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EYES ON MISSISSIPPI

Board to Decide Fate of Ole Miss Professor

By W. F. MINOR

(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

JACKSON, Miss.—Dr. James Silver of Ole Miss and what he has described as the "closed society" come to grips next week, possibly for the last time.

The Board of Trustees of State Institutions of Higher Learning meets Thursday to decide the fate of the controversial university history professor, whose outspoken criticisms of Mississippi policies have rankled politicians for years, but more so since he made his "closed society" speech last fall.

A subcommittee of the college board which has been investigating Silver is slated to submit its bill of specifications against the professor, aimed at getting him out of the university.

The dossier on Silver, as could be expected, reveals charges not related to his controversial speeches, on which the board might decide to fire him.

Indications Cited

The indications, according to sources, is the board will vote to give him the axe, even though it may run the risk of putting the accreditation of the university back under scrutiny of accrediting agencies.

Reportedly, the board is operating on the theory its bill of complaint against Silver is not based on his freedom of speech or his criticisms of Mississippi customs, but on grounds which will not flaunt accreditation standards.

The subcommittee which will bring in the Silver charges was headed by Hattiesburg attorney M. M. Roberts, long a foe of the professor and a prime advocate of some of the more drastic steps during the Meredith case two years ago.

Probation Lifted

The conduct of the board in dealing with James Meredith, under pressure from then Gov. Barnett, put the university under probation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. That probation was finally lifted a few months ago.

Silver poses the greatest crisis for the institution's board since James Meredith was admitted as the first Negro student to an all-white state supported institution of higher learning.

noted for his "shock" approach to learning, challenging students with argumentative remarks to debate all sides of a question.

The Silver of the classroom was the same Silver outside the classroom. He had always said things in public which made his superiors cringe for fear they would reach the ears of the State Legislature, from which the university gets its sustenance.

Biggest Moment

His biggest moment came last November when he bowed out as president of the Southern

Historical Society with his incendiary "closed society" speech which infuriated Mississippi political figures all the way from Jackson to Washington, D. C.

In other days the words of Silver may have gone relatively unnoticed or caused only a mild ripple, but in this time of high racial emotionalism, they were like rattling a saber in Mississippi.

When a politician grumbled at Silver, he came back with the tart reply, ever the fighter, even with the threat of midnight not far away.

To a friend recently he related how he had taught at the university in lean years when the pay was so poor he had to go off and work in the summertime to make enough money to provide for his family.

His life savings after more than a quarter of a century at the university, an acquaintance learned recently, amounted to less than what a truckdriver could reasonably expect to have in the bank for a similar period of service.

Evidently they aren't going to run Jim Silver off without a fight.

Admired or Hated

Several generations of politicians who have encountered the outspoken university professor either as student or spectator have either admired or hated him as one of the few iconoclasts on the public payroll in Mississippi.

As far back as 1943, some of his ex-students who managed to get elected to the Legislature have tried to get the Legislature to brand him as something or the other.

For 23 years Silver has managed to survive in a supreme test of the toleration capacity of politicians who despised him for being different, but somehow never got their way.

'Shock' Approach

From a professional standpoint, Silver evidently contributed something which kept him on the faculty for 23 years and in the forefront of scholarly pursuits which are vital to a university.

As a teacher, Silver has been

The board will have to take a calculated risk if it dismisses Silver, because the feisty professor has been placed in the public and academic limelight nationally as a pugnacious sparring partner for the unique ways of Mississippi.

Even Silver's friends concede he has kept a stinging left jab in the face of politicians and the college authorities in the state and inevitably somebody was going to try to put him away.