

Panel Told Mississippi Negroes Are Prepared for Self-Defense

By MARTIN WALDRON

JACKSON, Miss., Aug. 12—A Negro physician told the President's Commission on Campus Unrest today that Mississippi Negroes "are no longer afraid" and are prepared to "defend themselves against police repression."

His testimony was followed by that of a general who said that the Mississippi National Guard was trained and ready to put down disorder if called upon.

The physician, Dr. Aaron Shirley of Jackson, said, "We don't plan to stand around and allow cops, under the guise of law and order, to shoot our kids for throwing rocks."

Dr. Shirley said that the disturbance at Jackson State College on May 14, which the commission is investigating, was a case of "students acting as students and the police officers acting as murderers."

Two students were killed and 12 were wounded when law enforcement officers fired buckshot into a disorderly crowd on the Jackson State campus. The authorities have said that the shots were fired in response to a sniper.

Assurances on Sniper

Dr. Shirley, a leader of the Negro community, said he could assure the commission that "the next time there will be a sniper."

Maj. Gen. Walter Johnson, Commander of the Mississippi National Guard, who underwent an hour and a half of questioning, asserted, "Anyone who would make such a statement is irresponsible and trying to foment trouble."

"If there is any large-scale confrontation, we are going to stop it," he declared.

Members of the Mississippi Highway Patrol and the Jackson city police were on the scene when the shots were fired at Jackson State. Units of the Guard were also there, preparing to begin maneuvers to disperse the demonstrators.

General Johnson said that his 650 troops were carrying unloaded weapons and that his crowd control plan did not include the loading of weapons or the firing at the students except as a "desperate" resort.

Despite sharp questioning by several panel members, he said that "common decency" prevented him from criticizing the actions by the law enforcement officers.

Several witnesses have told the commission that the Mississippi Highway Patrol "likes to kill niggers."

"I don't think the Highway Patrol likes to kill anybody," General Johnson said.

An Area of Agreement

Both General Johnson and Dr. Shirley agreed that there was an air of violence in Mississippi, but they differed about the reasons.

Dr. Shirley said that part of the blame lay with recent actions and statements by President Nixon, Vice President Agnew and Attorney General John N. Mitchell.

"In the mid-sixties, it seemed to us in Mississippi as if the national Administration was asking for justice and human dignity for everybody," Dr. Shirley said. He said that several cases had been filed against policemen for violating the civil rights of Negroes.

As a result, the Mississippi police stopped calling Negroes

such names as "boy" and "nigger," the pediatrician said.

"But within the last two years, it seems as if police officers, particularly those on the Highway Patrol, are drifting back to where they were in the early sixties," he said. "They feel now that they have a friend who controls the actions of the Justice Department and that they no longer will have to answer for violations of civil rights."

As a result, he said, the 40 per cent of Mississippi's population that is Negro once again feels it is living in a "police state."



Associated Press

WARNS ON CAMPUS DISORDER: Maj. Gen. Walter Johnson, commander of the Mississippi National Guard, before White House panel investigating disturbances at Jackson State College. With him is the Deputy State Attorney General, Delos Burkes. "If there is any large-scale confrontation," said General Johnson, "we are going to stop it."

General Johnson, who drew jeers from the predominantly Negro audience at the hearing when he said that both he and Gov. John Bell Williams had no racial prejudices, said, "The people must start obeying the laws of our state and nation. If you don't like a law, get it changed. I don't like to see a breakdown in respect for law."

The police, he said, cannot stand by and allow segments of the population to break laws with impunity. "There is a difference between stealing watermelons and stealing color television sets," he said.