

A NEW DIRECTION AND THE KEY TO FREEDOM
THE SCHOOL BOYCOTT, MOULTRIE, GEORGIA

HERMAN KITCHEN

The major reason for the local people to want to put the boycott into effect at this time was to correct the inadequacies and deficiencies that exist at William Bryant High School. These deficiencies are: insufficient heating, buildings substandard and condemned, lack of any laboratory equipment, lack of enough and up-to-date textbooks for all students, lack of enough teachers and lack of well-qualified teachers, inadequate walkways and drainage of school campus; no accreditation of Bryant High; not enough classroom space or desks to accommodate all students; too-high pupil-teacher ratio. The reason why the school is not recognized by the accreditation association is because the content of the education they receive at Bryant will not produce pupils that will qualify to enter a college or other institution of higher learning because of the above reasons. Also, they know that the county is getting \$201,934 from the federal government for use in upgrading Colquitt County schools, and they are now trying to create a legal block to prohibit or stop that money from coming into the schools on a segregated basis. The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlaws such discrimination in the application of federal funds, and this is the legal basis for the action.

HISTORY

For the past few months, Isaac Simpkins and I have been working on research and organizing the community. People wouldn't work with me at first, because I had to find out what they were really interested in doing. And it turned out that the kids wanted action to improve the high school. It has lost its accreditation, its buildings are condemned and substandard, the school is overcrowded: student population is 744 in a school designed to hold 500; there aren't enough desks or books, and just 26 teachers for 744 students; the campus is a sea of mud.

We talked to the kids about a boycott, after having mass meetings with kids and parents about ways to correct the situation. A boycott was the remedy we came up with. Tuesday, 2 Feb., I had a meeting at Friendship Baptist Church with about 20 kids and 4 parents. We talked about immediate action and made plans for it to correct the deficiency of the school. These few people wanted to push the boycott, and I told them that it wouldn't be effective unless they could get at least 50% of the students to participate. In light of this, I told these 20 kids to serve as messengers the next morning, to tell all the other kids that there would be a general assembly meeting in the main hall. This was only a strategy used to see what percentage of the kids would push the boycott. The results were overwhelming. By 9:30, there were more than 300 pupils in the hall, singing freedom songs and demanding to have a general assembly so that they could really find out from the superintendent and principal the facts about why the school was off the accredited list, and what the community could do to get it back on. They were refused such an assembly, as they had been countless times before. So the kids spontaneously started a sit-in in the halls. In the afternoon, more than 500 kids left the campus of Bryant High, and assembled in Friendship Baptist Church, to make plans for the boycott.

By Thursday, 4 Feb., it had developed into a full-fledged boycott, and later into a protest march on the courthouse square downtown. When the kids returned to the school, the police were called, and sixty

There are three lines of approach now open. Acceptance of the school board's "concessions" (the leaders of the Progressive Movement are running scared and are trying this; the kids reject it); the march and fill the jails approach (Rev. Smith of Albany who has become a sort of unofficial chairman, supports this); and the send the kids back to school and go through the courts and the state board of education approach (a few of the sncc staff support this). I firmly oppose sending the kids back to school. Along with attorney C.B. King of Albany I have been getting certain pieces of legal information from lawbooks authorized by this country's government, discovering that such laws have not been complied with by the local, state, and national boards of education, and no overall efforts have been put forth to make sure that these laws have been enforced.

The police department sent notices to key parents in the community, stating that they were violating the Georgia truancy law, which says that all children between the ages of 7 and 16 must be enrolled in and attend a public or private school on the days that such a school is in operation in that county. On the following day, the parents that received these letters and their children went to the superintendent's office to get applications so that their children would be admitted to Moultrie High, the only high school recognized by the accreditation associations in operation in that county. So the kids were not admitted to Moultrie High, the all-white high school, and could not go back to Bryant, because it was unsafe and the content of their education there would not help them. So I set up Freedom Schools. In several of the Freedom Schools I was concerned with getting them information that would continue their education, and they would not be put behind education-wise. And I am hoping to have placement tests given to them when they go back to schools, so that the time they spent during the boycott will not affect their promotion.

The local departments have plainly refused to admit Negroes to the white high school, and it is apparent that separate schools have never been and never will be equal when discriminatorily run, as at present, or when run fairly, if such a thing is possible. The kids have every right to stay in Freedom Schools, because they have no other alternative. CBKing is now in the process of getting an injunction against the local board for its discriminatory practices.

WHAT THE BOYCOTT MEANS TO ME AND TO THIS COUNTRY

A? Correct the deficiencies of Wm. Bryant. The school board and superintendent have promised to spend \$10,000 to help get the school back on the accredited list. This will probably be used to pay the

salaries of additional teachers, and there will really be no money left over for anything else. This is a start, though a poor one. They promised \$2,000 for 157 new desks, which won't really supply the need in the school. They've promised to give \$200 for new library books, which is said to be the amount needed to reaccredit the school. They've promised \$4,000 to blacktop the campus, which won't even pave a small room. Asphalt paving isn't worth a damn anyway. The board's research team checked on the heating system during a 72 degree day, with the heating system turned up as high as it would go, and said the school was overheated and didn't need a new system. I sincerely agree. What they need is new buildings.

B. I feel that we have challenged the myths of our society. This country spends too much money on foreign aid, allies overseas, and in missile programs which have been robbing the high-school graduates that this country produces each year of their right to the best education that this country can and should provide for its people, which means that countless thousands of diploma-holding people are drifting around in America, who will not be accepted by a college or other institution of higher learning until they undergo makeup work. This above factor has been crippling our country in the fields of science, education, and human relationships. In light of this, I feel that the federal government should be awakened to this fact, and this is my basic interest in ushering the school boycott, because it is dramatizing this fact and opening legal doors to solving and abolishing this problem, and during the time that I am using the Negro citizens and their town as a stage to set these different existing factors out and show this country that they have not enforced laws that would have already guaranteed that these schools be up to certain standards. I constantly ask myself which is more important, pacifying the present needs or guaranteeing that these existing needs be abolished in the future. In light of this, I strongly feel that we, sncc, must create physical and legal blocks to help open the eyes of our nation. We sncc can no longer work in the direction that we have in the past. We have overlooked the fact that originally started this organization, and that is the utilization of students. I think we should draw a line right here and evaluate the things that we have accomplished in trying to correct the social handicaps and try to discover means to mobilize people and to get them to see, through a working relationship, that they depend on each other to fertilize this country's future welfare. We are no longer fighting black against white in America. We are now fighting this corrupt system, which governs our lives. That means the only way we can correct this handicap is through united efforts, black-&-white together, in rearranging the laws of this country, and guaranteeing ourselves in this way that they will be enforced. We must remember one thing: the laws in this country are supposed to be made by our people and for our people. Though I'm not overlooking the thing that's separating our people. That too is a system: segregation. But I firmly believe that through a working relationship, people working together learning to love and respect each other, this problem can be dealt with. And to guarantee that this happens, I've been having ministers meeting, black and white ministers together, to establish human and race relationships because I believe that Christianity is the base of what we are really fighting for. I'd like to leave with the staff two questions. 1. What part does religion play in the reconstruction of Tomorrow? 2. Which is more important, to give our energies toward

pacifying our present needs or toward establishing guarantees that these existing problems be abolished.

I feel that the schools and education can be used to mobilize people in Georgia the same way the FDP does in Mississippi.

I feel that sncc, sclc, and other civil rights organizations have been doing more harm than good. I know that in the mind of 99% of the Negroes born in this corrupt society based on that one dividing line, segregation, there is only one thing, and that is to correct that great wrong that he feels has been done to him, and while trying to correct this social disorder he, the American Negro, is doing more harm than good. And these are the reasons that Sncc and other civil rights organizations were formed. But those organizations have been doing more harm than good. Because you are only trying to meet your immediate needs and not taking time out to evaluate the kinds of programs that can solve our problem. We have been really mobilizing a wall, and that wall is hate. We are removing the wall of hatred from the mind and the Negro's world through legal action. Which means that we are forcing the segregationist to accept us in, and through court action. That is okay, because it gives us a guarantee that these things can and will happen. But it is still not the way to solve and abolish the real problem. The place that the American Negro gets the will to fight is through his heart and mind. This means that the people we are fighting are storing in hearts and minds the same fight, and the battle has not been won when the Negro gets his freedom in a court room, but has started all over. Unless we take time out and come up with a new program of work geared at winning hearts and souls, through Christianity or some overall law that practices love and brotherhood.

A Band of Brothers and a Circle of Trust is the key; but we as an organization have not and cannot practice this in a free manner, because that same society has corrupted us also, though we realize that we are byproducts of it. In Moultrie in the next few months I am going to try and implement this. Through meetings with white ministers that I have contacted I am going to try and apply my new discovery. I know what the staff problem is. I know why we spend days at national staff meetings everytime to come up with a new structure and a new direction. The sncc that you know is old, and there has to be a new kind of sncc. I will try to help you see this new direction by the kinds of things I engage myself in in the future. I hope you can see these new alternatives I am going to give through Moultrie. As an organization you have slowed up my progress by withholding funds and resources. I am going to set up my own contacts and raise my own funds. I am also going to try to get the federal government to adopt this new direction of change. And I won't have to depend on you people sncc for anything. Because they are supposed to be working for the people and by the people, and they, the government, must see their mistakes too.

I need people qualified in the following fields, which sncc must work in:

1. voter registration and voter education.
2. freedom schools.
3. legal action committee.
4. political action committee.
5. human relations committee.