

SCLC-MIA Drive Nets 180 Jobs



MISS DOROTHY HOLMES AT WORK IN J.J. NEWBERRY CO.

BY MICHAEL S. LOTTMAN

MONTGOMERY--When SCLC's Roosevelt Barnett and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) got together last fall, they had no idea how to open up job opportunities for Negroes.

"I wasn't sure what we were going to do," Barnett recalled this week. He noticed that "Negroes spent so much money downtown," and decided that "Negroes needed more jobs--and not just maid jobs."

But, he said, "everybody we talked to, it looked like they had done all the hiring they were going to do--and the people they hired were white."

"At the time," said Mrs. Idessa Williams of the MIA, "we didn't have picketing in mind. We were just going to sit down and discuss what would be the best first move."

"Then the incident at Kress's gave an opening to us."

The "incident," said Mrs. Williams, came about when S. H. Kress & Co. employees falsely accused a Negro girl of shop-lifting. Within a week, a picket line was thrown up around the store, and Negroes were urged to do their shopping elsewhere.

The picketing lasted five weeks. When it ended Nov. 10, the Kress management agreed to treat Negro customers courteously in the future, and to step up its hiring of Negro employees.

This week, Kress manager J. C. Spikes listed the names of 51 Negroes who had been hired, either for the Christmas season or permanently, since the picket line came down.

Apparently, other stores felt the impact of the picket line, too. "It looked like all the stores started to fall in line," said Barnett this week. "They wanted to hire Negroes for 'position' jobs."

he said. "I always try to talk."

Only once did the civil rights groups go back on the streets. They picketed Butler's Shoe Store for two days last week, until a Negro was hired there.

The increased hiring of Negroes "came with the trend of the times," said Frank Sego, executive vice-president of Downtown Unlimited, an association of most of the stores involved.

Some merchants might have put off hiring Negroes "until they absolutely had to," Sego said, but "many joined in a city-wide effort to comply (with the Civil Rights Act of 1964) even before the act became effective."

Since Negroes trade heavily with the downtown stores, he said, hiring Negro employees "seems the proper thing to do," and the merchants have been "highly pleased" with the results.

Some of the new employees were hired just for the holiday season, said Mrs. Williams, "but we're hoping the majority of the people were hired permanently."

"We're making such progress by sticking together," said Barnett. "Together, we make such a great force."

Barnett displayed lists compiled by managers of 31 Montgomery stores. They showed that more than 180 Negroes had been hired since the job campaign began, at stores like H. L. Green Co., Webber Co., Gaylord's, Dexter Toyland, and J. J. Newberry Co.

In approaching these businesses, Barnett said, he didn't threaten them with a picket line. "I never do that,"

Hi Gwen,

I pray for blessings of good health and spirit are with you. It was very nice to talk to you. You must be admired for your diligent work. May you continue to strive for quality life for the whole rainbow.

As we discussed I am very interested in coming to the May SREP meeting. It would be of great financial assistance if there were some sort of scholarship available to help bear the expenses from Florida.

You can reach me at 904-371-1525 or 904-372-0216, or write me at 823 NE 25th Terr. Gainesville, Fl. 32601.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

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