

PROGRAM COORDINATOR'S REPORT FOR THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

August 13, 1968

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Rev. Bernard LaFayette, Jr.

SCLC maintains and perpetuates the philosophy and strategy of non-violence; and even in the face of racial strife and tension between the black community and white community and the rabid violence that plagues our nation, we have been able to successfully carry out and maintain a nonviolent campaign.

In spite of the incidents on the part of the police in Washington, D. C., and as our campaign journeyed to Washington, and sometimes incidents among our participants, we were able to suppress violence and elevate and project nonviolence.

This campaign, more than any other campaign, came at a very crucial period, and we experienced for the first time acts of violence halting our demonstrations, as it were, in Memphis, Tennessee. And even though we were temporarily stopped, we were able to continue and restore our nonviolent posture.

Our whole strategy is to focus in on a particular problem, organize direct action around that problem by mobilizing the people, preaching them into direct action demonstrations. These demonstrations serve to increase mobilization and win support by getting people to discuss these issues, to confront themselves and the power structure. This challenges people to find different ways in which they as individuals can make a contribution toward the elimination of the particular social problem,

and it also challenges them individuals, members of organizations and institutions to withdraw from participation in systems that create or sustain the social ills.

Also, by focussing in on a particular, specific problem our organization has been better able than any other to relate a specific problem to many and varied evils in the social system which need correction.

In terms of making poverty the issue, these are some of the accomplishments:

1. The Campaign spread from an initial ten cities and five states to draw participants from among red, black, yellow, brown, and white poor people and supporters from each of the 50 states.
2. In the area of welfare, the planned inhumane "freeze" on federal aid to dependent children has been delayed, the Supreme Court has voided state laws which would require an unemployed father or husband to abandon his family before they could receive assistance, the Congress passed the open housing bill, and amounts exceeding \$5 million dollars have been appropriated to help the poor.

More food is being made available through commodities, food stamp, school lunch and free food programs for those in destitute conditions.

3. Politically, we have been able to get the support of the mayors of 22 of the nation's largest cities, several Congressmen have introduced legislation to help the poor, others have worked with us in interpreting the needs of the poor to their colleagues, city and state governments are looking at and experimenting with new and more creative ways of working with poor people, and for the first time poor people participated in the National Convention of the Republican Party.
4. The response of the nation has been gratifying. The poor have become visible and are no longer ashamed to speak and act in their own interest. Over 350 local and national organizations have pledged support as sponsors of the campaign. Tens of thousands joined the residents of Resurrection City in a mammoth demonstration of national solidarity.

Many churches and other organizations have developed or are in the process of developing new programs to eliminate poverty. Others are joining outstanding individuals in contributing funds to support such activities.

Heretofore hidden practices of exploitation and discrimination are being exposed to the scrutiny of a shocked populace. The extreme differences between the subsidy payments to the rich and the welfare payments to the poor are cases in point.

5. There were no major outbreaks of violence in the cities as long as the confrontation was existing in the nation's Capitol.

It is clear that none of these occurrences would have taken place except for the Poor People's Campaign.

Midway the campaign, we narrowed the focus from poverty and related problems to that of hunger specifically, which is seen not only as a national, but an international issue to which the people of the world must respond.

As we continue this campaign and our ongoing programs, our projections for the future include plans for developing a continuing education program for staff members including both field and office personnel.

All departments and personnel have been instrumental in bringing about the gains of the Campaign so far, and we are both grateful and expectant as we continue.