

STATEMENT BY  
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., PRESIDENT  
SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE  
OCTOBER 14, 1966

WE FULLY FACE THE FACT THAT THE NEGRO IS POWERLESS AND THAT IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR HIM TO AMASS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER TO REACH HIS LEGITIMATE GOALS.

I HAVE, HOWEVER, STATED IN MANY PLACES AND MANY TIMES THAT CONNOTATIONS OF VIOLENCE AND SEPARATISM ATTACHED TO THE BLACK POWER SLOGAN MUST BE RESOLUTELY OPPOSED BY THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE.

WE FOUNDED OUR ORGANIZATION ON PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE AND NEGRO UNITY WITH ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL. WE FOUGHT THE HISTORIC BATTLES OF BIRMINGHAM, SELMA AND MONTGOMERY WITH THESE TOOLS.

OUR NONVIOLENT ARSENAL ALSO HAS BROUGHT US OUTSTANDING VICTORIES IN OUR OPEN HOUSING STRUGGLE IN CHICAGO. WE WON VICTORIES OUR PEOPLE FOUGHT FOR A CENTURY AGO UNDER THIS BANNER IN HEAD-ON CONFRONTATIONS WITH SOME OF AMERICA'S WORST RACISTS.

OUR MOVEMENT IS THE MOST MILITANT AND MOST EFFECTIVE IN CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES. THE NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT HAS NEVER RESORTED TO VIOLENCE OR SEPARTISM. WE ARE JUSTIFIED, THEREFORE, IN REAFFIRMING ADHERENCE TO OUR FOUNDING PRINCIPLES ON BOTH MORAL AND PRACTICAL GROUNDS.

WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN FURTHERING ANY DIVISIONS IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, EITHER WITH THOSE WHO ADVOCATE LESS MILITANCY OR THOSE WHO FEEL THEY ARE MORE MILITANT. WE STAND CONFIDENTLY ON OUR RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND HOPE TO CONVINCED ALL THAT THE METHODS WE ADVOCATE ARE THE SUREST ROAD TO FREEDOM AND HUMAN DIGNITY.

TRADEGY HAS MANY FORMS. AMONG THEM COULD BE THE NEEDLESS HARM OF A JUST CAUSE BY AN EXTREMISM WITHIN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT THAT RIVALS THE EXCESSES OF ITS OPPONENTS.

IN THE INTEREST OF CLARIFYING PRINCIPLES, WE BELIEVE A GENERAL STATEMENT OF PROGRAMS FOR THIS CRUCIAL PERIOD OF TRANSITION IS NECESSARY AND ALSO WILL BE ILLUMINATING.

AMERICA'S GREATEST PROBLEM AND CONTRADICTION IS THAT IT HARBORS 35 MILLION POOR AT A TIME WHEN ITS RESOURCES ARE SO VAST THAT THE EXISTENCE OF POVERTY IS AN ANACHRONISM. THE MOST DISADVANTAGED OF AMERICA'S POOR ARE NEGROES WHO ARE TWICE HACKLED. THE NEGRO IS THE MOST ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BECAUSE OF A CASTE OF COLOR.

SURROUNDED BY AN HISTORIC PROSPERITY IN THE WHITE SOCIETY, TAUNTED BY EMPTY PROMISES, HUMILIATED AND DEPRIVED BY THE FILTH AND DECAY OF HIS GHETTO HOME, THE MANHOOD OF THE NEGRO COMPELS HIM TO DEMAND FAR REACHING AND IMMEDIATE CHANGES.

WHAT LITTLE SOCIETY HAS YIELDED THUS FAR IS SO UNSATISFACTORY, NEGROES LIVE WITH UNENDURABLE FRUSTRATIONS.

THE ANGER OF MANY NEGROES HAS DRIVEN THEM TO PASSIVE CYNICISM TOWARD SOCIETY, FOR OTHERS IT HAS EXPLODED IN VIOLENCE. THESE IRRATIONAL REACTIONS CANNOT BE MET BY PIOUS LECTURES. THE ONLY JUST AND MORAL RESPONSE FROM THE LARGER SOCIETY IS THAT THE CONDITIONS WERE CREATED BY MEN AND CAN BE REMOVED BY MEN. IT IS NOT THE NEGRO WHO IS ON TRIAL, BUT WHITE SOCIETY, BECAUSE IT ALONE HAS POWER.

IN FACT, "BLACK POWER" IS A REACTION TO THE ABUSES OF WHITE POWER. THE NEGRO IS NOT MOVING TOO FAST, HE IS BARELY MOVING. IT IS WHITE SOCIETY THAT IS STATIC AT A TIME WHEN SOCIAL CHANGE IS IMPERATIVE.

I MIGHT ADD THAT IT IS A FALSE ASSUMPTION THAT THE SO-CALLED WHITE BACKLASH IS CAUSED BY THE SLOGAN "BLACK POWER". ACTUALLY, THE BLACK POWER SLOGAN HAS BEEN EXPLOITED BY THE DECISION MAKERS TO JUSTIFY RESISTENCE TO CHANGE.

SCLC'S NEWEST AND MOST URGENT PROGRAMS ARE:

1.) TO ORGANIZE THE POOR IN A CRUSADE TO REFORM SOCIETY IN ORDER TO REALIZE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. WE WILL JOIN WITH ALL ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS, THAT HAVE A COMMON PURPOSE. THESE GROUPS WILL INCLUDE MAJOR CHURCH DENOMINATIONS, CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, JEWS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS BODIES.

ALSO IN THIS ALLIANCE ARE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONS, OTHER CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, AND MAJOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES OF THE NATION'S ACADEMIC COMMUNITY.

IN THIS REGARD, WE INDORSE THE A. PHILIP RANDOLPH FREEDOM BUDGET WHICH SEEKS TO ATTAIN THE MOST DECISIVE FORM OF SECURITY, AND AN ADEQUATE GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME. THE FREEDOM BUDGET MAY BECOME A WAR CASUALTY. IT WILL CERTAINLY BE ARGUED THAT THE NATION CANNOT AFFORD WEAPONS AND WHEAT. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT AN ARGUMENT FOR POSTPONING RACIAL JUSTICE---IT IS AN ARGUMENT FOR ENDING THE WAR.

2.) WE SEEK A RECONSTRUCTION OF YOUTH THROUGH MEANINGFUL TRAINING AND EDUCATION. WE EXPRESSLY AFFIRM THE NECESSITY OF EMERGING PROGRAMS FOR NEGRO YOUTH ON A MASSIVE SCALE. IN AN AFFLUENT SOCIETY THERE IS NO MORAL OR ECONOMIC EXCUSE FOR WASTING A SINGLE ADDITIONAL GENERATION AFTER CENTURIES OF CALLOUS NEGLECT.

3.) WE AFFIRM THE NECESSITY FOR POLITICAL REFORMATION OF THE SOUTH. IN THE SOUTH, POLITICAL RACISM IS ASCENDANT, AND IN THE NORTH IT IS MERELY THINLY DISGUISED.

THE SOUTH IS THE PRIVILEGED SANCTUARY AND BASE FOR AMERICAN RACISM. FROM THIS REGION, THE POISON OF RACISM HAS SPREAD OVER THE ENTIRE NATION. WHEN RACISM IS UPROOTED, ALL AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS WILL BE CLEANSED. AT PRESENT, THE POWERLESS MORALITY OF THE NEGRO CONFRONTS THE IMMORALITY

IN THE SOUTH NO LESS THAN IN THE NORTH NEGROES MUST ATTAIN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE IN PROPORTION TO THEIR NUMBERS. ANYTHING LESS, PERPETUATES SECOND CLASS CITIZENSHIP.

IT TOOK LESS THAN 20 YEARS FOR AMERICA TO FREE ITSELF FROM BRITISH COLONIALISM AND TO ADOPT THE CONSTITUTION. IT SHOULD NOT TAKE 200 YEARS TO FREE THE NEGRO. AMERICA'S PRIDE IN ITS HERITAGE IS DIMINISHED BY ITS REFUSAL TO FACE THIS PROBLEM HONESTLY AND PROMPTLY.

THE QUESTION OF POWER IS NOT AS COMPLEX AND OMINOUS AS IT HAS BEEN MADE TO APPEAR. THE VAST MAJORITY OF NEGROES SEEK ONLY TO SHARE POWER IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT A COMMUNITY IN WHICH NEITHER POWER NOR DIGNITY WILL BE BLACK OR WHITE.

IN 100 B. C. CICERO SAID: "FREEDOM IS PARTICIPATION IN POWER." NEGROES DO NOT WANT ALL POWER BECAUSE THEY WOULD THEN DEPRIVE OTHERS OF THEIR FREEDOM: BY THE SAME TOKEN, NEGROES CAN NEVER BE CONTENT WITHOUT PARTICIPATION IN POWER.

AMERICA MUST BE MADE A NATION IN WHICH ITS MULTI-RACIAL PEOPLE ARE PARTNERS IN POWER. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF DEMOCRACY TOWARD WHICH ALL NEGRO STRUGGLES HAVE BEEN DIRECTED SINCE THE DISTANT PAST WHEN HE WAS TRANSPORTED HERE IN CHAINS.