

RH
Wilcox
D521

POLITICAL EDUCATION PROJECT
--associated with Students for a Democratic Society
room 309, 119 Fifth Avenue phone GR 3-7274
New York, New York 10003

presents:

THE MARCH
ON
FRANKFORT

A STUDY IN
PROTEST -
ORGANIZATION

JIM WILLIAMS is director of PEP and an at-large member of the SDS Nat'l Council. He was an organizer of the March On Frankfort and participated in the subsequent Hunger Strike.

The Roots of Negro Discontent

On March 5, 1964, 20,000 Negroes and whites assembled in Frankfort in a mass demonstration to demand a state public accommodations law. Not since the 1930's, when the Worker's Alliance rallied 10,000 unemployed workers, had the capitol city seen such a demonstration.

What brought these people to Frankfort? Why was such a demonstration needed? How did the concurrent Hunger Strike develop? What were the results? To get these answers one must go back four years to the city of Louisville.

The fall of 1960 and the spring of 1961 saw large demonstrations in Louisville by Negroes for the integration of public facilities. Hundreds of students and adults were arrested as a wave of sit-ins, stand-ins and picketing took place. These were the largest demonstrations to occur anywhere in the South during this and unequalled until much later in the development of the rights movement.

This mass unrest led the city to form a Human Relations Commission, which soon developed a city-wide public accommodations ordinance enacted into law; the city soon developed a national image as a liberal and progressive oasis in the South. The foundations for this image had been established in 1957, when Louisville's school system integrated rather peaceably; this picture received only a slight set-back during the demonstrations, largely because of the gentleness of the arresting officers.

Though the race problem was temporarily assuaged in Louisville, the rest of the state remained largely unyielding and segregated. As the Negro revolt spread throughout the nation, even the remotest areas were sparked into expressing their discontent.

When the March On Washington clearly demonstrated the existence of mass national support for a Federal civil rights bill, returning Kentuckians expressed interest in working for a state bill in the near future. The most vocal person at this time was Frank L. Stanley, Jr., the editor of the Louisville Defender and an NAACP leader. In an article in the Defender which appeared in the second week of September, Stanley announced that he would initiate the campaign.

It is important to note that growing Negro discontent was evident in Louisville at this time. The Public Accommodations Ordinance's enforcement section had been declared unconstitutional, and deeper issues were causing unrest. Negro unemployment was disproportionately high, reaching an unbelievable 39.8% ! The murder of William Lee Moore in Alabama, the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi, and the events in Birmingham climaxed by the foul murder of six Negro children did much to awaken an apathetic Negro population. Other factors, such as the extreme pressures being put on the Negro poor in the city by urban renewal did a great deal to develop new interest in direct action.

Thus, a situation developed in which the Negroes and their leaders were under internal and external pressures necessitating some solutions.

What directions did the Negro movement take? What was the response of the white community to new demands?

The answers made history.

Early in 1964, an ad hoc delegation of some 20 persons visited Kentucky Governor Edward T. Breathitt to determine his attitude to a possible state public accommodations bill. At that time, Governor Breathitt told the delegation that he would work for a state bill, if the federal bill had not passed 15 days before the state legislative term ended.

Subsequently, this delegation returned to Louisville and began to develop a formal structure which would build public support for such legislation. The delegation formed itself into the steering committee of a new organization called Allied Organizations for Civil Rights in Kentucky (AOCR), and began bringing together a broad coalition of civil rights and liberal groups to work together specifically for a state public accommodations law. About 40 organizations affiliated with AOCR, including labor, religious, community, student and civil liberties, as well as civil rights, groups.

The Chairman of AOCR was Frank L. Stanley, Jr. Stanley, a graduate of the University of Illinois with a master's degree in business, was a relatively young man, only 27, and the editor of his father's newspaper, the Louisville Defender. He was one of the major leaders of the 1960-1961 demonstrations and was, for the most part, considered the voice of the Negro community.

The Co-Chairman of AOCR, the Rev. Dr. Olof Anderson, Jr., was the Executive Director of the Louisville Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of the United States -- the southern branch. Dr. Anderson is also active in other liberal causes. Generally, he had the respect of a large segment of the white community, and had always been a supporter of civil rights on a moderate level.

Another important person was Eric Tachau, an insurance executive, who served as chairman of the Finance Committee of AOCR, and as its Treasurer. Mr. Tachau, throughout his career, had repeatedly demonstrated liberal sentiments, and had the added advantage of being a member of the business establishment.

The Reverend Father John Loftus, Dean of Bellarmine College, also served as Secretary of AOCR. Fr. John's support of civil rights was widely known in the community and his support of AOCR (permitted by the Archbishop) indicated the approval of the local Catholic bureaucracy for civil rights.

A further recitation of the membership of the policy bodies of the AOCR would be a listing of the prominent Louisvillians who support civil rights. The membership of the three main policy bodies (Steering Committee, Executive Committee and Advisory Committee) will be included later.

All the leadership did not come from policy bodies, however. Staff persons played a very important role in the organization, often making policy in the process of day-to-day work. The principal staffer was Mrs. Jasper Ward, who served on the Steering Committee and as Administrative Director in the office. Mrs. Ward lists herself organizationally as representing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which is led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. (The letterhead of the SCLC does not list Mrs. Ward as a Kentucky representative.) Mrs. Ward was distinguished politically by active membership in the Jefferson County Young Democrats and as a Chandler supporter. Although Mrs. Ward was noted in civic affairs, she considered herself a "housewife" and untutored in running a bureaucracy.

Other important office people included Mrs. Georgia Davis, Office Coordinator, Mr. Charles Hammond, a former President of the Jefferson County Young Democrats who served as Media Secretary, and Bruce Anderson, a teacher at Shawnee High School and NAACP Executive Board member. Mr. Martin Karp, a commercial photographer, served as State Organizer.

These people, in practice, were responsible for the efficient functioning of AOCR, and this necessarily gave them a part in the making of policy -- at least in the sense that their advice was usually heeded.

It is important to note that many hundreds of people assumed positions of leadership in their own communities around the issues raised by AOCR. This upsurge of grass-roots leadership was perhaps the only saving quality of AOCR. Many persons took not only their first step in civil rights, but also their first step in leadership.

The functioning of the AOCR also held lessons in how a pressure group operates. In its beginning stages, AOCR began to connect the varied organizational threads which composed it, and recruited the support of new organizations -- specifically large segments of the white community. It concerned itself with getting people to write letters to their representatives, with getting their church, community and labor organizations to pass resolutions supporting public accommodations; and organizing and urging individuals to travel to Frankfort to see representatives. This is often the usual pattern of most pressure groups and, in these areas, the AOCR is acting within the orthodox framework of pressure politics.

However, this situation was not to remain static. AOCR, as a civil rights organization, could not long remain separated from direct action.

While all pressure groups have certain common methods of operating and the same general philosophy of how one influences one's government, each pressure group has certain specialized patterns which are suited to a particular problem and to a local situation.

This is immediately obvious when observing civil rights pressure techniques. Insofar as they are directly political, civil rights groups have a tendency toward mass demonstrations, picketing and other direct action techniques. The techniques of mass action take on a whole new aura as Herbert Garfinkel, in his book on the first Negro March On Washington explains it:

"However entreating the official words (e.g. in the Bonus March of 1932), a march carries a tone which is the opposite of supplication. One marches to Washington, rather than "sends a delegation"; one demonstrates rather than "holds a meeting"; one demands, and does not "request" or "resolve"; the participants are not "delegates", "negotiators" or "leading citizens", they are masses. The activity is a movement of direct action, and not a "conference". The proposals usually are demands in the form of slogans for agitational and propaganda value more than concrete plans for the remedy of a specific problem. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the immediate demands of such movements are not the real purposes of the activity. The demonstrat-

ion seeks its justification in the strength of its communication as a radical symbol rather than in the attainment of a particular goal."

We can see that marches and mass demonstrations have purposes other than direct appeals to authority. They serve a two-fold purpose: educating the public at large to the plight of the Negro, heightening the participants' conceptions of political action, and developing their political consciousness. Thus, when a person, however sympathetic, comments that marches and demonstrations don't solve anything, he will have a hard time convincing Negro friends of this since they have proven results in hand.

While these methods are often used by Negro protest groups, they are not confined to these groupings alone. Many different types of organization have used them; e.g., the Washington Action Project conducted by student peace groups in 1961 involving 5000 students, and demonstrations by such groups as the Workers' Alliance in the 1930's.

The politics of civil rights have a distinctly Gandhian tinge. Many Negro leaders speak of nonviolence, not merely as a technique for gaining political ends, but as a way of life. This attitude of nonviolence permeates every activity of the civil rights revolution. A handbook on nonviolent methods lists "benchmarks" of nonviolence:

1) Violence Renounced. Both violence and the spirit of violence are forsaken. Martin Luther King has said, "Don't ever let them pull you down so low as to hate them."

2) Truth Seeking, Truth Speaking. Nonviolence seeks honesty; clear expression and communication between opposing parties.

3) Constructive Solutions. A constructive solution is a mutually satisfactory solution. Nonviolence is not merely the absence of violence, it also seeks the presence of justice. If at all possible, it leaves the opponent a face-saving way out.

4) Direct Action. Action must be directed against the immediate evil, deviousness and subterfuge are not consistent with this approach.

5) No Retaliation. Evil must be resisted -- but not by more evil nor by resentment.

6) Willingness to Suffer. Those who participate in nonviolent direct action projects must be willing to suffer, if need be, rather than inflict suffering or to retaliate.

7) Reconciliation. One using the nonviolent way does not seek to humiliate his opponent, but seeks understanding and friendship."

Virtually all civil rights groups use these axioms in one way or another, and it is perhaps a little strange to the ear of the orthodox political analyst to hear politics discussed in such eschatological terms. But many of the leaders of the Southern civil rights movement are either ministers, ministerial students or active laymen -- the church and Christianity holds an immediacy for them that is difficult to express. Neither the theology of the Neo-Orthodox (as expressed by Niebuhr) nor the social gospel (as expressed by Rauschenbusch)

is wholly relevant in explaining these things.

For a movement which exalts such high-blown ideals, the civil rights movement is unique in that it seems to adhere to them fairly well, which is unheard of in this day and age.

Seeing these axioms and analyses, it is then possible to approach the organizational development of the AOCR.

On the evening of February 27, the Executive Committee held the historic meeting which determined the policy for the March On Frankfort. It was there that the Executive Committee was first presented with the well-worked out plans for the March, and their ratification was gained for the plan. (It is noteworthy that while the Steering Committee was responsible to the Executive Committee, in practice the Executive Committee merely served as a ratifying body.)

The debate lasted about three hours, and the plan for the March was adopted. The white people present who spoke were in whole-hearted support of the march. Fr. Loftus was especially insistent, and said that "white people have held the Negro back for the last 100 years and it's time for a change."

Many of the Negroes had reservations. The Rev. Austin Bell of Henderson, Ky. was particularly concerned about the participation of white people. He felt that the March should have at least 50% white participation. He felt that 50,000 Negroes marching alone would have no effect. Mrs. Alicia McAlpin, however, ventured that 50,000 people of any color marching would produce a result. Finally, Mr. Lyman Johnson, President of the NAACP, gave the March his imprimatur and so the Executive Committee approved the March without any reservations.

Thus, the machinery was set in motion. An organizational plan, laid out largely by Martin Karp, gave a month's detailed organizational activity for every local unit to follow. The decision was made to keep each local march committee totally under the centralized control of the AOCR office and all policy decisions were handed down from the top. The purpose of this tight structure was "to eliminate factionalism on the local level", according to Bruce Anderson, who explained the organizational details in conjunction with Mr. Karp. The Plan was to begin functioning on February 9th. It was felt that in order to "screen out wine-heads with guns," a great deal of time must precede the actual March, in order to allow a proper screening process. Each week of planned activity would tend to eliminate the danger of the unexpected.

The following Tuesday night, a group of field organizers, some from the University of Louisville, were given areas in the state to organize, the Covington-Newport-Carrolltown area, the eastern Kentucky coalfields, to operate in, the University community in Louisville, etc. Each organizer went out on weekends to encourage these communities and to see that the plan was being properly implemented. This was a relatively inexpensive process which brought immediate results. The organizing process was not without its frictions and set-backs, but, all-in-all, was conducted surprisingly well for an amateur organization.

The organizational process extended all over the state to Negro communities in areas which have never experienced civil rights activities, such as the coal fields and the western tip of the state. It was hoped that these isolated communities would be encouraged by the March to participate in more activities when

they returned.

Though AOCR was manned by inexperienced people who often demonstrated a lack of organizational sense, by March 5th, 20,000 persons assembled in Frankfort for the largest demonstration in Kentucky's history. The program lasted about three hours and included such notables as Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, Jackie Robinson and Martin Luther King.

Attendance figures are still debatable. The state police originally estimated 30,000 but were apparently ordered to cut this figure in half.

The Governor was visibly shaken by the demonstration, and seemed anxious to negotiate a compromise bill. Frank Stanley and the AOCR leadership were inflexible at this point, and refused compromise, an overestimation of the effects of the March.

There were, at this point, two civil rights bills in the legislature. One, a model bill prepared by the State Human Relations Commission and introduced by Rep. Norbert Blume of District 43, Louisville, and Senate bill 27, introduced by Sen. Shelby Kinhead of Lexington. The latter a much milder and vague bill than the Blume bill.

Governor Breathitt, in his statements to the press, announced his support for the Kinhead bill--which he felt had a better chance to pass in the legislature.

In the next few days, however, it looked as though neither bill had much chance. Both were bogged down in the House Rules Committee. AOCR agreed to drop the Blume bill and to settle for a strengthened Kinhead bill.

The AOCR leadership saw the need to dramatize the situation. Yet, what step to take? Another March was out of the question, it would be impossible to organize in so short a time. An ordinary picket would likewise be undramatic. It was finally decided that a hunger strike would be held in the House Gallery.

On March 16th, 23 hunger strikers entered the House Gallery wearing signs saying "Give Me Freedom Or Death." They announced that they would not leave until one of the civil rights bill had been passed. Frank Stanley told the press that, "We are demonstrating nonviolently...to impress on this legislature, our Governor and the people of Kentucky the urgency of public accommodations legislation now--not two years hence--but now." Governor Breathitt said that the strikers could remain as long as they were peaceful and did not damage property. By Tuesday, the number of demonstrators had risen to 32.

18 Negroes and 14 whites fasted throughout the final week of the legislative session, living only on water. Stanley acknowledged when questioned, that the fasting technique was borrowed from Gandhi. "If Gandhi--one man--by fasting and passive resistance could move the British Empire, then 32 ought to have some effect on the Kentucky legislature."

The week was an event-filled one. Two of the demonstrators collapsed and had to be hospitalized, and hundreds of well-wishers came from all over to sit with the demonstrators. An even larger number of letters and telegrams came to the demonstrators expressing sympathy and concern. By this time, it was clear that Kentucky, and the nation, was being stirred up by the fast. Senator John Sherman Cooper spoke out in favor of the fast in the U.S. Senate, and newsmen converged on Frankfort from all over the nation (the strike was page one news in the New York Times!)

Repeated attempts to get the bill on the floor failed--were beaten by the segregationists and their supporters. Blume made attempts to attach the bill as a rider to another bill and to get the whole House to overrule the Rules committee. Both measures failed.

By the 20th, Blume admitted legislative defeat and did not make a further attempt to pass a bill. He did, however, severely castigate the Assembly for its "hypocrisy" and failure to support civil rights.

However, this presented problems for the Hunger Strikers. They were publically pledged to "Freedom Or Death", but privately pledged to stay through Friday. How were they to save face?

Naturally this caused a great deal of debate among the strikers. Some actually wished to stay until death! Another grouping was satisfied to leave, provided some face-saving device could be worked out--while still another felt that some other type of action--such as the actual disruption of the legislature by a lie-in was call for.

By late afternoon, a meeting with the Governor had produced a face-saving out. Governor Breathitt agreed to issue a statement saying that he would call the entire General Assembly into session after the Federal Civil Rights Bill has been passed. Breathitt also lauded the courage and good behavior of the demonstrators. With this concession in hand, the demonstrators left for home at the close of the session.

The effects of the strike are still being felt. Wide-spread support was aroused all over the state--even to the point of sympathy demonstrations in places like Maysville, Kentucky, which had never before experience demonstrations.

The strikers themselves were unanimous of the need for reform of the legislature and the need for political action to elect good civil rights candidates. A direct upshoot of this action was the entrance of one of the strikers, Mrs. Margaret Riley, into the Republican primary and of state representative Norbert Blume into the Democratic Congressional primary. Many of the persons who supported AOCR moved into the Blume camp and are working actively for him.

Many of the former AOCR staff people joined the Blume forces. This is perhaps an example of the direct effect of the AOCR campaign.

As for AOCR itself, it is lying dormant at this point. Only one person mans the AOCR offices and its main activity is paying off its debts. Very likely AOCR will cease to function altogether, since its nature is ad hoc.

Eugene V. Debs is quoted as having said, "No strike is ever lost." And this is probably the most encouraging thing about the AOCR campaign, the fact that hundreds of persons were trained in grass roots political insurgency. Thought the campaign failed this time, next time the amateurs won't be so amateurish and perhaps they'll win. In the meantime, democracy gained.

The AOCR experience is an excellent example of ad hoc pressure politics and its study will add considerably to one's knowledge

IN RETROSPECT

Although almost a year has passed since the March On Frankfort and the Hunger strike took place, one is still nagged by the question: "Why did they fail?" It is far enough removed from us to be able to venture an educated guess. These reasons seem to be valid:

1.) Labor support, while overt, actually was not really forthcoming. Many labor unions joined AOCR, passed resolutions and etc., but few unions really pushed the March. This was true on the legislative scene where the labor legislative representatives did little to push the civil rights bill for fear of losing needed support for labor legislation. (Incidentally, labor took a terrible beating in that session--pointing out the need for allies.) More labor support could have conceivably been the key to the situation.

2.) The Negro Organizations were led by concious middle-class professionals who had little grasp of the feelings of the Negro masses, little regard for their needs and even less actual contact with them. It was characteristic that the Negro leadership were always ready to substitute form for substance. Thus, the March had 15,000 Negroes who were largely middle-class and divorced from their own poor. (The shrewd Kentucky legislators knew this, I think.) The lack of Negro organization amongst the working class was later demonstrated when Norbert Blume, who had fought so bravely for the civil rights bill, failed to receive the large vote he needed in the Negro districts in the Congressional primary.

3.) The next failure was a lack of coalition sense. Few leaders really grasped the significance of the need for Negro-Labor-Liberal coalition, and the lack of coalition-oriented people among the leadership of these groups was a hindrance to the type of unity that would have produced victory.

If a coalition sense had prevailed and the roots of a real coalition had been formed, then the demonstration of 20,000 would have been much larger and more representative and would have shaken the political machine to its roots, since such a coalition would have indicated that it had the political power to overthrow the old regeme and elect a new, progressive one.

The presence of 15,000 Negroes would not have meant that 15,000 apolitical Negroes were concerned, but that 15,000 vote getters were standing there threatening to overturn racism. The presence of Labor in a real way would have meant that the votes of 1,500,000 AFL-CIO members were hanging in the balance. The groups of white liberals would have taken on a new significance--since they would no longer be isolated from the masses of working people and Negroes--but would be active political allies.

The coalition does not form by itself. It is often difficult for unions to develop more than a "trade union consciousness", and for Negro groups to see beyond piceting and marching. Only when people are activists in the Negro and Labor movements, and work side-by-side with them in the everyday battle, who have their confidence, begin to agitate and educate for coalition, will such a new alliance develop. Those persons who divorce themselves from the mass actions today cannot presume to have the ear of those whom they would influence.

LITERATURE FROM P. E. P.

JOHNSON WITH EYES OPEN by Robb Burlage

1 Issued before the election, this paper is still relevant as a discussion of Johnson's history and style of politics. The paper includes most of Johnson's congressional voting record. 10¢

THE MARCH ON FRANKFORT: A STUDY IN PROTEST ORGANIZATION

by Jim Williams

2 A discussion of the attempt to organize popular pressure for a state civil rights act in Kentucky in March, 1964. Detailed account of how the March was organized and how the hunger strike was conducted by a participant. 10¢

3 ROAD BLOCKS IN CONGRESS an illustrated folder on congressional reform published by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, AFL-CIO. Good for community and general distribution. free

4 THE EXTREMISTS an illustrated pamphlet on the Ultra-Right issued by the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education. Good for community distribution. free

5 WE SHALL OVERCOME --REGISTER AND VOTE colorful poster depicting the Negro upsurge for freedom, has Negroes marching, chains breaking, etc. Produced by AFL-CIO COPE. free

6 THE NEW LOST GENERATION: JOBLESS YOUTH by Mike Harrington. Reprinted from the N.Y. Times Magazine. Deals with unemployment among teens and working youth. free

7 A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY POLITICAL RESEARCH by Arthur Waskow. Tells how to determine the ripeness of an area for rapid political transition. free.

READY SOON:

Toward A New Coalition by Steve Max and Doug Ireland

The Times of Fiorello LaGuardia, by Margie Wasch

The Noel Day Campaign by Dave Smith

Beating the Buckley Machine by Monte Wasch

POLITICAL EDUCATION PROJECT, ROOM 309
119 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY. 10003

Please send me the following:

1. ___ / 2. ___ / 3. ___ / 4. ___ / 5. ___ / 6. ___ / 7. ___ enclosed is \$ ___

NAME _____ SCHOOL _____

STREET _____ TOWN _____ STATE _____