

AME Bishops Protest Social Program Cutbacks

WASHINGTON — Calling the Nixon Administration's social policies "dehumanizing" to black and poor people, 12 bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church last week strongly denounced the

President's budget cuts, the dismantling of the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the impoundment of Congressional appropriations funds.

In a press conference with the Congressional Black Cau-

cus—which is comprised of the 15 black members of the House, all of whom are Democrats—the bishops said they would unite with other groups, including white church leaders, to fight the budget cutbacks and called on the President to "rescind these threats to the very vital lifeline of our communities."

The bishops said they were attempting to serve as "voices of prophets trying to avoid a long, hot summer."

"We're trying to take the leadership for the people in the street," said Bishop D. Ward Nichols, the groups' spokesman. "If our voices are not heard, I greatly fear the radicals will take to the streets in the summer and there will be bloodshed. We are here to ask Congress to help avoid what we see coming."

Four of the bishops—who have taken a conservative stance in the past—supported President Nixon's re-election last year. However, last week, Bishop Nichols said, "but the majority of black people did not support the President."

Noting that they were becoming activists for the first time in the 157-year history of the church, Bishop Nichols said, "it is dehumanizing to take from the Americans those supportive programs in education, in housing, in communi-

ty organizations, in manager training, in child care, in economic development which have formed a small basis of hope in ranging sea of despair."

He said the President had listened to the "wrong voices" to reach the conclusion that anti-poverty programs had been ineffective.

"The programs have reached the people," Bishop John Adams of the Texas Episcopal District said. "They haven't been perfect, but they have been better than nothing."

Bishop Nichols said the 18 ministers—whose districts are divided across the country and in West Africa and who represent some two million blacks—would meet with the Caucus to map a strategy of action and to plan "a black summit meeting" to bring together all groups opposed to the Nixon program cuts.

The concept of a summit meeting of black leaders has also been proposed by Vernon Jordan, Jr., executive director of the National Urban League and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, president of People United to Save Humanity (PUSH).

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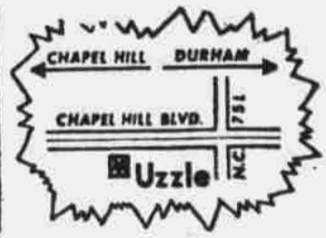
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