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EDITORIAL

DEXTER GIVES  
 PROMISE OF  
 RIGHTS ACTION

By LARRY GRAFF  
 News-Gazette Staff Writer

Mayor Emmerson V. Dexter promised Negro community leaders that civil rights action is forthcoming, possibly at the next City Council session.

Five members of the Champaign - Urbana Improvement Association, including three clergymen, asked the City Council Tuesday night to take some kind of action to definitely state its policy on racial matters.

To questions about a resolution stating Council policy on open occupancy, Councilman Virgil Wikoff said resolutions are just "so many words" and mean nothing concrete.

"We can legislate for equal opportunity," Wikoff said, "but not for people to love their neighbor."

The leaders agreed that "you cannot legislate love," but stressed that the Council should make a positive statement to "create an image of the elected officials' positions."

Rev. Blaine Ramsey charged if the Council does not act it may be guilty of creating a poor racial climate. He likened the results of a poor racial climate to the deaths of six Negroes in Birmingham, Ala., last Sunday.

'More Ticklish'

Rev. Ramsey, official of C-UIA and head of the fledgling NAACP chapter in Champaign-Urbana, said the longer a policy statement is put off, the more ticklish the racial situation will become.

He pointed out the action of the Chicago City Council last week in passing an open occupancy ordinance although local opinion here feels that the move is contrary to state statute.

He said "if Chicago could pass an ordinance, Champaign could pass a resolution." Rev. Ramsey said a resolution would pave the way for creation of an ordinance if the Illinois General Assembly makes it possible.

Councilman Kenneth O. Stratton said he felt a specific mention of public housing should be made in any resolution the Council makes. He said he felt there was segregation in public housing. (In the Human Relations Commission's recent annual report to the city, it was alleged that Champaign County Housing Authority was guilty of biased renting practices. The Commission said it received no answer when it sent the Housing authority legal opinions calling the practice of segregation contrary to law for public bodies.)

On the question of equal rights at Burnham City Hospital, Rev. A. T. Rowan said he felt a clear and concise policy statement should be forthcoming from hospital authorities.

Quote From Mercy

He quoted from what he said was a policy statement of Mercy Hospital:

"We do not practice segregation. . . If we learn that any of our employees do, may God have mercy on them."

Councilman Stratton said he was also not satisfied with policy statements from Burnham. He stated he believes all phases of segregation "should be ended today."

"If it takes strong action on my part," Stratton said, "I'll take it."

Rev. Rowan said recent changes in the hospital, lessening bias, would go down the drain if a new statement doesn't come soon.

HR Expansion

Stratton, in answer to another question put to the Council by the civil rights leaders, said he felt he would like to study their suggestion of expanding the Human Relations Commission from seven to 11 members, although he agreed with Councilman Frank Schooley's opinion that increasing the membership might be harmful. Councilman Wikoff agreed that the effectiveness of a group is de-

creased by increasing members.

Schooley pointed out that of 14 such committees under the city's structure, none have so many members.

The C-UIA leaders were advised to confer with Mayor Dexter privately about his naming a 24-member bi-racial committee. The C-UIA last week re-

jected the committee as being non-representative of existing civil rights groups.

Dexter had said he named the committee to act as arbitrator.

The leaders were told Tuesday the committee is not under the Council but under the mayor.

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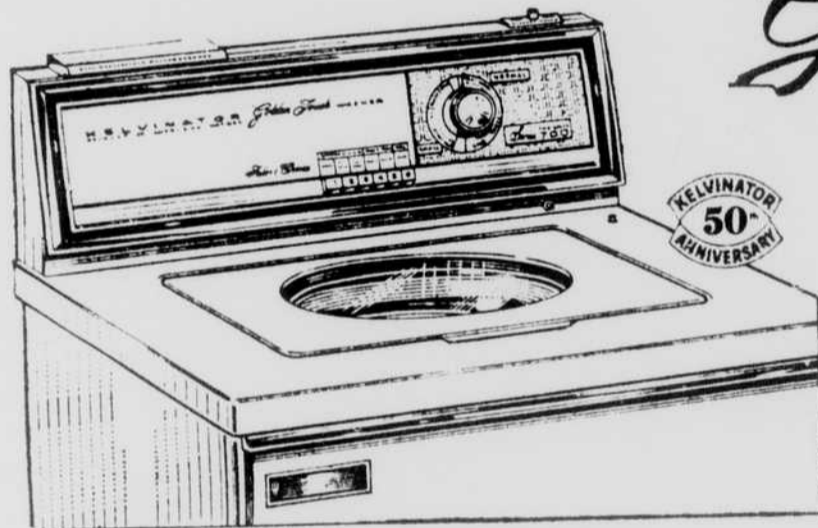
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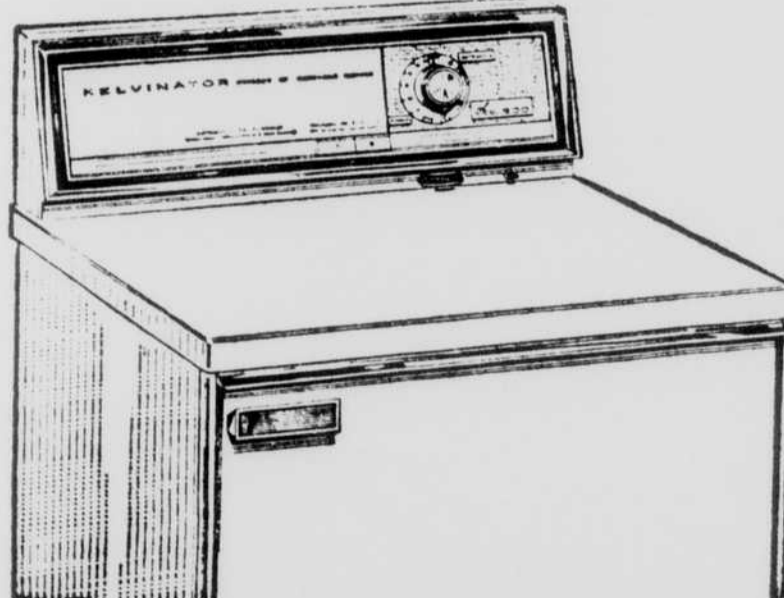
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