

SIM CHICAGO NEWSLETTER

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"The Crisis Period" is written by S. J. Beagin, graduate student in Ethics and Society at the Divinity School, University of Chicago. The second report is by Bruce Christie, SIM intern with the SCLC in Chicago and student in Chicago Theological Seminary.

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"The Crisis Period"

As all theological students know, a crisis has two sides. On the one hand the moment of crisis carries the possibility of destruction or judgment. At the same time, the crisis is a moment in which new possibilities are opening before history—that is, in every crisis there is a possibility for new creativity. Some interpretations of the movement of history require both sides of the crisis not only as possibilities but as necessary actualities. Real judgment has to take place in order for the creation of new things to emerge from the crisis moment.

I mention this Galtmanian point, for it appears relevant to the present developments in Chicago churning around the SCLC and the movement. A dating for the beginning of the "crisis period" would be the release of Archbishop Jody's request for a suspension of the street demonstrations. Let us spend a little time with the Archbishop's statement and related happenings and then try to set the "crisis" in the context of SCLC overall strategy. The creation of a crisis ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~in the parts of the power structure~~ ^{is} ~~to the necessary table~~ and such a crisis is, then, to be viewed not with alarm but with a certain, tentative sigh of relief that a long sought and important stage has been reached. (You sigh but at the same time you take in a deep breath with which to fortify for the coming days and possibly weeks of intensive activity.) The analysis offered here sees the crisis as a creative potentiality and interprets certain developments—such as the Archbishop's statement—as symptoms of the inner crisis confronting the power structure.

The Archbishop's statement calling for suspension of the demonstrations was released on Wednesday August 10. Just prior to his statement activity in the marches had been building up, and the publicity concerning the marches was increasing even faster than the marches themselves. At a mass rally on a Monday, August 8, at the Action Center, on Warren Avenue, a new height of excitement was generated by the naming of Bogan and Cicero as new target areas. (The last SIM Newsletter re-

port was written on Tuesday, August 9, following that mass rally, and tried to interpret that mood.) A great deal of confusion existed as to whether the speakers had actually said the marches would go to Cicero and Logan at a certain time, or had only mentioned that there would be marches continuing and that Cicero and Logan would be future targets for the marches. Whatever actually was said in the rally, the papers concluded and printed that marches that week would go into these areas. As was mentioned in the last Newsletter, these two communities are considered hotspots of potential violence.

In the demonstrations this summer, there has been more threat of violence than actual tragic violence. Bricks, bottles and cherry bombs have been thrown at the marchers by jeering crowds that keep step alongside, and numerous projectiles have reached their mark; but fortunately the injuries in most cases have been slight. No one can deny that the threat of irremedial violence is ever present.

Against this background of determined marchers and hostile reaction Archbishop Jody's statement was released to the press. Jody reiterated the position of the Church in regard to racial justice. "I have urged our priests and religious to preach in season and out of season the Christian doctrine and American ideal of the brotherhood and equality of all men. Some of our people have criticized these actions. A few have even raised veiled threats of non-support for church institutions because of the message of love which we have been carrying. Nonetheless, we have remained true to our calling and to our nation, with the help of God, we shall never waver in this commitment."

Jody had sent a fine statement of support for the Chicago Freedom Movement to the initial mass rally on July 10, at Soldier Field. From the pulpits of Catholic churches throughout Chicago, the archbishop's support had brought to the attention of the congregations. The majority of the marches that have taken place since July 10 have been in neighborhoods where the percentage of Catholic residency goes as high as 80%. The negative response that these people have given to the marches has staggered Catholic leadership. "A few have even raised veiled threats" is a generous understatement. Threats to withdraw support and membership have been open and numerous.

According to reports, very few of the parishes have tried to meet this hostility in a constructive way. Most pulpit remarks have been calls for law and order. Isolated parishes have mobilized their resources to try to reach the people and to probe the real source of the problems. But, if the reports are accurate, these efforts are disappointingly few. (Just to keep the remarks balanced-indications are that the protestant churches have been no more, possibly less, creative than the Catholic parishes on this score. One pastor has even accused the "open housing" marchers of violating one of the commandments in "coveting his neighbor's house"!

Jody's August 10 statement continued with a description of the purpose of the marches and then a supportive line about their right to march: "The right of such groups to march and

demonstrate is in itself beyond question.... Those who seek to deny this right by either threats or violence are clearly in violation of the law and morally blameworthy.

"This being said, it now appears that a new dimension has been added to the marches and demonstrations in the Chicago area.

"Because of the shameful reaction of some to the exercise of basic freedom of our land, representatives of government, the police, and many other responsible groups are convinced that if the marches and demonstrations continue in the manner in which they have been proceeding, the result will very likely be serious injury to many persons and perhaps even the loss of lives.

"In view of all this, it would seem that the leaders of the civil rights movement are themselves confronted by a serious moral obligation, namely, that they prayerfully reconsider the methods now being employed to achieve their altogether just and laudable purposes... It is truly sad, indeed, deplorable, that citizens should ever have to be asked to suspend the exercise of their rights because of the evil-doing of others. However, in my opinion and in the opinion of many men of good will, such is the situation in which we now find ourselves.

"Therefore, with a heavy heart, I would call upon the leaders of the Chicago Freedom movement to take counsel among themselves and with their supporters concerning the continuation of marches and demonstrations at this time."

The Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago which maintains its independence within the diocese and this year for the first time elected two priests to its Board, released a statement expressing disagreement with the archbishop's position. For the priests and nuns of the area who had been taking part in the demonstrations it is a difficult time. Many of them went into retreat to consider the Archbishop's words and their decision. Apparently the statement has the status of a directive to the churches which leaves the individual free to decide whether to continue participation in the marches.

One further word of background may add understanding to the Catholics' dilemma. Selma was a significant event for Chicago Catholics. According to reports, with Selma the Catholics of Chicago came alive to the full dimensions of the Movement. The Catholic Interracial Council was active in developing support and encouraging priests and religious to join the Selma march. Some even go so far as to suggest that it was partially in gratitude for this support that Dr. King made his decision to come to Chicago and lend impetus to the Movement here. Involvement in the Freedom movement in Selma has had significance beyond the limits of civil rights, for it was a freeing experience in communal relations as the varying faiths prayed together, marched together, and practiced inter-communication. The theology of non-violence became a first-hand exposition of Christian faith for many of the participants. These aspects of past involvement should help us to understand the seriousness with which the Catholic faces his decision about continued participation in view of the Archbishop's statement.

In closing his request, Cody called upon the Realtors, and other community groups to correct the situation that led to the demonstrations. He then called upon the civil authorities to convene a meeting between the realtors and civil rights leaders to resolve the crisis.

This statement from within the Catholic church was the first public sign of the strain building up in the power alliance that holds Chicago together. Other indications rapidly followed that the pressure of the demonstrations and the violent response to the marches was being felt throughout the power system. The business community feels the impact of the bad image projected of Chicago. The politicians are sensitive to increasing pressure from the reaction to the demonstrations. The political intent of the marches was rather subtle for a while. No one pointed publicly to the impact that demonstrations might have on voters in Chicago neighborhoods. Then, at a rally on Sunday, August 21, Dr. King announced that if a certain state representative had voted otherwise on a bill "he would not be here today." And, "we are going into South Deering because its two state representatives were the only democratic representatives to vote against an open housing law, and the law lost by two votes." So the demonstration would remind the residents of that community of who was responsible for the presence of 500 marchers in their streets. That is a direct political statement.

Probably more important than the increasingly obvious political impact of the movement are the cracks appearing in the system of alliances by which the metropolitan area is governed. Uneasiness is widespread in the Catholic Church. The business community is feeling the pressure. The labor unions are speaking up. There is imminent need to produce votes at the polls. There are indications that the stream reaches to D.C. That complex system of power is pulling apart at its well knitted seams. It was not surprising when the Conference on Religion and Race issued an invitation to all interested parties to sit down and discuss the issues confronting Chicago. Someone has said that for three or four months before an election, city hall in Chicago, practically closes down rather than do anything that might offend the voters. The Catholic Church had decided not to take any more unilateral action but to make sure that all action and statements were in the name of Protestant-Catholic-Jews. So, the initial breakthrough within the crisis period for negotiations came from the interfaith conference on religion and race.

The movement respectfully declined the request of Archbishop Cody to cease demonstration, and proceeded to schedule three marches for Sunday afternoon, August 14. This was the first time that more than one march had been scheduled for a single day. The marches were to go back to Gage Park, the area where the most violence had been aroused; to Logan, where great violence had been anticipated but where the first march into that community had met with surprisingly little opposition; and into a neighborhood not previously visited, Jefferson Park. The Conference was scheduled for Wednesday, August 17. On

Tuesday, August 16, the "most wide spread demonstrations in Chicago's history" were projected. Five different establishments in the Loop of Chicago were picketed between 3 o'clock and 5:30 in the afternoon-Chicago's rush hour. That evening hundreds visited several real estate agencies in Jefferson Park. It was late in the night when they returned to action headquarters.

What is here described in concrete events is the application of pressure by the movement; the emergence of a crisis within the power structure of the city; the effort to relieve the pressure; and the persistent application of the pressure by the movement moving the power structure closer to the bargaining table. Now, let's translate these concrete events into a set of abstract principles of social change methodology as understood by the SCLC.

The first principle was mentioned briefly in the footnotes to the first newsletter this summer. 1. The fundamental concern of the movement is with the structure of American society. Some ambiguity can be admitted on this point, though the issue is clear. The ambiguity has to do with the radical nature of the SCLC's approach to social change. How radical is it? Is it aimed at reform or revolution? At present it would appear that the aim of the Movement, as it is guided by the SCLC, is to impose institutional reform upon the custom of the land. That is, SCLC's strategy is to affect federal legislation which will force the customs of the land to conform to the law.

In some segments of our society the consequences of such a goal appear truly revolutionary. In truth, such a Movement is designed only to modify some of the practices of society so that the benefits of the part can be more equally distributed to the whole. Even if the ultimate strategy of the SCLC is to assure a guaranteed annual income to all citizens, this would only assure what is already accepted by the great majority of society as a natural benefit of modern social structure. Within this framework most of us would be content to describe the SCLC as a reform movement.

But the rhetoric of the SCLC frequently suggests much more. The goal of the Movement becomes a basic change in the system and not simply reforms of the present practices of that system. In this framework are envisioned some basic value changes in the goals and purposes of the system. The simplest way of putting this contrast is to consider the difference between moving into the American middle-class way of life and reaping its material benefits, and the dream that a new way of life might emerge from the tumult giving some creative excitement to life. This latter instance would entail a revolutionary movement of broad dimensions.

Without trying to say just which the SCLC is-revolutionary or reforming-admitting ambiguity at this point, the SCLC has recognized that a part of the social system cannot be changed without changing the whole system and that only by changing the whole system will the way of life for the Negro be appreciably improved. When one fully appreciates this initial

point, the Negro's concern with Viet Nam is placed in its proper context. Such concern is not an aberration on the civil rights movement but grows out of this systemic awareness. The civil rights movement is making a dramatic effort to bring to public awareness the intimate relation of domestic affairs and foreign policy. These two divisions hardly hold any longer. The system reaches round the globe and when it is touched in Chicago the tremors vibrate in Viet Nam. It is something of this that the Movement is saying to us.

2. The first principle of social change was made clear in the early days of SCLC orientation in Chicago. The second point has been equally clear, although again no one can deny the complexity that attends this principle. The means by which the SCLC is to transform the social system is through a "mass-based movement". The success of the movement depends upon the numbers that can be mobilized. As Dr. King said in his most recent speech in Chicago, "We do not have any molotov cocktails. There are no bricks in our hands, no knives in our pockets. All we have is the power of our bodies and of our souls." The power of the Movement is in the number of bodies that it produces in mass demonstrations that fill the streets or the jails. This is the primary source of pressure applied by the movement.

In Chicago the SCLC has accepted responsibility for "mobilizing the ghetto". This has been a grass-roots effort to organize for effective action. The practical techniques of that program are described in Bruce Christie's article. In generating a "mass-based movement" the SCLC depends also on gaining the cooperation of the widest possible spread of organizations through out the community.

These cooperating organizations include different types. For instance, included are neighborhood community organizations. Apparently, not a great deal of effort has been expended in direct appeals to these neighborhood organizations to take part in the marches and demonstrations. Even where direct efforts have been made, they have encountered resistance on the part of some neighborhood groups to become involved in efforts not directly related to the immediate needs of their particular neighborhood. There is additional reluctance to become involved in something which may yet prove a failure. The neighborhood organization which is going to be around the city for a long time to come is loath to risk its reputation in a venture led by men who can leave the city and move on to greener pastures. Since the reputation of such groups is a source of power in bargaining with the power structure, such reputation is guarded carefully in order to continue to be effective.

The Church is one organization on which the SCLC depends to a large extent. A lot of effort has gone into involving Negro pastors in the work of the SCLC. It appears that Operation Breadbasket has been most successful in gaining the support of the pastors. Through Operation Breadbasket a number of the pastors have become involved in the larger work of the

Movement, influencing their members to become active participants in marches, etc. SCLC leadership has tried to show how the gaining of jobs through the Breadbasket work is integrally related to the whole to the systemic concern of the Movement. In so doing the pastors are led to see their work as a part of the whole.

But it is not always easy for the Churches to be involved in the Movement. Many of the problems are quickly apparent- the threat from the loan associations that a proposed building plan cannot be financed if the pastor continues his participation with Dr. King- this is a familiar problem. The "molotov cocktail" thrown against the church in the night, obviously designed not to burn but to promise hotter things to come- this is a pressure which the Church receives if it becomes noted as a center of activity. Other problems are less familiar but real. The pastor of the congregation begins to receive complaints from his people that he is neglecting the business of the church. Such pressures exert a telling lever on the pastor of both large and small churches. In Chicago you have the added problem of the head of the National Baptist Convention making loud criticisms of Dr. King.

A word should be said about what is meant by "mass" in a mass-based movement. It is realized that "the mass" is going to be a minority of the people of any city. But it is hoped that it will be a "significant minority". A significant minority is one sufficient to make its presence felt in repeated marches and demonstrations. In the movement in Chicago to the present time the largest rallies and marches have probably engaged about 1500 people. Whites have generally composed about a quarter or more of that number. The total number involved has been growing steadily and will in all likelihood continue to increase.

There is little question that 1500 fully committed persons is more than enough to exert the needed pressure on a city the size of Chicago. Commitment can be measured in many ways. On Sunday, August 21, commitment was measured by those willing to march in a driving rain that left "even their wallet wet". Or it can be measured by the elderly lady who said that on the day of a march her lunch grows cold on the stove. She is so excited that she just can't eat.

In the mobilization of the masses, the role of the charismatic leader has been stressed. Anyone who has observed the spontaneous response that Dr. King continues to enlist from the crowds of Chicago is impressed with the power of the man and his role in the Movement. Earlier some observers wondered whether that power could be translated from the rural south to the metropolitan north. The answer now is Yes. Other leaders of the Movement enlist enthusiasm and respect from the crowds, but there is a noticeable difference in the rush with which the crowd comes to its feet when Dr. King walks into the room. An immediate rapport exists- almost as if a personal relationship preexisted between Dr. King and his audience. This quality is what the word "charisma" tries to convey.

For a period one might question whether the crowds attending the rallies and marches were coming in response to the charisma of the man or to the Movement. It begins to be apparent that while there may have been a brief time in which men and women came to see the famous leader, now they come because the man is of the Movement. Crowds are equally large now for the rallies whether or not Dr. King is present. This has to be an impressionistic conclusion, but it seems obvious that the charisma of Dr. King was instrumental and probably vitally necessary at a certain point in the emergence of the Movement around the first of August but that now the Movement has found itself on its own ground, walking with its own feet, on its own road.

3. A point must be chosen at which concentrated pressure of the movement will be applied. Many aspects are considered in the choice of this point. Months of research in Chicago went into the choice of a slogan that related to a real and tangible experience of the City. The pressure point had also to be one that was susceptible to political treatment on a national scale. One very general qualification has been necessary in the choice of the pressure point in each of the SCLC projects: the objective must be one that is as acceptable to as many people as possible and which touches as many lives as possible. This two-sided qualification can be illustrated through the choice of "end the slums" as the Chicago objective.

Similar to "voting rights" no one can raise serious objection to a demand that America rid itself of the slums. Thus the slogan "end the slums" provides a highly dramatizable image that generates a minimum of opposition but solicits the greatest number of supporters. The other of the qualification is that the chosen objective must be a part of the experience of as many people as possible. Voting rights are a potential of every adult American. Housing is a basic need of every American. Few aspects of existence are more general than the need for shelter. The quality of that shelter has become as important for humanization as the mere fact of shelter. The slogan, "end the slums", strikes to the heart of American experience today and lends itself to a Movement designed to mobilize the masses.

4. Only one more point will be added to this issue of mobilization. The establishment of priorities is a necessary part of the strategy. Once the goal of "end the slums" and decent housing is established then the job of the movement is to keep that issue clear for the public. In the last week or so one of the pressing problems of the Movement has been to keep the issue of open housing of first priority. The presence of the Nazis tends to lead attention astray from concrete housing goals. The riots are still being used to confuse the issue. Law enforcement has been pressed as the uppermost concern of the community. The police department has claimed that crime has risen in Chicago by 25% this summer. This rise in crime, implies this department, is related to the concentration of the police forces deployed to protect the marchers. In the absence of documentation on this led to suspect that a 25% increase in crime is wholly accounted for in Chicago by the

Numerous arrests connected with the July riots and the arrests of trouble-makers at the marches and demonstrations. If this is true, the increased number of crimes have not taken place where the police are not but precisely where the police have been massed to perform their duty.

But the priority of a movement must be maintained and the question of crime is not the point at issue. The question of violence to marchers or others is not the priority item of the Movement. The establishment of a priority schedule and the maintenance of that schedule is a basic part of the strategy.

5. Once the grassroots are organized and a clear and distinct objective chosen, the next step is the visible emergence of the Movement. For the SFLC this continues to be through the mounting of mass demonstrations directed at the chosen object. The pressure of the demonstrations is increased until a crack is disclosed in the power structure. Prior to the demonstrations it is possible for the power alliance to present a closed and apparently impenetrable face to the world. The assumption of the Movement is that behind that impassive face there is implicit disagreement and potential dissension. The purpose of the pressure is to open that situation up to public view. This might be noted as another meaning of the "open city".

The modern metropolis is governed by consensus of disparate power groups. A mayor such as Mr. Daley operates by moderating these separate groupings. But large masses of the public have no part in this consensus. The purpose of movement pressure is to make possible the entrance of the disenfranchised parts of the public into the process by which the city is governed.

The conclusion here drawn then is that the organizational work and the pressure made possible by the freedom organizations has as its purpose the inclusion of a new group in the negotiating process by which the city is governed. The crisis is that moment when the "open city" begins to appear. The public can witness the parts of the governing process and has a chance to enter into the process with some power. This is not the end of the Movement. It is the attainment of one objective and one stage. It marks as well the beginning of a new phase. The coming newsletter will report on the phase just entered.