

THE WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE AND THE "GREAT SOCIETY"

THIS SUMMER WILL witness the convening of another White House Conference on Civil Rights. The official theme of this one is "To Fulfill These Rights" and it is a follow-up to President Johnson's speech at Howard University last year.

In preparation for the coming Conference, the top White House planners are putting on strong pressure to make it, what they call a "how to do it" conference. This is meant as a substitute for any real discussion of principles and ideas, and is a way of avoiding a confrontation with certain harsh realities.

Among these realities which has so caught up the Johnson-Humphrey Administration in a web of contradictions is America's current military involvement in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. The Johnson Doctrine of policemenhip over the struggling colonial peoples of the world is a racist-colonialist policy. Consequently, it is a policy which is in fundamental conflict with and opposition to any genuine fulfillment of the long-overdue rights of Negro Americans.

Especially are our youth made to feel the full weight of this policy. Too often they cannot find jobs, have no money to pay for a college education, and as a consequence face a choice of being drafted or volunteering for the Armed Forces as an escape from going hungry in the streets. For many, Vietnam is their graveyard.

So, the millennium has not yet arrived, even though the impending White House Conference may prove to be the largest in history. We all know that the size of a conference does not alone determine its content or significance. Ever since Booker T. Washington's day, from time to time, Negro leaders have been called to conferences at the White House, not for the purpose of fundamentally solving the multiple problems of a racist society, but to keep up appearances that there is a genuine dialogue between the black population and the political spokesmen for the white power structure.

As for other areas of related concern, there has never been a serious governmental effort to eliminate poverty in our country—even though America has had the industrial base and material capacity to do so, since at least the 1920's—nor is Johnson's "Great Society" program, as yet, a serious effort to end poverty. It is an exercise in tokenism—part of the general strategy of the announced intention to "get the Movement out of the streets" while attempting to hold the black voter, the unemployed and others within the political confines of that rather unique trap—called the two-party system. And while some leaders of the Freedom Movement are making the minimal demand that there be *no cutbacks* in Federal money for anti-poverty programs, it should not be overlooked that it is Johnson himself who is advocating "economy" at the expense of public health and welfare programs.

As long as Congress is voting the Pentagon and other sections of the Military Establishment a total of \$50 billion every year, the "Great Society" can never be anything more than mere phrasemongering; empty gestures toward a dream deferred.

NO SUPPORT FOR RACIST WARS; let that be the theme which guides the deliberations of the delegates to the White House Conference. It provides a *principled* basis upon which constructive programs to meet such urgent needs as Jobs, Housing and Education can be designed and implemented.

In summary, the kind of massive mobilization of the nation's resources required to overcome generations of oppression and injustice leaves no room for diverting billions of dollars into fruitless, unjust wars overseas. Furthermore, our Freedom Movement stands for a higher morality than the distorted "equal right" to help police the colored colonial peoples of the world, which the Johnson-Humphrey Doctrine advocates. Only a politically independent, well organized, grass-roots movement with its own determined program to eliminate poverty and racism in America can begin the fundamental reconstruction necessary to create a Great Society and "fulfill these rights."

Only to the extent that the gathering in Washington is utilized to further that objective can it be regarded as a purposeful occasion.

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THE EDITORS.