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Behind the Hostile Press Campaign Unleashed by the Election of Stokely Carmichael

SNCC DOES NOT WISH TO BECOME A NEW VERSION OF THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

We hope white liberals will not be taken in by the press campaign against the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee since Stokely Carmichael succeeded John Lewis as national chairman. White sympathizers with the Negro have to keep several things in mind. One is that in any movement the leverage exerted by the moderates depends on the existence of an extremist fringe. The second is that a certain amount of black nationalism is inevitable among Negroes; they cannot reach equality without the restoration of pride in themselves as Negroes. The third is that this cannot be achieved unless they learn to fight for themselves, not just as wards of white men, no matter how sympathetic. SNCC is reacting against a new version of the White Man's Burden.

Fresh Approach to Southern Politics

No white man really knows what it is like to be shut into the ghetto. "The Negro," as Martin Luther King said in a vivid phrase on CBS Face the Nation May 29, "is still smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of the very affluent society." For the white sympathizer, the struggle against the ghetto is an act of philanthropy; for the Negro, it is a battle to save himself, not just from poverty but from a corrosive self-contempt. The ghetto dweller distrusts the white SNCC worker. Mr. Carmichael's idea of recruiting black SNCC workers from Northern ghettos is psychologically sound. His idea of using white SNCC workers to organize the Southern poor white to the point where joint action between white and black becomes possible opens fresh perspectives in Southern politics.

The wonderful white boys and girls who went South in the past few years helped to thaw out the Negro from political deep freeze. But now that the battle has shifted from the simpler symbolic acts of sitting at a segregated lunch counter or in a segregated waiting room to the harder and more complicated tasks of winning economic and social equality, the job will have to be done by Negroes themselves. These are not tasks for a summer adventure in between classes. They can only be accomplished if Negroes are mobilized to carry on for themselves. In such areas as the Black Belt, where the Negro is a majority, this means seeking majority rule and that means Negro majorities. Otherwise the Negro is at the mercy of a white minority. In Loundes county, Alabama, for example, where the Negro third party, Black Panther movement, originated, the white Sheriff has deputized every white man over 21. To be a deputy is to have the right to carry a gun, and to have a kind of hunting license to shoot Negroes.

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This is the background against which one must read Carmichael's statement, "We feel that integration is irrelevant; it is just a substitute for white supremacy. We have got to go after political power." He asked an audience in Washington last week-end, "How are you going to integrate a sharecropper making \$3 a day with a plantation-owner making \$20,000 a year?"

Some people were shocked by Mr. Carmichael's angry remark, "We want quality education, not integrated education." But here I believe he expresses the reaction of Southern Negroes to the bitter experience of integration. The Wall Street Journal (May 26) carried a story, "The Invisible Wall" on the ostracism and the humiliation visited on those few Negroes who have often literally risked their lives to get into white schools. Many are leaving. This frightened handful in white schools only distracts from the need for first rate education in Negro schools. This is just as true in the North where Negro schools are segregated by the flight to the suburbs. Only by improved schooling can the Negro be fitted to compete as an equal in a hostile white world. To dismiss this as Negro nationalism is neither fair nor perceptive.

Of course the main reason for the campaign against SNCC is the statement it issued refusing to take part in the White House Conference on Civil Rights which convened as we were going to press. "Our organization," it said, "is opposed to war in Vietnam and we cannot in good conscience meet with the chief policy maker of the Vietnam war to discuss human rights when he violates the human rights of colored people in Vietnam."

High Ratio of Negro Combat Troops

This speaks the unspoken thoughts of many Negroes. The war is an affront to them. The proportion of Negroes in combat troops Joseph Alsop reported May 25 was "running above 20% in the average infantry company, because Negro recruits, with a lower average of technical skills, are less likely to be assigned to one of the technical specialties." The ratio in combat units is thus almost twice the Negro's ratio to population. The same discrimination that deprived Negroes of education puts them into the front ranks of battle in a struggle supposedly to preserve abroad a democracy denied them at home. How can they be blamed if they, like so many Vietnamese, see this as another white man's war?

But the main point, as Dr. King expressed it on TV, is that the war is wasting the money and the energy which can alone rehabilitate the Negro and bring him fully into the American community. Dr. King sounded very radical when he said this would cost \$10 billion a year for 10 years. The Vietnamese war already costs more than that, and the price will rise as it escalates. Is it any wonder SNCC feels bitter?