since they were dropped completely by the accrediting agency. Now a crash program is ordered to gain membership for getting them admitted to the list of member colleges and universities.

A SCREENING COMMITTEE

At no previous time in the past three sessions of the board has the question of replacing Drake been discussed. But in the recent session a committee was named to screen applicants for the position and to report back to the entire membership as soon as possible for final action on naming a successor.

Interviewing was begun immediately by the committee. LeCroy had planned to enter a resolution naming Dr. Leon W. Bonner, an A&M faculty member, as the new president. Bonner was summoned to Montgomery to attend the session.

The committee declined to consider him at that time since several members were not acquainted with him and also wanted to interview two other applicants. Bonner was screened by the newly appointed committee in LeCroy's office immediately after the meeting.

Apparently there has been some procrastination on the part of the Governor, the Superintendent of Education and the school board. Four years went by before any action was proposed to remedy the accreditation matter, and it was almost a year before steps were taken to replace Drake.

Both matters required immediate attention, but a combined period of five years went by before either was considered.

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Reasons given for the called meeting were for determining what action



is necessary for getting accreditation for Alabama's two tax-subsidized Negro institutions of higher learning. During the meeting Gov. John Patterson set a time limit of 60 days for completing a study of Alma State College for Negroes, Montgomery, and Alma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Huntsville to ascertain what must be done to the colleges accredited.

Although both institutions have been carried on an approved list of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the accrediting agency, it is a matter of fact that neither school has ever had full membership in the association.

For a period of four years, 1957-61, both colleges were listed on the association's separate approved list for Negro colleges and universities in the South. As of December the approved list was discontinued by the association, and at that time neither school had been on the roster of member institutions.

Certainly the state government knew that neither State nor A&M has ever fully accredited, but only approved, and that neither had been listed with the association since December.

Another by the board to replace, as possible, A&M President Dr. J. Drake has become a controversial figure.

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