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Grace Methodist Church
Magazine St.
Cambridge, Mass.
May 30, 1960

Mr. Ray Jenkins
City Editor,
Alabama Journal
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Sir:

A friend sent me a copy of your editorial entitled "A Futile Prosecution" from the "Advertiser-Journal" of May 15, 1960. Overall I thought the editorial was quite good. However, there are a few points I would like to write a few words on. I hope you will be able to print this so that readers of your editorial (column) may also see it.

First of all,
The integrated luncheon at the Regal Cafe in March was not a publicity stunt. We ate together in order to continue conversations begun earlier that morning.

In your article you stated that Dr. Nesmith regarded the whole affair as exceedingly unfortunate and that he was neither vengeful nor vindictive. Then you continued, "Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for another member of the group, the Rev. R. Edwin King. The young reverend did quite a lot of shouting about 'police state' conditions in Alabama and his words were carried in newspapers throughout the nation." By your statements I hope you did not mean to imply that I was "vindictive or vengeful" I can assure you that I have no such feelings. Although I have been interviewed by some reporters I really do not think I have been exactly "shouting"--in any literal or figurative sense--and I was unaware of nationwide press coverage. I have used the term "police state" to describe conditions in your city. Perhaps this is not the best term to use, but conditions in Montgomery are quite serious. In your own column you saw how the police power employed against the integrated luncheon group might be used against you and the free press or against political opposition. I imagine that most of the responsible citizens of your city do not really know the conditions that exist now and what the police are doing to the Negro population (and their white guests). If the people really knew I feel sure that they would not stand for it and the police state features of life in Montgomery would soon end. The events of our arrest, imprisonment, and trials show signs of "police state" tactics. These events I trust you and your readers are well aware of. But other things besides this have happened to me in your city. These are not things just told to me by my Negro and white friends. (I was warned by them to be cautious about anything said over certain telephones because it was thought that the lines were tapped by the police???) The night after our trial was recessed early in May I was invited to attend a religious meeting of Negro students in a Negro church in your city. The church was being watched by men identified to me as being police. We were in the church only a few minutes before the police dared to enter a House of God while the congregation was singing hymns of the Christian faith. They stood in the back of the church as the Holy Scriptures were read and as we were led in prayer. After a Negro minister had addressed the congregation I was given an opportunity to speak. Both of us had been arrested by the police and therefore could hardly think these police were there as part of a friendly congregation. It is a rare experience for a Christian minister in America to face hostile police as he tries to preach what God would have him preach.

When I attempted to leave the church I was questioned by these police,. Later that night, after going to the Montgomery Improvement Assoc. office (which was being watched by the police), I had another new experience. The car I was in was followed-by police we assumed.

It is for reasons such as this that I have used the term "police-state" in trying to find some way to describe what I have seen, heard, and experienced in Montgomery. Dr. Ehrenstrom, one of professors in the Methodist seminary here, said that such things reminded him of the early days of the Nazi movement in Germany. And a fellow seminarian facetiously asked, "Which sleeve do the police wear the swastika on?"

Having never really experienced a Nazi, Communist, or South African form of police state, I can only say that I used the term not trying to bring any further shame on your city, but only to describe as adequately as I could what I found in Montgomery.

While in Montgomery I met many wonderful people, both white and Negro, and this has convinced me that most people probably really don't know what is happening in their city. If so they would not tolerate such to continue. We may sincerely disagree on the matter of integration, but I appeal to you, as a newspaper editor, and to your readers, the citizens of Montgomery, as fellow Americans and fellow Christians, to bring these evil conditions to an end.

Sincerely,