

# CORE Sets Moves Against N.J. Bell

3-25-64

The Newark-Essex chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality announced today that it will begin a "direct action campaign" on Saturday against the New Jersey Bell Telephone Co. in an effort to force the hiring of more Negroes.

The announcement was made after CORE and Bell representatives failed to resolve a deadlock over company employment practices during a three-hour session at the telephone company headquarters last night. It was their fifth meeting in the last two months.

Richard Proctor Jr., head of CORE's industrial relations committee, refused to disclose the time, place or nature of the planned demonstrations, but said it would be called off only if "the Bell System agrees to put forth an acceptable plan for the hiring of nonwhites."

A company spokesman promptly replied that CORE's threatened action "will undoubtedly have a negative effect on the overall civil rights movement and will cause many peo-

ple to resist what can only be described as a policy of force."

No further meetings were scheduled, but Proctor said CORE would still be willing to confer with the company if it has a definite proposal to make. The company is also willing to meet again, a spokesman said. However, no further sessions were scheduled.

Proctor said CORE has submitted specific demands to the company, but he declined to disclose them. The company representative said, however, that CORE has insisted that the number of Negro supervisors in Essex County be raised from 16 to 200 (of a total of 2,200) in one year, and that 30 Negroes be hired as switchmen in the next three months.

The Bell spokesman said the CORE demands are "unrealistic" because they take no account of the normal rate of vacancies in such jobs, and the normal length of training required. It will be four years before the company needs 30 new switchmen, the Bell man said, and they ordinarily spend years in training.

But Proctor charged that

"obviously Bell has not obeyed" the state's 1948 law against discrimination, since it has significant numbers of Negro employes as telephone operators.

He also accused the company of distorting its hiring record by claiming that 78 of the 150 new positions added to the payroll last year were filled by Negroes. During the year, Proctor said, Bell actually hired 1,342 persons, of whom 208 were Negroes. Most of the 203 were operators, he said.

Neither Proctor nor the company spokesman would supply any statistics on the company's overall work force in Essex County.

During the negotiations, Proctor said, the company representatives "offered nothing but a continuation of the tokenism which they have engaged in since they agreed to the President's Plan for Progress in January 1963." He said the company talks only in generalities, and refers to various programs that are barely under way or haven't even started yet.

The Bell spokesman said his company "has bent over backwards to find Negro applicants with suitable skills or potential . . . but it cannot in fairness to the public it serves reduce its technical standards as CORE apparently wants it to do."

The spokesman also con-

tended that CORE insists the company have certain numbers of Negroes in certain positions, but refuses to help find applicants with the necessary skills or aptitudes. "CORE consistently refuses to recognize that the problem is one of availability, not discrimination," said the spokesman.

The company asserted that it will hire qualified Negroes for any starting position in the crafts or management, and that it is training Negro employes now "with the goal of increasing the number in management as rapidly as possible."

"The minority employment situation in Essex County will not be solved by thoughtless demonstration," the company concluded, "but by genuine cooperation between industry and civil rights leaders. N.J. Bell stands ready to work with any group in bettering the lot of the Negro in Essex, but it will not agree to reckless demands which would imperil the telephone service . . ."

CORE's negotiating team last night was composed of Robert Curvin, chapter chairman; Dr. August Meier, a history professor, and Proctor. The company was represented by Jean Feller, vice president of operations; William Helmstadter, personnel supervisor, and D. J. Stevenson, district manager.