Segregationist Evades CRC Queries

By Tom Maugh '65

From the placards on the tables in the dining halls to the write-up in Preview, from the propaganda sheets and "Young Socialists" (a left-wing newspaper) being handed out at the door to the carefully constructed questions and lists of facts, last Wednesday's speech by Eric Johnston had the taint of a circus atmosphere in which a large number of the audience had undoubtedly turned out with the hopes of seeing Mr. Johnston thrown to the lions of the Civil Rights Committee.

However, any who bore such hopes were left with their desires unfulfilled as Mr. Johnston, public relations director for the state of Mississippi, became blindly non-committed on most of the major issues at hand, thus leaving the CRC, which sponsored the speech, little opportunity to embarrass or corner him. By his own admission, Mr. Johnston, was in a tight spot to begin with, defending segregation before a Northern audience, but the consensus of opinion was that he handled himself remarkably well.

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THE TECH

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The Bell Telephone Companies

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"We have our problems in Mississippi, and we have been wrong in the past, but can't every state say the same?" This was essentially the method Mr. Johnston used to mollify and control the audience, along with several totally unrelated anecdotes and pleas of "Please eat more chicken!" (relating to his home town's poultry industry, which can "produce 850,000 chickens per week").

From an objective viewpoint, neither side made many significant points toward discussion. Two of Mr. Johnston's main points appeared to be: after the Civil War Mississippi was governed mostly by the Negro population, and, since they didn't integrate the schools and universities then, but rather established separate schools for the colored, they obviously didn't desire integration; and, regarding the Supreme Court's recent interpretation of the 14th amendment with regard to integration, Mr. Johnston pointed out that the same congress, which had passed the secession bill also established the system of segregated schools in Washington, D. C., thus showing that they must have had a different interpretation of the law.

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The CRC's main points in the questions they preferred involving the voting rights of the southern negroes, Mr. Johnston's plea on equality of races, and what will happen when (if) total integration is eventually forced in Mississippi. Mr. Johnston, however, skillfully managed to evade the points, evidently not caring to tread on dangerous grounds. Thus, the Committee actually won their point, although they were not able to prove it.

The lecture brought varied reactions among the campus. One senior pointed out the fact that since Mr. Johnston had no philosophical doctrine to base his arguments on, he had to appeal to legalities by the customary method. Since his audience had a different set of customs his arguments were ineffective in convincing them.

Others, in the audience (which filled nearly two-thirds of Kresge) seemed to consider everything the speaker said completely wrong and vociferously objected to many of his statements, thus showing not only lack of openmindedness, but also of good manners.

Tomorrow night, James Lerner, the national director of the Congress of Racial Equality is scheduled to give a rebuttal, speaking on a non-violent approach to desegregation of the southern industry, with whom we have been in touch on the problem of race relations. Since there is little Mardi Gras atmosphere attendant to his speech, we Cohen if it will have a very large attendance. However, you may look for a review of it in next week's paper, in addition to a summation of the two antithetical viewpoints.

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