

MOBILIZATION AT THE GRASS ROOTS: 1961-62

Early in that summer of 1961, a group of SNCC leaders went to Jackson, Mississippi, and began to organize support there for Freedom Rides. They met with some success, and a Jackson bus movement began.

More important, the experience crystallized a dream some young leaders had developed over the previous year: if they were going to change the South, they could not remain just a student movement; they had to organize the communities.

Actually, the very existence of the student movement since 1960 had stimulated action by all age groups. In West Tennessee, a mass voter-registration movement grew under the adult leadership of John McFerren; when sharecroppers who had registered to vote were evicted by their landlords, they attracted national support by setting up a "tent city" in which to live. In Hopewell, Virginia, and in other communities in that state, direct-action movements cut across age lines. In some communities older Negro leaders saw the student uprising as a threat, but others looked eagerly to it for help.

The other important thing that happened in that summer of 1961 was that powerful people, from the White House down, got much worried about the "bad image" the disorders surrounding the Freedom Rides were creating for this nation abroad. They were determined to get the movement "out of the streets" and into other arenas. Now, the Kennedy administration was much interested in registering Southern Negroes to vote; Negro voter registration in the South was only a million out of a potential 5 million. Whether the Kennedys were interested because of moral concern or the belief that registered Negroes would vote for Kennedys is not important. The important thing is that they were willing to do something about it. Attorney General Robert Kennedy pointed out that this was one area where the federal government had laws to use; both the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts were supposed to protect voting rights. He urged

the young people—and other civil rights organizations—concentrate on a gigantic registration campaign in the South.

Simultaneously, and openly related to the Kennedy campaign, the movement into voter registration, civil rights was steered by private foundations offering to give large amounts of money for registration drives. To many in SNCC, this was the opportunity they had been looking for—now there would be no more part-time work, they thought, so they could work full time. There were also rumors, never confirmed officially—that young people working in voter registration would get deferment from the military draft.

"We've been saying we want to give ourselves to the struggle," said one Negro student. "Now the way is open. The only question is, are we willing to give our bodies to it?"

For some in SNCC it did not seem that simple, and the organization was almost torn apart by the resulting debate. Students who had been deeply involved in direct action felt that voter registration was a tame operation and a draining of their energies into ineffective channels. Nashville students noted that Negroes had had the vote for a long time—but that nothing changed. Thousands marched in the streets. After their lunch counter sit-ins they tried a registration drive but found students remarkably uninterested.

The other group in SNCC—the pro-registration people—argued that it was only through the vote that real changes could come. "This is a matter of power," one of them said. "It doesn't matter how many lunch counters you integrate—until you get political power things don't change." Besides, these advocates argued, in the Deep South areas—where terror awaited the Negro who tried to register—voter registration would actually be direct action.

The argument was never really settled that summer, but SNCC managed to hold together by dividing into two wings—the voter registration wing and the direct-action wing. This turned out to be temporary, because as the work moved into the Deep South those who had said that voter registration and direct action were the same and the same proved right—and the lines between the two blurred. Meantime, the important thing was that the offer of financial support had propelled a group of dedicated young people into the Deep South to organize. Jim Forman, the Mississippi-born Chicago teacher who came South to write and found that history pushed him into the administrative job of executive secretary of SNCC, summed it up this way later: "Sixteen cats in 1961 decided it would be good if a small group devoted itself full time to the movement." And that was the beginning.

THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The first venture of students into community organizing was

It was in the late summer of 1961 in Monroe, North Carolina. This was not a SNCC project—but it involved some students who were already or would later be a part of SNCC.

Monroe is a small town in southwestern North Carolina where Robert Williams, a militant young Negro, was a leader. Williams had fallen into disfavor with national civil rights leaders when, after two white men freed by the courts after vicious attacks on them, he suggested that Negroes must protect themselves by using violence with violence." This statement was widely publicized and upset many people, including some who made no claims for advocates of nonviolence but said Williams should not have said such a thing publicly. This, along with other militant positions he had taken (such as embarrassing the United States by publicizing the Carolina injustice overseas) caused the more respectable civil rights organizations to tag him as "uncontrollable." Once he was thrown into outer darkness by these groups he found it harder and harder to get even meager police protection. Thus, in 1961 when the Freedom Riders at least had some protection from federal marshals after a nationwide protest demanded it, pickets attacked the Freedom Riders at an all-white swimming pool in Monroe, were still arrested by local, state and federal agencies.

Some young Freedom Riders were disturbed by this and decided to go to Monroe and try to help. They also wanted to try to get their hand at community mobilization.

It didn't work. When they set up a picketing operation, they were attacked by white mobs. Police looked the other way, and several people almost got killed. Robert Williams and other Monroe Negroes, along with some of the students, were charged with kidnapping a white couple, and Williams fled Monroe to keep from being murdered. The kidnapping was obviously a frame-up. Williams left the country, convinced that he would be killed if he tried to face trial. The other four defendants received prison sentences ranging up to 20 years. A higher court reversed their convictions in early 1965 on grounds of racial discrimination in jury selection, but Monroe officials got new indictments against them in May.

Since 1961, thousands of words have been written about Monroe. Followers in nonviolence have used it to prove that violence does not work, and opponents of the nonviolent theory have used it to prove that nonviolence won't work. Actually it proves that a group of young people with admirable intentions but with little experience

and little planning run into problems when they rush into such a community.

Jim Forman, who was one of them and who later became one of the most skilled community organizers in the South, said immediately after the Monroe fiasco:

We were hoping a pattern could be set whereby teams of 10 or 12 young people could spend their summers in Southern rural communities, attempting to develop nonviolent movements for justice. . . . The movement has succeeded at the lunch counters in the cities. But what about the Negro in the small town who does not have the money to go to the lunch counter? We hoped to offer an answer to the economic problems of lower class Negroes.

This approach became a guideline as SNCC moved into Deep South communities, and the failure at Monroe no doubt became an ingredient of the more soundly organized campaigns later.

The first thing decided by those "16 cats" who determined to "put their bodies into the struggle" was that they would concentrate in Deep South rural areas. These sections still dominated the politics of the South. They were also the toughest areas, where people were the most oppressed.

They decided to concentrate first on, of all places, Mississippi—the state generally considered the worst. This was partly because that is where student organizers, following the Freedom Riders, had made some beginnings. It was also because the young New York school teacher, Bob Moses, was already laying groundwork there.

It may be significant that Moses developed his dream of grass roots political organization in Mississippi without regard to the overtures from foundations and the federal government in that summer of 1961. He first came South in the summer of 1960 and toured Mississippi to recruit students for the second SNCC conference. There he studied what he saw and began to think, and there he met Amzie Moore and began to dream about what might happen if Negroes could vote in that state where they were 42 percent of the population but where only 5 percent of voting-age Negroes were registered. Moses went back to New York that winter, but in the summer of 1961 returned to stay. Actually, he took virtually no part in the debate raging among SNCC people that summer; while the others were talking, he was quietly working in Mississippi: contacting people, finding places for civil rights workers to live, looking for meeting places.

This relates to the other important decision SNCC made at that time: that if people were going to organize an area they must

move into it, and become a part of it. This they did—first that initial group, later many more—into small towns, country villages, onto back roads, first in Mississippi but soon also in Southwest Georgia, Black Belt Alabama and rural Arkansas. The money promised by big foundations didn't begin to come through until the following year because there were complications about channels for it. But the young people learned to live some way—seemingly on air and dedication. Often local families took them in, and they picked squash or chopped cotton for their keep. Many times they went hungry. One of the early student organizers in Mississippi made it a habit to eat just once a day—about 2 a.m. before he finally went to bed, because, he said, he didn't like to "go to bed hungry."

Under the impact of this operation, over the next year and a half a complete metamorphosis took place in SNCC. The early sit-in leaders were not, by and large, middle-class in origin, as some observers claimed; most well-to-do Southern Negroes sent their sons and daughters East to college or to the very few prestige Negro institutions in the South. But the early movement *was* middle-class in its aspirations. Many of the leaders came from rural cabins or city slum streets, but hard-working parents had saved to send them to college and they were on their way up. When they spoke of civil rights, they usually meant the right to get rich with the white man's son and move into the suburban split-level house. The symbol of that early sit-in movement—as widely depicted in photograph and cartoon—was a well-dressed young man, in suit and tie, seated in dignity at a lunch counter. Middle-class white Southerners, contrasting this picture with the white hoodlums who were dropping lighted cigarettes down the students' backs, breathed a sigh of relief and decided that perhaps Negroes, after all, were nice and respectable like themselves.

Three years later, at the 1963 SNCC spring conference, most of the organization's active workers showed up in overalls. The change in dress was no prank. The overalls had become the uniform of the youth movement. It was the students' way of saying that their identification was with the great majority of the South's Negroes who are desperately poor.

"I used to think the thing to do was work hard and get ahead," explained one student. "Now I know I can't be really free until all Negroes are free."

With the change in dress and identification came a change in goals too. All through SNCC there was less talk about lunch counters and more talk about the freedom to have a decent job

and enough money to feed a family. The young organizers were reflecting the drives of the poor in the communities where they were working. They had walked the dirt roads of Mississippi, had seen the children hungry and the mothers cutting up the living room furniture for firewood; and integrated lunch counters came to seem less and less important.

There were also other influences prodding the movement beyond the lunch counter. Some were in SCLC. It too turned more toward the Deep South areas where the struggle promised to be sharpest. At the 1961 SCLC fall conference, the Rev. Jim Lawson spelled out his idea of "nonviolent revolution":

It would be well to recognize that we are merely in the prelude to revolution, the beginning, not the end, not even the middle. . . . We have been receiving concessions, not real changes. . . . We must sweep away the tyranny of centuries, even institutions away. . . . While we recognize segregation as harmful to the whole nation and the South, we rarely blame this on the system and the structure of our institutions. . . . But if after over 300 years, segregation (slavery) is still a basic pattern rather than a peripheral custom, should we not question the "American way of life" which allows segregation so much structural support? . . . The economy of the South encourages segregation—with cheap labor, keeping certain groups of Negroes and whites pawns of the financial interests, using race hate to stop unions.

As a method of attack, Lawson proposed the formation of a "nonviolent army" of from 2,000 to 8,000 volunteers for "mass non-violent action in the Deep South."

Let us recruit people who will be willing to go at a given moment and stay in jail indefinitely. . . . The Freedom Rides were a start at this, but they involved too many people for a court test and too few for a jail-in. Imagine what would happen if in the next 12 months we had such an army ready. A campaign with such an army would cause world-wide crisis, on a scale unknown in the Western world except for actual war; not even a Berlin crisis could be used as an excuse for America to escape its cancer at home.

Lawson noted that young Americans give a year or more of their lives to service in a "violent army," and asked why they should not be willing to give similar time in a "nonviolent army" for a revolution at home.

The SCLC endorsed Lawson's proposals nominally in 1961, but only a few people made serious efforts to implement them and the army never materialized as he proposed it. However, something similar began to develop, without this name, in the various actions in Albany (Georgia), Birmingham, and Selma in 1965.

Another SCLC thrust beginning in 1961 was an effort to develop grass roots leadership through citizenship training. This was initiated among the unlettered people on the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina by Mrs. Septima Clark. Because she refused to resign from the NAACP, Mrs. Clark lost her job as public school teacher and became director of education at Highlander Folk School from which she extended the citizenship education program to other parts of the South. After Highlander closed, SCLC took over the program.

Under this program, people with leadership potential were trained to be teachers of others in their home communities. They learned techniques of teaching the unlettered to read and write. They also learned to teach the rudiments of government and the democratic process. What resulted was a literacy program, but unlike some approaches, this was literacy with a purpose. It was always clear to everyone that the basic objective was to encourage Negroes to vote and to take control of their government. Mrs. Dorothy Cotton, one of the program leaders, has noted that people who have a reason to learn do so very quickly; thousands of people learned to read and write in the citizenship classes.

The Rev. Andrew Young, another SCLC leader, said the ultimate purpose of the program was to make the Southern movement a true mass movement. "It must be that," he said in a report to an SCLC convention, "not only in numbers but because it is a movement of the common man. It is the grass-roots people who can bring change."

He maintains that there is great hidden talent in those grass roots. "You have to know the Negroes in the South to understand it," he said. "You meet a man who never went beyond the second grade and he's spent all his life in a cotton patch. But you talk to him and you realize that he's got a Ph.D. mind."

That was the job of the citizenship program, Young said—"to comb the South for those Ph.D. minds that have been wasted in the cotton patches."

Despite these various thrusts from civil rights groups, there was no immediate response from the silent masses of Southern Negroes. SNCC organizers going into the rural Black Belt communities at first found local Negroes crossing the street to avoid them. The young organizers were no "outside agitators" either; sometimes they were Negroes from nearby counties. But they were identified with the movement—they were "freedom riders," as they were indiscriminately called. So they were dangerous. To local Negroes, association with movement people meant likely loss of job and pos-

sible death. SNCC organizers in Mississippi once escaped through a back window of their Greenwood office as a lynch mob approached on the other side. In Southwest Georgia, a woman who taught SCLC citizenship schools and took in SNCC workers had shots fired into her home. The same thing happened in Delta homes. In Amite County in Southwest Mississippi, Herbert Lee, a farmer who worked with Bob Moses, was shot and killed in 1961—and in 1964 a man who witnessed his murder, Louis Allen, was also killed. And so it went.

There were reasons other than fear for the lack of response. As one SNCC worker in Southwest Georgia put it: "People have such a struggle just to live. When you work in the cotton fields all day and come home to eat nothing but pork and beans—and get ready for another day—it's hard to even think about registering."

But gradually, despite the danger and the seeming hopelessness of their lives, people took a stand. Some were young—like 16-year-old Brenda Travis who led student sit-ins in McComb, Mississippi, and went to reform school for it; some were old like Mrs. Annie Raines, 68, of Lee County, Georgia, a practical nurse who had delivered 1,000 babies in her community, both white and black, and serenely watched her former patients turn on her as she exchanged paternalism for democracy and joined the movement. Each in his or her own way, made some inner decision—like that of Brenda Travis who describes her feelings when she decided to join the NAACP; how she set out walking to the home of the local president and wouldn't let herself stop, saying inwardly, "I'm going to rule myself; I'm not going to be afraid."

Sometimes the new leaders emerged under dramatic circumstances, from what had seemed to be a paralyzed Negro community. For example, the first mass breakthrough in Mississippi came in the spring of 1963 in Greenwood, after the arrest of one young Negro SNCC worker, the near-fatal shooting of another, and a decision by county officials to cut off the surplus-food program, on which many Negroes depend for survival in the winter. Until then, SNCC had been unable to reach many people. All of a sudden now, they began to come in from the countryside; hundreds marched to the courthouse to try to register. It was the movement's first mass confrontation in a rural area of the Deep South. One factor in the breakthrough was that SNCC was able to organize campaigns over the country to send in food and clothing quickly after the government food was cut off. Thus Mississippi Negroes knew that they were not alone, not totally dependent on the toleration of local white men. Again the police state could not be broken entirely from within.

In contrast to this dramatic situation, sometimes new movements developed very quietly. For example, in Perry County, Alabama, where Marion is located, when civil rights organizers came in 1964 they found a solid organization that had been working for several years. These people had heard what was going on elsewhere and had caught the spirit.

Thus there spread over the Deep South a new layer of leadership. Most had not been the traditional "Negro leaders" in their areas. A few were middle-class, but more often they were poor, for dangers were great and only those with little to lose were attracted. Even when they were ministers, which might sound professional and middle-class elsewhere, they were often men who preached for virtually nothing on Sundays and during the week worked wherever they could in order to live.

One important pattern developed as the student movement sent full-time organizers into communities: wherever they went, and no matter how much they talked about voter registration, direct action spread in their wake. That was not, except perhaps in isolated cases, because the students were seeking voter registrants with one hand and organizing sit-ins with the other. Usually the direct action was spontaneous. The very presence of young organizers aroused some people in the community, usually first the young people. Once aroused, they were often remarkably disinterested in the vote. It was the familiar pattern: what was wrong seemed too big to tackle any other way, so they assaulted symbols. And they often risked their lives and certainly their immediate freedom to sit at lunch counters where they had no real desire to eat, because this was visible, this was oppression, this was something the individual could reach. This pattern developed, for example, in McComb, Mississippi, where SNCC workers first concentrated when they entered Mississippi. They went to register voters, but Brenda Travis and others walked downtown not to the registration office (they were too young anyway and their elders weren't going) but to sit in at a drugstore.

The first mass movement that followed the student move into the communities was in Albany, Georgia, and it was sparked by assaults on lunch counters and bus and train stations. SNCC organizers moved into Albany, a town of 58,000 population, 40 percent Negro, in Southwest Georgia, in the fall of 1961; they planned to make the city a base for work on voter registration throughout the rural Black Belt counties surrounding it. A group of young people were arrested for trying to use the white-only bus and train waiting rooms. There were protest marches, more arrests; Martin Luther King, Jr., was invited to come in and speak and help; he got ar-

rested and because of his national news value the campaign was soon on front pages over the nation. Albany became a concentration point for both SNCC and SCLC staff workers; arrests soared to over 1,100.

There were three phases to the Albany direct action drive: first, the actions of late 1961; second, an uneasy truce through the late winter and spring; and finally, another big flare-up of mass marches and mass jail-ins in the summer of 1962.

Albany was an important peak in the Southern civil rights drive because it was the first time since Montgomery that an entire Negro community had mobilized. The movement cut across all age and class lines. Even the local police chief told the city's white people that they must face the fact that the Albany Movement (as the civil rights coalition was called) represented the entire Negro community.

Southern Negro leaders said the Albany Movement was an advance over the Montgomery movement of six years before because, whereas Montgomery had been a mass withdrawal (in that Negroes stayed off the buses), Albany was an aggressive movement in which Negroes used mass marches, demonstrations, etc., to take the offensive against segregation. Furthermore, whereas Montgomery had focused on a single indignity, Albany was an assault on the total pattern of segregation.

But by the fall of 1962, direct action in Albany died away, with no clear-cut victory. The movement's main leverage was the power of masses of people staying in jail, and as one SCLC staff member later said, it just ran out of people to go to jail. Jail-staying was still a new concept in the movement, and for adults it means probable loss of jobs and income and a complete change in one's economic and personal situation, perhaps for a lifetime. Short of a truly revolutionary situation, there will always be a limit on the number of people willing to go that far. The Albany Movement did not end in that fall of 1962, but it began to channel its energies into voter registration, and it was no longer a point of national focus.

Significantly, the registration drives burgeoned after the direct action campaign as they have often done in such circumstances; people who get out in the streets and become directly involved in attacks on the deplorable conditions of their lives begin to sense a power, and they begin to grasp for other weapons, one of which is the vote. This laid the basis for future political action in Albany, and Negroes began to run for office there. But the over-riding fact to many people at the time was that after all the suffering, jails, and physical brutality against Movement people, the direct action

campaign ended and not one thing in Albany was desegregated except the bus station, which opened up after the Interstate Commerce Commission order.

Key leaders in Albany, however, firmly maintained then that Albany was not a failure—and they still take that position. To understand this point of view, it is necessary to realize that one of the first purposes of recent action in the South has been to spark change within the Negro himself. This has nothing in common with the so-called "improvement" plans of white liberals who suggest that Negroes should get educated and otherwise overcome the disabilities imposed by segregation before they demand an end to segregation. Rather it is a recognition on the part of emancipated Negroes that there are many Negroes, especially in the Deep South, who have never realized that it is possible to say "no" to oppression, a recognition that oppression creates an inner degradation and that its victims unconsciously accept the proposition that there is no way out.

Negro leaders of the Albany Movement maintained that the campaigns there in 1961 and 1962 forever broke those inner chains. Never again, they held, would Negroes in Albany bow down before an oppressor. The Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, then aide to Martin Luther King, said the direct action movement was doing what the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did not—"freeing the Negro's soul." It was the difference, Walker said, between having something done for you and finding you can do it yourself. Jim Forman, by then executive secretary of SNCC, put it another way. Describing Albany in the fall of 1962, he said: "Victory has been won when people recognize the power they have in their own hands when they are organized."

By 1965, there was again great restlessness and frustration in the Albany Negro community. By then, ironically, the basic demands of the 1961-1962 movement had been won. Public accommodations desegregated in response to the 1964 Civil Rights Act—which the Albany Movement certainly had a part in achieving. The schools desegregated—in a token fashion, of course—in response to a court order which would never have been obeyed without the challenge of the Albany mass movement two years before. The Negroes of Albany finally got what they had demonstrated for in 1961-1962, although late. Whether what they were demonstrating for was all they really wanted is an entirely different question.

Meantime, the national spotlight moved away from Albany late in 1962. All through this period there was never any real quiet in the South; there were repeated upsurges in widely scattered communities: student demonstrations in Talladega, Alabama, finally

broken by court injunction; a student drive in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, broken by expulsions from a Negro college and mass arrests; sit-ins in Huntsville, Alabama, by all ages including mothers with children; sleep-ins in Nashville hotel lobbies; picketing at Edenton in North Carolina's Black Belt; new demonstrations in Tallahassee, Florida; and then the next national focus of the Southern movement in the Birmingham demonstrations in the spring of 1963.

Birmingham was essentially an SCLC operation. The foundation had been laid by Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth and his Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Shuttlesworth had built a mass movement involving hundreds and, at some crucial points, thousands; contrary to some distorted reports these were poor Negroes, not middle class and professional people, most of whom stayed aloof from the movement until it grew to national proportions. For more than a year, Shuttlesworth and other Birmingham leaders urged Martin Luther King and SCLC to come into Birmingham and turn a national spotlight on that city. Birmingham was known as the most rigidly segregated city in the world outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. Furthermore its police had a reputation for brutality. Shuttlesworth was convinced that Birmingham would never change without massive pressure from the outside, as well as from the inside. Furthermore, he was convinced that once the pattern of segregation cracked in Birmingham the beginning of the end was near for the entire South.

Never did an analysis prove more surely a prophecy. Birmingham was a turning point in the Southern struggle; it eventually changed the face of the South and awakened the nation. This does not mean that everything is perfect in Birmingham today. But the movement eventually got what it asked for there too. Whether it asked for all it really wanted is, as with Albany, another question.

The immediate objectives of the Birmingham campaign were a beginning on desegregation of public accommodations and a beginning on opening up job opportunities. As at Albany, thousands joined the movement and went to jail. Birmingham did not run out of people to go to jail before the nation was fully aroused. This was partly because the children of Birmingham became involved. That got SCLC and King much criticism, but usually the critics were white people who had never known, or conservative Negro adults who had forgotten, what it is like to be a Negro child—how early he knows that he is in a prison without bars and what it does to his personality *not* to protest. An eloquent defense of the involvement of children was published by a Negro newspaper at the time. The reporter described a six-year-old Negro boy in Birmingham, what

his life was like, and his inability to do anything about it. Then, the writer noted, the movement came and he could do something about it and King came and the world knew. "They said Martin Luther King was using that little boy," the report concluded. "The truth is that he was using Martin Luther King."

One thing that helped make the Birmingham campaign different from Albany was the nature of the opposition. In Albany the police chief worked hard to maintain a humane image, convincing many people that he was only doing what was necessary to maintain law and order. He maintained law and order all right, but as historian Howard Zinn noted in a major report, he did it by arresting every man, woman, and child who disagreed with him and by running the town with "the quiet efficiency of a police state." In Birmingham, the police commissioner was still Bull Connor who had been breaking up integrated meetings since the 1930's. He brought out the police dogs, clubs, and fire hoses. The nation and the world were shocked—and moved to action.

"We drew the poison of the Birmingham police yesterday," said Shuttlesworth, obviously triumphant, on the day after he himself was almost killed on a Birmingham street. People who don't understand the direct action movement interpret that remark to mean that this movement wants to provoke violence, but this is not the point. What it wants to do is to draw to the surface the underlying violence that strikes in darkness, to bring it out where the world can see. For decades Birmingham police had been invading Negro homes, brutalizing Negroes, and sometimes killing them—all under cover of darkness, unknown to the world. Only when they began to do it openly was there hope of change.

Another thing that made Birmingham a turning point was one of those unexplainable phenomena—as with Rosa Parks' action and the Greensboro sit-in. In a way that defies a completely rational explanation, sparks flew from the Birmingham demonstrations that ignited the South. No state remained untouched. In a single month, there was mass direct action in at least 30 cities. Some surveys placed the figure at 100 communities for that entire hot summer of 1963. For the first time, mass direct action against segregation was spreading into the North too.

In the South, the period was comparable to those early months of the 1960 sit-ins—when demonstrations leaped from city to city and the whole South seemed on fire. But there were important differences from 1960. Whereas then it had been mostly students, now the movement cut across age lines. And whereas then the demand had been lunch counters, it was now what came to be called an

"open city"—that is, desegregation of all public accommodations. There was more talk too of jobs without discrimination.

The 1960 sit-in movement reached sufficient proportions to force both major parties to put the strongest civil rights planks ever into their platforms. The 1963 upsurge awakened the nation to the fact that it had to face some major changes. The young people in the Southern movement had long called their work a "revolution." Now this word found its way into the most respectable publications in the country. President John Kennedy, who earlier in 1963 told Negro leaders he would not propose any new civil rights legislation that year, sent to Congress the strongest civil rights bill yet proposed in this country—including a ban on segregation in public accommodations.

The great accomplishment of the summer of 1963 was that by the end of it the struggle for desegregation of public accommodations was essentially won. Some people don't mark up the victory until the following summer when the new civil rights bill was finally passed by Congress. But this was simply a writing into law of a victory that was already a fact. In the wake of the 1963 demonstrations, at least 79 cities instituted some desegregation. Later some people expressed amazement at the widespread compliance with the 1964 law, even in the Deep South. This too reflected the effect of the demonstrations that had gone before. As that white man in Nashville had said in 1960: "This town was not ready for desegregation before, but the sit-ins made it ready." There was also compliance in 1964 from some cities where there had been no demonstrations, as officials sought to avoid turmoil; but the most complete desegregation—with fewer evasive tactics like exorbitant prices to Negroes or conversion to private clubs—was in those communities where there was an active freedom movement. The struggle to open public accommodations was won in the streets, including the biggest street demonstration of them all in Washington in August, 1963, which insured that the victory would be written into law.

Much of the ferment of the nation came to a focus in that giant March on Washington which united 250,000 people from across the country. It was an historic outpouring on the part of many, many determined people, and it said once and for all that this nation could not ignore its oppression of the Negro.

Yet all was not well for the freedom movement on that day when thousands marched in Washington. The storms beneath the surface came into view when it became known that some of the more conservative leaders of the march had threatened to withdraw unless John Lewis, chairman of SNCC, altered his speech.

Lewis agreed to do so in the interest of unity, but even in altered form his speech was the most militant heard that day.

In the original draft, Lewis wrote:

In good conscience, we cannot support the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect people from police brutality. . . . What in the bill will protect the homeless and starving people of this nation? What is there in this bill to insure the equality of a maid who earns \$5 a week in the home of a family whose income is \$100,000 a year?

In the toned-down version, Lewis said SNCC supported the bill but with "great reservations" and went on to spell out, pretty much unchanged, what they were.

He cut the sentence that read: "We cannot depend on any political party, for both the Democrats and the Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence." But he left in this one which also frightened many people: "The party of Kennedy is also the party of Eastland. The party of Javits is also the party of Goldwater. *Where is our party?*"

The problem was that the Lewis speech attacked the federal government and the Kennedy administration and thus violated the unannounced but generally accepted "line" of the march. Early in the summer when pressure for a march on Washington began building up, the Kennedy administration was very cool to the idea. Then administration leaders apparently decided "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," and rolled out the Washington red carpet for the marchers. The top march leadership responded by making the demonstration pro-civil rights and anti-segregation but not anti-Kennedy—and many of them sincerely felt that this was the way to get something done. :

Lewis, on the other hand, who had been constantly on the front lines in the South reflected the thinking of people there. Despite the public accommodations victories in some parts of the South, this had been a time of serious failures too. A direct action campaign in Jackson, Mississippi, completely fizzled. So did one—although it took longer—in Danville, Virginia, where special deputies beat demonstrators brutally. It was also a time of widespread violence—from the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi in June until the church bombing (in September after the Washington march) that killed four Negro girls in Birmingham. In between there were a multitude of incidents—many never widely reported because they involved little known places and unknown people: church burnings in rural areas; mass arrests of demonstrators in

Americus, Georgia, where four student leaders were jailed on charges of insurrection; cruel beatings of civil rights workers in many places, sometimes by hoodlums, but often by police. Jim Forman, wherever he had access to a public forum, said over and over, "The Number 1 problem in the South is police brutality," but few people seemed to hear.

More and more, people working in Deep South areas were asking why the federal government could not or would not do something to stop these things. The question had been building up for a long time. In the early days of the new movement in the South, nobody really expected the federal government to do much. Traditionally Southern Negroes have looked on FBI agents with suspicion because whatever they told them seemed to get back to hostile local officials. Dwight Eisenhower was President when the new upsurge started in the mid-50's, and although he did send troops to Little Rock when the situation there reached chaos, he never claimed to be for desegregation in principle—refusing consistently to say more than that he would support law and order.

With the Kennedy administration, however, the expectations were different. John Kennedy ran on a strong civil rights platform. And it was Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy who a few months after he took office urged civil rights forces to concentrate on voter registration and promised them full support.

At first things did seem different. Now civil rights workers in the Deep South could call the Justice Department in Washington collect, and charges would be accepted. They could call federal officials at home in the middle of the night and get a polite response. All this made people feel better; no longer did Negroes and their white co-workers in hostile Southern communities feel so completely alone.

Gradually, however, the spell began to wear off. Somehow it became less and less enchanting to have one's collect calls accepted when the voice on the other end was always explaining why Washington couldn't do anything. Victims of police brutality filed affidavit after affidavit with the FBI—and nothing ever happened. FBI agents stood on the streets taking notes within a few feet of officers poking demonstrators with cattle prods—and nothing ever happened.

The explanation given by the FBI was that they were a fact-finding agency. The explanation given by the Justice Department was that they were hamstrung by the doctrine of federal-state separation of powers, that local law enforcement was the domain of local officials. Highly respected constitutional authorities chal-

lenged this position, declaring that the Civil War of 100 years ago had supposedly established the proposition that the federal government has not only the right but the responsibility to protect its citizens. They pointed to specific statutes passed after the Civil War which they claimed the Justice Department could use to arrest both police and private citizens who violate the constitutional rights of others. To the average civil rights worker under a policeman's club, even if he knew no constitutional law, it just made no sense that the most powerful nation on earth could not protect the lives of its own citizens.

Then in the summer of 1963, just before the March on Washington, nine leaders of the Albany Movement were indicted—not by the state government but by the federal government. The case grew technically out of a grand jury investigation of a white grocer's complaint that the Movement had tried to put him out of business because of his vote on a federal jury in another case, involving the shooting of a Negro by a sheriff. The nine Movement leaders were charged with either conspiracy to injure a juror or perjury. Negroes in Albany were stunned. During the height of the Albany struggle, many affidavits had been filed with federal authorities detailing violations of Negro rights, and nothing was done. One of those now indicted was Slater King, who had helped organize the Albany Movement. In 1962, his wife was kicked by a deputy sheriff and soon thereafter lost her unborn child. Nothing was done about that either.

Later, civil rights attorney William Kunstler described the Albany case as a "bone thrown to the segregationists by the Kennedy administration." There is absolutely no way to explain it except as an effort of the Kennedys to carry water on both shoulders, and appease Georgia's segregationists while courting the civil rights movement.

"I want to know--which side is the federal government on?" asked John Lewis in his original Washington speech. He cut that sentence out of the delivered version, but people throughout the movement continued to ask the question. Organizationally, SNCC came to personify the most sceptical approach to the national administration, but the question was not confined to SNCC. The urgency of it was in direct proportion to the closeness of any person to the struggle in the Deep South, regardless of his organizational affiliation. "I've come to the conclusion," said an SCLC staff member, "that the only time the government is going to do anything is when there's about to be a riot and they have to."

Howard Zinn maintains that the problem is that the Compro-

mise of 1877 under which the federal government agreed to keep hands off the relationship of the Southern power structure to the Negro citizenry is still in effect—and that no President since then has had the courage to repudiate it. Zinn wrote that in 1964, and nothing that has happened since alters this judgment—despite President Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech in which he proposed new voting rights legislation. It was only a few weeks later that peaceful civil rights marchers in the Alabama Black Belt were being tear-gassed and arrested, and FBI agents were still taking notes.

Thus, over the past few years, the realization grew that the federal government is not in itself a savior. More and more people in the movement faced the fact that freedom cannot be handed down from above and decided that democracy, if it is to be real, must begin at the bottom. It was in Mississippi that this approach most clearly guided the direction of the movement.

Since 1961, the movement in Mississippi has been developing along different lines from anywhere else in the South. To understand this, we have to go back to the time when those first students went to Mississippi in the wake of the Freedom Rides.

These students, all Negro and college products, were as unprepared as white liberal intellectuals might have been for the deprivation of most Mississippi Negroes. Some had gone to Mississippi convinced that Negroes there were sitting on their doorsteps waiting for the young to lead them to a new society. When they found that centuries of oppression had crushed the spirit of revolt, some were disillusioned. Then they began to grope toward a theory that they must produce some inner revolutions before there could be an outer one.

"The young people here have never had a chance to hear about freedom—they don't know their own worth. We need our own school system," said one young worker.

"All they do is hang around in joints. How could they feel they are worth anything?" another asked. "Music dinning in their ears all the time—I believe it is a plot of the segregationists. We need community centers where people can go."

"My God," reacted one veteran of the civil rights struggle when she heard these comments, "they are all going to become social workers."

That didn't happen, but as most of the world knows, the Mississippi movement did go on to organize its own freedom schools, community centers, and cultural program. In the process, many Mississippi Negroes did indeed get new images of themselves—and many of those students, the ones who stayed, learned also. They

found they didn't have all the answers after all and that the uneducated sharecropper could teach them a number of things. The movement never became "social work" because its purpose remained to change society. But the effort to change people so they could change the world around them also changed the movement. It became less flamboyant. Direct action was minimized—not because the young organizers didn't believe in it, but because they thought it would be significant only when local people were ready to lead it themselves. The students had studied the effects of the Freedom Rides, which had been an important ground-breaking operation, but which had left life for Mississippi Negroes not much changed.

From the beginning the political side of the movement was emphasized in Mississippi too. Finding the official voting rolls closed tight, the movement began to set up its own polling places, make its own ballots, and run its own candidates in what became known as "freedom elections." In the first such campaign, Aaron Henry, who pioneered for years as state NAACP president ran for Governor, and the Rev. Ed King, an emancipated white Mississippian, for Lieutenant Governor. More than 85,000 Negroes voted, out of a potential 430,000—not bad for a start. The purpose was to show that Mississippi Negroes would vote if they could and to inject some real issues into Mississippi politics. The next step was inevitable: that the disfranchised would set up their own registration system.

Thus was born the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) which "registered" its own voters and was open to all, but in fact was almost entirely Negro. The FDP ran three candidates for Congress and one for the Senate in 1964. It organized at the precinct level, and held its own county, district, and state conventions. A sense of the political gripped people who had never been close to such things before. "Until a year ago, I never heard the word 'precinct,'" said one Jackson woman. "Now they can't call a meeting that I won't be there."

It was to assist the FDP, the freedom schools, and the community centers, that hundreds of young volunteers, 85 percent of them white, went into Mississippi in the much-publicized Summer Project of 1964. The civil rights groups in the state had united to form the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Mississippi Negro leaders made it clear to volunteers that they were not being called upon to try to be heroes. Bob Moses, the young man whose quiet courage and careful sense of organization had given form to the Mississippi movement, told them: "You are not freedom riders. The idea is to stay out of jail if you can. Your job is to strengthen

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local people. If each of you can leave behind you three people who are stronger and more skilled than when you came, that will be 3,000 more people we'll have to work with next year."

There was also the secondary purpose of the Summer Project which its leaders frankly stated—to involve a callous and deaf nation in Mississippi. It is stark testimony to the inherent racism of the United States that not until white people worked in the Mississippi movement did the nation look and care. Tragedy soon brought this point home. When Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, both white and Northern, were killed with James Chaney, Negro and a Mississippian, everyone knew that if it had been only Chaney, few would have heard about it. Bob Moses repeatedly told the press in early 1964 that five Negroes were murdered in racial incidents in Mississippi in the preceding six months, and few took notice. But the Schwerner-Goodman-Chaney murder aroused the nation, and their martyrdom worked to save the lives of others.

The Summer Project didn't register many voters, because the state wouldn't allow it, but more than 55,000 Negroes registered in the FDP, 3,000 enrolled in freedom schools, and 40 community center programs were begun. Not all of these continued, but some did and everywhere seeds were planted. Most of all, the Summer Project left behind new rays of hope in Mississippi.

It did something profound to the people who came from the outside too. The Mississippi movement was not callously using them as cannon fodder. Those who came knew they were risking their lives and wanted to do it. For some it was the beginning of a lifetime of commitment; for almost all it was an experience that would forever make their lives more meaningful. SNOC, which conceived the project, sensed something most of the nation did not previously seem to know—that a sizable number of young Americans yearn for something meaningful to which they can relate their lives. The Summer Project was designed to harness that yearning to the needs of the Mississippi freedom movement. One result was that various groups planned summer projects for young people in 1965, both North and South.

The Mississippi movement has released creative energies in the lives of many people—both Mississippians and outsiders. People of many professions have come: teachers to work in the freedom schools, actors to the Free Southern Theater, doctors and nurses through the Medical Committee for Human Rights, lawyers mobilized first by the National Lawyers Guild and later by other groups. Ministers have come by the hundreds, sponsored by the National Council of Churches and various separate denominations. As as

organization, the white church in the South still vacillates on implementation of human rights (although many individuals within it have been heroic), but nationally the church finally responded to the challenge from the South. This has added great strength to the Southern freedom movement, but the benefit flows both ways: many a minister and rabbi have found in the movement a meaningful ministry and a significant channel for their religious beliefs—as the doctors, lawyers, teachers, and others have found a way out of the sham that dominates their fields of work in so much of America.

All this has happened in the movement throughout the Deep South, but the mass release of talent started in Mississippi. From a jail cell in McComb, in his early days in Mississippi, Bob Moses wrote to a friend about the "tremor" that was beginning in Mississippi—"a tremor in the middle of an iceberg—from a stone that the builders rejected." By 1964, it seemed that in the midst of an America grown sick with its own corruption and futility the stones that the builder had rejected were forming in Mississippi an embryo of a new society, one that was vital and young and challenging and that called forth the heroic and creative in those who dared to respond.

In a sense, this was happening because the Mississippi movement was withdrawing from the existing society. That essentially was what the freedom schools, the community centers, and the FDP represented—withdrawal from the white world and a setting up of new social, cultural, and political institutions.

Many movement people worried about this withdrawal. Was it not necessary, they asked, to come forth and confront the evil state? How long would people support the movement if it could not begin to crack the racist power?

In late August, 1964, there finally was a confrontation by the Mississippi movement—but not in Mississippi. It was at Atlantic City as the Freedom Democratic Party demanded that its delegates be seated at the Democratic National Convention instead of the regular Democrats from Mississippi. The confrontation shook not only Mississippi but an entire startled nation—a nation that had become used to thinking one could only go to the top through channels and that you can't fight City Hall, much less the Democratic National Committee.

The Johnson administration was shocked and frightened, for here for the first time in many years was a force in American politics that could be neither predicted nor controlled. Johnson wanted to mute the racial issue in the hope of avoiding showdowns that make elections hard to win. To Freedom Democrats from

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Mississippi, racism was a cancer and not an issue to be muted. They refused to compromise in their demands for seats—winning for themselves and for SNCC which supported them the fury of the Johnson administration and some more moderate civil rights leaders.

But they also won something else. They won a place in history as the first truly grass roots political movement this country has known in a long, long time. To the sophisticated it seemed almost a miracle because they had no big money behind them, no political power, and in the beginning not even the big names of the civil rights movement. Yet here were Negro sharecroppers from Mississippi, some of the poorest people in the nation, speaking to the country and making themselves heard. Support groups sprang up all over—and by the time the FDP challenged the right of regular Mississippi Congressmen to sit in the House of Representatives in January, 1965, they had more than one third of the nation's Congressmen voting with them. Little people in many parts of the country began to feel that if the sharecroppers of Mississippi could make their voices heard, then maybe they could too—and a new possibility of meaningful grass roots politics seemed to be opening up. "We have decided in Mississippi," said Mrs. Victoria Gray, an FDP congressional candidate, to supporters from all over the nation, "that it is time for people to quit reacting to power and start making power react to us."

There is no myth about the grass roots nature of the FDP, and its development is probably the single most important thing that has happened in the modern freedom movement to date. Here it is being proved that even in our complex society, which some have said must turn men into machine cogs and machines into men, little people can organize themselves politically to take control of their own destiny—in other words, that democracy can work.

The first major confrontation on the voting issue within the South, however, came not in Mississippi but in Alabama. SNCC started working on registration in Selma late in 1962. All efforts met stony resistance, despite federal suits. Meantime, the Rev. James Bevel and his wife, Diane, formerly identified with SNCC but now of SCLC, had taken up the Rev. James Lawson's idea of a non-violent army and had moved to Alabama to implement it. The army did not develop in this form, but the Bevels and other SCLC staff began to concentrate in the Black Belt. In January, 1965, SCLC moved into the area in force—in a conscious effort to dramatize the continued denial of voting rights in the Deep South. Sheriff Jim Clark of Dallas County made it easy for them, as had Bull Connor in Birmingham, and once again the evil of racism was brought

into the light of day. The result was the greatest upsurge of national support for Negro freedom that has yet been seen.

One by-product of the Alabama campaign was that long-simmering divisions between SNCC and SCLC began to get written about in the newspapers. There were vicious press attacks on SNCC, probably inspired by powerful forces starting with the White House and unfortunately possessed of some allies within the civil rights movement. These forces decided after the FDP challenge that SNCC was a threat to the political status quo and must be destroyed as uncontrollable.

Most of what has been written about the SNCC-SCLC divisions is distortion. For example, SCLC has been depicted as moderate and nonviolent, SNCC as wild and violent. This is falsification. Both SCLC and SNCC continue, as organizations, to espouse non-violent direct action as a means of social struggle; on the staffs of each of them are people with widely varied attitudes toward non-violence as a matter of personal philosophy and individual practice. Again, SCLC has been painted as responsible and more given to the long hard pull than to demonstrations, SNCC as a group of wild youngsters interested only in demonstrations for demonstrations' sake and not about "to pitch into the hard work of actually registering voters," as one columnist put it. This too is distortion. Many SNCC people did object, once demonstrations started, when Martin Luther King turned the march back as it approached the police line. But it was SCLC, not SNCC, that started mass demonstrations in Selma in 1965, and it was SNCC people who had been walking country roads for months, doing the tedious job of seeking out potential voters.

Despite these distortions, there are some real differences between SNCC and SCLC. The one basic dispute involves theories on the nature of social change. SNCC has held as a cardinal principle that the job of its staff is to help develop local people to be their own leaders. It has always resisted anything like a "great leader" idea. In SNCC's early years, it rotated the chairmanship at each meeting to avoid any one person becoming the personification of the organization. In late 1964, after Bob Moses rose to national fame as leader of the Mississippi movement, he left the state, changed his name and took up residence elsewhere to begin organizing anew. He told friends that the people of Mississippi must lead themselves and that with the image he had acquired he could only cripple them if he stayed.

This rejection of the great-leader idea reflects a disillusionment among the young with leaders of the past. It also reflects a conviction

that the only significant social action is what people do for themselves.

Within SCLC too there are people who try hard to develop local leadership. Nevertheless, emphasis on a single leader is inherent in the SCLC operation since it was built originally around King's person and personality. A fact of life is that King's name and presence galvanize a Negro community in the South. This may not be a healthy situation; it has certainly sometimes been a debilitating one, for many a movement has languished and died waiting hopefully for King to come lead it, and sometimes when he comes and then departs, a vacuum is left behind. But people who wait for King's presence want him because he attracts national attention and also because he inspires the people, as anyone knows who has sat in a Southern mass meeting while he speaks. King and SCLC did bring the Alabama Black belt into the national and international spotlight, something that SNCC, for all its hard work, was not able to do. Obviously, despite their difference, the two groups can in many ways effectively complement each other—and the forces which have tried to divide them undoubtedly know this. As of the spring of 1965, top leadership of both SNCC and SCLC were trying to minimize their differences publicly. No matter how much they might grumble privately about King, SNCC leaders were unhappy about students who spent a few days in Alabama and went home to make speeches, purportedly representing SNCC and attacking SCLC. Likewise, while King and other SCLC leaders might shake their heads privately over the tactics of SNCC, King apologized to John Lewis because a minister, purportedly speaking for SCLC, had publicly attacked SNCC. Both organizations know that a major split in the Southern movement could benefit no one but the racists.

For in the spring of 1965, the Southern freedom movement finds itself in the strongest position it has ever known. It has come a long way since those first SNCC organizers looked with coolness on the suggestion that they register Negroes to vote. The movement has turned political in a big way. This trend really started in earnest back in mid-1963, about the time it became apparent that the public accommodations battle would be won. But the political turn reflected more than that; there has been a qualitative change in the voter registration campaigns since 1961: then they were essentially the campaigns of the national administration into which civil rights workers were being drawn; by 1963 the campaigns were the movement's own. The change came with the realization that the Southern Negro could not depend on the federal government to establish his freedom for him.

The change also reflected a growing awareness within the Southern movement of the places in the world where colored people were taking over the reins of government. Interest in Africa, in particular, has been mounting. In the new African states, Southern Negroes for the first time saw black men not depending on concessions from the white man, but actually taking power. "Power" became a word that was used more and more in the daily conversation of civil rights workers.

More Negroes were running for office than ever before, and some got elected. The end of the county unit system in Georgia (which gave disproportionate political power to rural areas) and the reapportionment of state legislatures was giving more strength to urban areas where many Negroes were already registered. In the fall of 1963 SNCC leader Julian Bond said: "Which is more important, integrating a lunch counter or having four or five Negroes on the City Council where you can change all the laws?"

"Besides," he commented, "I agree with Dick Gregory that some of these Dixie towns aren't worth integrating."

In May, 1965, Bond himself won the Democratic nomination for state legislator in Georgia and is expected to win the general election. This will make him, at 25, one of the first leaders of the sit-in movement to win political office.

In 1965 in Selma, the Rev. James Bevel was saying: "We are no longer fighting for a seat at the lunch counter. . . . We are fighting for seats in the legislature."

The transition from the lunch counter was complete. Yet the road ahead was not clear. Some in the movement felt the vote drive was the real key. "Now we are going after where it's at—that's why they're so mad," said one SNCC staffer after the Selma drive. The active freedom movement was now concentrated in the Deep South—really in a few states, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, parts of Louisiana, and Arkansas, and mainly in the rural areas. Those who think this is "where it's at" maintain that once Negroes win the vote in the Black Belt repercussions will spread out through the state legislatures, the rest of the Southern states, the Congress and the nation, and that a general growth in democracy will follow. There seems some validity to this theory.

Yet many are not sure. The growing protest movement against discrimination in the North has had a profound effect in the Southern movement. Until a few years ago, there was a widespread naivete about the North among Southern Negroes and white Southern civil rights activists; many believed that it was only in the South that racism, discrimination, and segregation were major problems.

The growth of the Northern movement shattered these illusions, and it is impossible not to notice that in the North there are no barriers to keep Negroes from voting.

There are no barriers either in most parts of the upper South—nor in many cities even in the Deep South. Yet nowhere can it be said that basic problems have been solved. Many in the movement have become convinced that the vote is not the only key to a new society. Howard Zinn whose writings and teachings have influenced much of the student generation in the South put it bluntly in a speech to SNCC in 1963.

What do you tell people when you ask them to register and vote? Do you tell them, "I want you to register because that's really all that's missing. We have a beautiful working democratic mechanism here. The only problem is that you are left out of it." Well, I don't think this is an honest statement. I think it is truer to say, "If you register and if you vote, you will then have as much power as the rest of us, which is very little."

If freedom is more than a hamburger, the Rev. C.T. Vivian of SCLC once said, it is also more than a ballot.

But what, many people are wondering, and how do you get there?

5

BLACK AND WHITE TOGETHER?

The Southern civil rights movement has never been all-Negro, nor basically anti-white although sometimes it has come close to being both.

On the other hand, neither has it ever been more than tokenly integrated from the white side.

White opposition to racism, like Negro resistance to oppression, has deep roots in Southern history. The nation's first anti-slavery societies were formed in the East Tennessee mountains, and it was a white man from that area who went to New England and sold William Lloyd Garrison on the idea.

During the Civil War, many white Southerners fought with the Union. Tennessee, for example, had more Union volunteers than any other state. There are Southern counties which flew the Union flag throughout the war. These were in the hill country—as opposed to the flat rich lands with big plantations. It was people from these areas who joined with freed slaves in the Reconstruction governments. They were also the people who united briefly with Negroes in the abortive Populist movement.

By the time of the national ferment of the 1930's, with growing industrialization, there was a new white working class in the cities. Some of these people united, if but temporarily, with Negroes in early CIO efforts. There were also joint Negro-white tenant farmer unions. And, among middle classes and intellectuals, there was considerable activity against racial oppression. Later, in the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, white and Negro united in the beginnings of a real mass movement for change.

By the time the Negro upsurge started in Montgomery in 1955, however, there were very few white people working for civil rights in the South—just as, in the general paralysis of McCarthyism, there were very few people of any color anywhere in America doing anything about social problems. But two Southwide organizations did exist which were concerned with race relations and especially the white Southerner. These were the Southern Regional Council (SRC) and the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF).

That kind of action calls for much organization and commitment. But so does an armed uprising. The kind of nonviolent revolutionary action described here has been talked about often in the South; it has never really been tried. Whether the nonviolent movement in its present form is ready to try remains a question. But until it is tried, the question remains as to whether it makes sense, even in desperation, to talk about violent revolution.

To many watching and participating in the Southern movement—and contemplating a world which has brought itself to the brink of destruction by violence—it seems insane to scorn a course of action which may offer a way to achieve social change without death and destruction, especially when the varied possibilities of this method have only begun to be tried.

7

THE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

A Marxist making his first visit South a few years ago sat in on a meeting of young civil rights workers. Later he said:

I've been in many meetings but I never saw people quite like these. No heroics, nobody talking to hear his own voice, people listening to each other, willing to sit long hours until a problem is solved. We've read about how revolutions in other countries make a new kind of person out of those who take part in them. I always wondered if it was true. Now I know it is.

A Christian minister who worked in Albany, Georgia, during the movement there tells this story:

It was hot and stifling; they were crowding people into jail cells like animals. There were 30 women in one tiny cell, and all day they had nothing to eat or drink. Finally in the evening, a jail trusty slipped them a single glass of water. Nobody grabbed it, nobody gulped. Slowly they passed it among them and each woman took a sip. I've been in many churches where they held something they called the communion service, and it didn't mean a thing. To me, there in that jail cell, was the Holy Communion.

What the Marxist and the minister were commenting on, each in his own terms, describes the first and foremost accomplishment of the Southern freedom movement to date: it has created new people. Not all are saints, by any means, but they have been able to achieve a human level that is far beyond the norm in the society of the United States today.

The second solid accomplishment of the movement is that it has created a powerful social force, one of the few great mass movements in the nation's history. It has pulled great numbers of people together, made them a cohesive force, and shaken the country.

And the third accomplishment is that the movement has achieved virtually all of the specific goals it has thus far set for itself: It desegregated the buses; it opened the lunch counters; it eliminated all-white waiting rooms; it desegregated the restaurants, theaters, hotels, and other public accommodations; and now it is winning the

vote. Not all of these battles have been won everywhere, but in the main they have been achieved. This is something people who criticize the movement and stress its shortcomings forget. It has gotten everything it asked for so far. Maybe it has just not asked for enough.

When the thousands of freedom marchers entered into Montgomery on March 25, 1965, and walked through the streets where Montgomery Negroes live and then down Dexter Avenue to the state capitol of Alabama, suddenly there was dramatized all that is right and all that is wrong with the freedom movement.

Here where direct action was first practiced almost 10 years ago was the largest demonstration yet seen in the South for Negro freedom. Montgomery Negroes walked alone in 1955, but now on the same streets walked thousands from every corner of the nation, black and white, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and atheist, young and old. This was a movement that people were willing to travel thousands of miles and to die for if necessary. It was a movement they were willing to spend long hours in unsung drudgery for. It was a movement that seemed to harness all that was best in America, and it was powerful.

Yet, as they walked through the streets of Montgomery, the marchers passed mute testimony to the oppression the civil rights movement has not yet touched; for most of Montgomery's Negro population live in poverty, and many of the Negroes who came out to watch the march that day (and some to join it) came from dilapidated and primitive homes in the back alleys and the dirt streets.

It is not that nothing has been accomplished in Montgomery since 1955. The restaurants are open, hotels are open, the Greyhound bus station has only one waiting room, token desegregation has started in the schools—all things that 10 years ago many people white and black would have said were impossible in Montgomery.

But none of this alters the fact that the movement has not yet touched the things most Negroes need most: a decent place to live and the income to live adequately.

A Montgomery Negro leader, describing conditions there just a few months before the giant march, noted that if a Negro father was earning \$40 a week he was doing well. Jobs for Negroes above the menial level are virtually non-existent. Most working women are in domestic service, making \$16 to \$18 a week.

And these conditions, in varying degrees, are what prevail in Negro communities across the South—and in much of the rest of the country.

This does not mean the freedom movement has failed. It only means its work has just begun.

Now the question is how can it go on from here, how can the powerful momentum it has built be directed to solving some of the basic problems that plague society?

This is a question which alert civil rights activists are well aware of. For several years it has been the subject of discussion anywhere people in the movement meet.

"Of what advantage is it to the Negro," asked Martin Luther King, Jr. in his address to the 1964 SCLC convention, "to establish that he can be served in integrated restaurants or accommodated in integrated hotels if he is bound to the kind of financial servitude which will not allow him to take a vacation or even take his wife out to dinner? . . . What will it profit him to be able to send his children to an integrated school if the family income is insufficient to buy them school clothes?"

"What is at stake," Jim Forman told a meeting in the Alabama Black Belt early in 1965, "is political power. But it's more than political. It's economic exploitation. You make \$18 a week and the white man makes \$65 a week. So now we have to demonstrate, but we also have to organize. Like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. . . . You've got to hold these meetings where you can talk about economics and politics as well as your spiritual well-being."

The problems the freedom movement is up against are essentially the same problems that confront the whole society—only more so. The movement leaders know that too. It was King who also noted that although a greater percentage of Negroes than whites live in poverty, 78 percent of the nation's poverty-stricken families are white (by the government's measuring rod of an under-\$3,000-a-year income, which is unrealistically low).

Many people in the freedom movement also realize that programs like President Johnson's "war on poverty" are in the category of going to fight an enemy army with a pea-shooter. The new government programs may get a few jobless young men off the streets temporarily and into a Job Corps; they may do something toward providing pre-school training in slum areas, etc. But they are not going to change the basic conditions of men's lives. And as a matter of fact, unless people organize independently to exercise control over these programs and make them their own, these federal efforts are likely to become channels through which existing corrupt political structures can keep control of the very people who are supposed to benefit from them.

Something more basic is needed, and many active people sense

that too. SNCC workers at a 1963 conference heard one of the strategists of the nonviolent movement, Bayard Rustin, say: "When we asked for the right to ride the buses in dignity in Montgomery, we could—with a certain amount of social dislocation—get what we asked, because the seats were available. When we asked for the right to eat in a restaurant we could get that too, because there was room in the restaurant. But with jobs it's different. We are not going to get that which does not exist, and the jobs do not exist."

But despite such discussions—and there have been many of them—no one has yet found a way to bring to bear on these problems the tremendous power of the freedom movement.

In the absence of a program big enough to meet the needs that many sense, there are some obvious pitfalls that a social movement encounters. In the July, 1962, issue of *Harper's Magazine*, John Fischer, its editor, wrote a much-discussed article on what he called the need for a "first-class citizens' council" among Negroes. He said that the civil rights battle was virtually won (in 1962, he said this, no less) and that there was need for Negro leaders to recognize the great educational and cultural lag among masses of Negroes and do something about them. Although Fischer disclaimed such notions, the article definitely smacked of the idea that the Negro must "raise" himself to a certain level in order to "earn" the right to freedom. Civil rights leaders were infuriated and said so in numerous forums. Yet over the past three years, a rather curious thing has happened: the civil rights movement in some places is coming very close to doing what Fischer advocated. Tutorial programs in the slums, day nurseries for working mothers, youth programs designed to combat juvenile delinquency are very much "the thing" now both South and North. Often they are sponsored by civil rights groups; or people formerly active in civil rights work have drifted into them.

In the absence of any real change in society, such programs may be needed, but unless they are tied to an organized effort through which people can move to take control of their own destiny their value even to the individual affected is doubtful. For example, the freedom schools in Mississippi opened new horizons for many people because through them people found their way to the Freedom Democratic Party; this gave them a political voice in a movement that was trying to change the society that had thwarted them. A tutorial project in a slum, unrelated to any freedom movement, may be just a dead end, even for its participants. One of the most significant sociological facts that has come to light in the freedom movement is that wherever a direct action project has gripped an

entire community (from Montgomery to Birmingham) both juvenile delinquency and crime in the Negro community have fallen to virtually zero. People fighting for basic changes in their lives have a reason to live and a reason to learn. Can these drives ever be created artificially?

The Urban League is proposing gigantic government-sponsored development programs in Negro communities. But can such programs be truly meaningful when they are built from the top down? Those administering the present anti-poverty program claim they are trying to tackle this problem by involving "poor people themselves" in the planning at every level. But will this work when the impetus still comes from the top? Most of the development programs now being projected for Negro communities (and poor white ones) South as well as North are tied to the present power structure either through the federal government or through private foundations which are an integral part of that structure. Can any such program—or any person, no matter how well intentioned, working for that structure—really encourage people to organize to take control of their own destiny? And short of that kind of organization, can people ever win freedom and dignity, or even bread?

It is easy for socialists to resolve this dilemma by simply saying that the answer obviously is socialism, and maybe it is. But to say just that is not enough either. People who advocate socialism need to come up with some specific answers to specific problems the freedom movement faces.

For example, what does socialism suggest as an answer for the Negroes in the Mississippi Delta? In addition to terror from the white man, they face a situation in which agricultural machines do the work now and their manpower is no longer needed; yet if they move to the cities—North, South, East, or West—they are not needed there either. And what about the people in the cities? Nobody likes slums, but nobody likes urban renewal either, for it tears down the slums and puts the people out—and where can they go that is any better? What would a socialist system do in this situation? What would a socialist system do about the growing ghettos of the South—as white people flee to the suburbs and Negroes stay confined in the inner city (as in the North) and the schools resegregate?

Socialists somewhere are probably discussing these questions, but such discussion seldom penetrates civil rights circles. In its 1963 summer issue, *Studies on the Left* published an article entitled "Socialism: The Forbidden Word," by Staughton Lynd, one of the most profound thinkers who is writing about the movement. His

thesis was that the years of McCarthyism had so stifled discussion in this country that most people feared to talk about socialism or had never heard enough about it to be able to talk about it intelligently. He said that not only the civil rights movement but other social movements were reaching a dead end because of this lack. He proposed that the concepts of socialism be dusted off for normal conversation and given an airing again.

Today the word "socialism" is not quite so forbidden, and one often hears it on the lips of some active young people in the freedom movement. But the years when it was forbidden took their toll. Many who claim they want socialism cannot really define it. They are disgusted with the way things are, they are against the "establishment" that exists—and socialism, somewhat mysterious and still somewhat forbidden fruit, seems like a good thing to be for. This is still not a program, and not the kind of concept that a sustained movement can be built around.

Furthermore, as a result of the years when discussion of socialism was considered almost treason, many intelligent people (including many in the freedom movement) are sincerely convinced that socialist answers cannot be applied without imposition of a new kind of slavery. Those who believe otherwise and advocate socialism need to initiate discussion and debate as to how exactly they propose to establish a socialist system.

One of the healthiest things about the Southern movement, especially the student part of it, is the way in which it has encouraged grass roots leadership and independent thinking on the part of people in the various localities. SNCC organizers, for example, make almost a fetish of their determination not to impose their ideas on a community. Because of fear that the "intellectuals" will control those without formal education, there was even recently a proposal that no one with more than an eighth-grade education be allowed on the SNCC governing body. This didn't pass, but it indicates the mood. With this kind of atmosphere it is utterly unthinkable that any socialist with complete blueprints for the new world could impose his ideas full-blown on the Southern movement.

But what could happen is that more socialist ideas could get into the general atmosphere, more socialist answers to specific problems of the South into discussions large and small. This would surely be all to the good, for it would stimulate discussion of the basic nature of our social order and what needs to be done about it. As and when various ideas on that question permeate the movement, people will take hold of them, refine them, adapt them, make them suit their needs. What finally emerges might very well be some-

thing new and different from the precise answers of traditional socialism—and it could be better.

No one need think it is going to be smooth sailing to open up free discussion of ideas like socialism. There are many pressures to encourage continued silence. One must look at the last 20 years whole: the anti-Communist hysteria of the postwar period, the investigations, the jailings, the lists, and the restrictive laws were all part of a pattern created by people who do not want things to change and do not want control of society to slip out of their own hands. It was for this that they silenced the country. The Negro revolt, starting in 1955, broke through this silence simply because the craving for freedom could not be stilled. The forces that want to maintain the status quo could not stop this revolt, so they moved to contain it; they have tried to dilute it, divert it, satisfy it with concessions before it forced an overhaul of the entire society.

When he was the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy said a revealing thing during mass demonstrations against segregation in 1963. He said that racial problems in the South were easier to solve than those in the North because the demands were simpler—open public accommodations, etc.—and that these things could be granted and a "valve released." The day when it was that simple has now passed, and the same forces that created a witch hunt 20 years ago can be expected to revive it now—and indeed they are doing so. They cannot undo the last 10 years, they cannot destroy the freedom movement, but they can try to divide it and they are trying. The new attacks on SNCC and the Freedom Democratic Party are part of this. The silence of some supposed liberals in the face of plans by the House Un-American Activities Committee to investigate the Ku Klux Klan along with what they call "extremism" in the civil rights movement (the "plague on both your houses" approach) is another manifestation.

All of this is to be expected. As Jim Forman says, "We are trying to take their power away from them; you expect to be hit in the head." The question is whether enough people will see through the subtle atmosphere of fear created by the banning of words and concepts like socialism, will see the need to break through the fetters this time and bring such concepts out into the open sunlight so that all ideas can be examined, will see the need to look for the causes as well as the effects of second-class citizenship, will see that when you set up forbidden areas of thought you choke off all creative thought and thus surround your movement with a maze of dead-end streets.

There are also internal pressures in the movement that discourage serious consideration of ideas like socialism. The most ac-

tive and militant people in the South, especially the young people, tend to shy away from big concepts and what they may consider proposals for final answers.

The most committed young people who go into social action today tend to prefer projects where they work closely with a relatively small number of people. They like to teach in a Southern freedom school, or organize councils of the unemployed in a Northern slum. Their object, they will tell you, is to find and develop local leaders, to help these people find themselves and organize to establish their own control over the decisions that affect their lives.

When Howard Zinn told the 1963 SNCC conference that they must face the fact that even the ballot would not give people much power, the solution he offered was to build up what he called "centers of power outside the official political mechanism" able to exert pressure on the social structure, and that is exactly what SNCC has been busy doing. All of this makes for a very healthy grass roots movement. But if you ask the people who are busy building these "pockets of power," as some SNCC people call them, what their ultimate goal is—just what "decisions that affect their lives" the people they are organizing are eventually going to be called on to make—many of them would rather not talk about it.

Partly this results from the organizers' fear that they will try to force their opinions on the people they are working with. It also reflects their rejection of most of the established social reform movements in the country. Young activists who take this position (and there are great numbers of them) tend to have no use for what they call "coalition politics."

The proponents of "coalition politics" within the civil rights movement favor an alliance among the civil rights organizations, labor movement, church and so-called liberal forces to bring economic changes in the country. Bayard Rustin advocates something like this—and some young people who say that contact with Rustin or his ideas was the first radical influence in their lives now consider him a conservative force. SCLC tends to lean in the coalition direction—although some younger people on the SCLC staff reject it, as do many more among SNCC workers. In the view of these people, the groups with which the proposed "coalition" is suggested are themselves a part of the corrupt system and cannot therefore be allies for the building of something new. These young people prefer to start from scratch, with grass roots people who can shape their own forms for political and social change.

Yet many of them, after rejecting the possibility of an alliance with existing groups to work toward broad social goals, go on to reject

establishing any broad goals of their own. So their refusal to give serious consideration to answers such as socialism reflects also a basic distrust of big solutions. Perhaps they acquired an unconscious sense of caution by hearing tales of an older generation of radicals who staked their lives on a belief in the perfectibility of man under socialism and then were cruelly disillusioned when perfection did not come. Or perhaps they reflect the mood of a generation that has been told so long about how complex is the world they live in that they no longer want to look at it all in a piece. We have here the paradox of a strange sort of cynicism in some of the most idealistic people one can imagine. They seem to feel, although many don't articulate it, that there probably are no big answers to society's problems, and that one must accept this, that the most an individual can do is build something creative and democratic in the corner that he can see and be a part of. This is not the thinking of everyone in the active Southern movement, but it is more prevalent than many people suppose; and it is, to one degree or another, the thinking of most of the people who are working the hardest and sacrificing the most.

One can admire their commitment, one can agree that the building of "pockets of power" is tremendously important. But is it ultimately enough? You can talk about new values and a new society, but some day don't you have to spell out the shape of it?

Is it possible that the moral fire of the freedom movement can yet be merged with a clear vision of a new social order for the nation? Is it possible that the great dream of human dignity can yet be tied to some hard and real understanding of economic systems and what they do to men? Is it possible that the passion of the freedom movement for the development of the individual can yet be combined with an overall plan that can hold a hope of freedom for all people? Is it possible that the determination of the young people to place power on a base of grass roots democracy can be achieved along with a rational economic order? Is it possible that enough people can glimpse such visions to mount a great crusade for them?

It may well be, to paraphrase the poet, that all of this is "not to wild a dream as those who profit by postponing it pretend."