

## How Repression Works

# N. C. Dentist Found Guilty of Negligence

(By Staff Correspondent)

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—Dr. Reginald Hawkins is a black dentist who has been involved in the civil-rights movement here for many years. He has helped to bring considerable change in North Carolina—and, all along, he has worked to involve black people in the political life of the state.

Last summer the state Board of Dental Examiners accused Dr. Hawkins of negligence. They “proved” 13 charges against him, and found him guilty of malpractice.

Dr. Hawkins has appealed the ruling and charged the dental board with discrimination and racism. If his appeal is not successful, he could lose his license.

This is not an isolated case. Across the South, people who work for social change have often lost their jobs; professional men (who cannot simply be fired) are likely to find themselves attacked by their professional associations. Civil-rights lawyers in Kentucky and Florida are presently fighting to keep from being disbarred.

Dr. Hawkins’s case is a clear example of the use of this means of social control to silence a vocal, effective fighter. There have been previous attempts. Dr. Hawkins says:

“In 1964 I headed a voter-registration drive that added 15,000 Negroes to the voting lists. They said I had added the names of illiterates, and I was charged with four felonies and a misdemeanor. But they knew the charges wouldn’t stand up, and the case wasn’t brought to trial for four years.

“In 1965, I filed a school desegregation suit. That August, they fired 13 bullets into my home. In November, they bombed it.

“When I ran for the Democratic nomination for Governor last year, they revived those old charges about voter registration. But they didn’t dare try it till after the primary, because they knew their witness was lying.”

A jury threw out the charges. Then Dr. Hawkins announced that he would lead a challenge to the Democratic National Convention in August. It was at that point that charges of professional negligence were brought.

The dental board had been fighting Dr. Hawkins since 1960, when he challenged their refusal to admit black dentists. That case was not won in the courts until 1966—and the board has been failing black dentists ever since.

A more recent struggle was over the right of people on welfare to choose their own doctors and dentists—rather than being sent to the worst clinics. “We won that, too,” Dr. Hawkins said. “That means that the state can’t use the Federal funds any way they please—as they did in the past. It also means that black dentists and doctors have been getting most of the business.”

The dental board brought charges against four dentists—three black, one white—who had done work on patients covered by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Dr. Hawkins was charged with 38 “discrepancies.”

“They brought in a panel to examine our work, and told them I had

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# ***Dentist Harassed***

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admitted to the 38 discrepancies. The panel first said they could see only 25. Then, during a hearing we demanded, they reduced this to 13.

"This included two fillings that fell out—out of a total of more than 2,000. There were six errors of nomenclature: simple typing mistakes that a secretary made in typing down a long list. And there were a few cases which I had decided were complete—and they said were not. This is a question of the dentist's discretion; it's their judgment against mine."

The board found Dr. Hawkins guilty of malpractice, even though his experts had rebutted their charges. "They charged the other three so that it wouldn't look like they were after me alone," he said. "And they never intended for the white dentist to get caught. They have allowed him to correct his discrepancies—which were more serious than mine—without bringing charges against him."

Dr. Hawkins and the other black dentists have appealed the decision and charged the board with discrimination and racism because of its leniency with the white dentist.

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Why are the people who run North Carolina so determined to get Reginald Hawkins?

"What they fear most about me is political power," Dr. Hawkins says. "They counted 130,000 votes for me in the primary—and we believe they lost at least 80,000 more. That vote is there, it's the balance of power, and from now on it will have to be reckoned with."

They also fear Dr. Hawkins's efforts to build links with other groups in the state and elsewhere in the South. He built his primary campaign around the issues of poverty and racism—and he went after poor-white votes as well as black. "I talked about doing away with those things that have kept poor blacks and whites fighting each other, and at the mercy of the power structure."

For the last few months he has been stumping the state, building a coalition of black people, students, intellectuals and labor—not for this election, but for the future. "We can take over the Democratic Party in this state and they know it," he says.

"They can't touch me by firing me—so they try to make it appear that I'm a bad dentist and a bad man. That's how the regulatory power of the state is used—to intimidate people.

**"What they have never learned is that this sort of thing makes us stronger. It's a coalescing force, not a destructive force, in the black community.**

"You see, they're dealing with unconventional warriors—we're not afraid. We're sort of like the Viet Cong over in Vietnam—people who understand power and know how to use it. We're not the old black Joe . . . It's really a battle to decide whether the people are going to participate in this democracy—or whether there's going to be a democracy at all."