

THE MEANING OF ALBANY

By A. J. Muste

What seems to have puzzled quite a good many of CNVA's supporters is that the "action" in Albany was not simple and restricted to a simple, fairly specific objective. Race, peace, civil liberties, court action, noncooperation, fasting, all these and more were involved.

This is a March directed at the relations between the United States (and Canada) and Cuba - Latin America. It was supposed to reach Miami by Christmas. Mid-January it is still in Albany, Georgia, but not "bogged down" as some may think, not out of contact with Cuba. For the other evening listeners in the U.S. caught Radio Havana broadcasting at length about the experiences of the Peace Marchers in Albany. They had spoken to Cuba and Cuba was responding. It may well be that the way into Cuba, about which there had been speculation among us, has thus been opened.

C N V A of course stands for integration. In fact, several members of the Committee are taking a decisive role in the struggle for racial justice. In the South the March had to be integrated. It would have been "dishonorable" for believers in nonviolence, as one of the Marchers put it, not to identify themselves clearly, unmistakably, with racial equality, on the ground that their cause was "peace." As they moved into Georgia, "deep South," the fact that white girls and Negro men walked side by side tended, for many Southerners, to blot out everything else, and so there was the horror of police brutality in Griffin, Georgia several weeks ago. But the fact that "peace" people, "peace-niks" were beaten and reacted nonviolently but did not flinch or give up, gave to multitudes of civil rights workers and Negroes a new idea of the cause of "peace" and established a link of common action and suffering that has made the "cause" of peace and the "cause" of civil rights one in a way that could hardly have been accomplished otherwise.

The March resumed, weathering arrests and jail in Macon, the hysteria following the Kennedy assassination, and police threats in Atlanta. It proceeded in relative quiet for a couple of weeks even through sensitive territory such as Americus, Georgia.

Then the Marchers reached Albany a day or so before Christmas in the season of peace on earth and good will among men. In Albany the Peace Marchers were in truth nonviolent but they were firm on the point that the March must be free to proceed through main streets where they would be seen and people who wished could accept their leaflets - which are never forced on anyone. In Albany, where authorities and police were relatively sophisticated and did not resort to overt violence, the Marchers could not compromise on what seemed a small point.

(over please)

For Albany had been the scene of an aborted civil rights movement many months before, where hundreds upon hundreds were thrown into jail and the civil liberties of people violated wholesale. When you encounter - as Peace Marchers - an instance of this arbitrariness which has so largely immobilized the civil rights movement for months, you cannot brush aside that tyranny and you cannot leave it to others, the Negroes, to continue to suffer under it. You must face those who exercise tyranny, and you must lovingly say NO and take the suffering upon yourself.

This is why the Peace Marchers reacted as they did. In prison they mostly refused cooperation. They fasted. They expressed a political and a profound spiritual revulsion against the whole complex of racist attitudes and institutions, and said with their bodies and souls that there can be no peace either, unless racial injustice and inequality are removed. The way must be open in Albany, Georgia for the nonviolent struggle for civil rights, or it is an illusion to think that it is open to struggle against war.

If, on the other hand, civil rights workers and others have by chance regarded Cuba and Latin America as a side-issue, then the sudden eruption in Panama a few days ago may remind them that it is the Latin-American situation which might trigger nuclear war or at least precipitate reaction in the United States and thus stymie the civil rights struggle.

Basically, a relevant movement today has to be revolutionary in relation to racial equality and the renovation of the economic order. Similarly, a movement which seeks to deal with such issues will have to be one which turns its back on war and develops a nonviolent spirit and strategy. This is what our Peace Marchers in Albany have said.

PLEASE SEND MONEY: You will want to do so to express your appreciation to the Peace Marchers for the sacrifice they have made on behalf of us all, and for the creative relationship they have developed between the civil rights and the peace movements in Georgia. Money is needed also to speed them on their way presently to Cuba, now that the importance and the critical nature of our relations with the people of Latin America has again been vividly high-lighted by the recent eruption in Panama.

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