THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

By WARREN PRITCHARD

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The Poor People's Campaign began to bog down about mid-afternoon, Sunday, May 19th, seven days after the first cadre of poor people arrived in Washington. That afternoon some 1,300 incoming campaigners, evicted on four hours notice from the District of Columbia Stadium, moved into an uncompleted Resurrection City. The eviction coincided with the beginning of the monsoon-like rains that eventually would move some residents to wonder if even the Lord was still on their side. Spirits would remain high for several weeks as residents went out to challenge segments of the most powerful government on earth, but from that afternoon the measure of Resurrection City was more that it survived as a symbol than that it sustained a movement.

After that Sunday, the City was never to become the secondary concern of Campaign leaders. The Rev. Andrew Young of SCLC would observe later that it became instead a millstone hung around their necks, demanding energies that would have been better spent in the business of confrontation. In Selma, Albany, Birmingham, and Memphis, leaders had not had to attend to the feeding and sheltering of their followers. In earlier days, those who had not been jailed or hospitalized after demonstrations returned to their own homes, and the weather was a minor hindrance compared to physical harassments such as police dogs and firehoses. In Washington, the absence of other visible challenges, obstacles to be overcome, intensified the effect of the rain which dumped more water (nine inches) on Resurrection City during its six weeks than normally falls on the park there in three months.

Events preceding the stadium evacuation pointed up weaknesses that would continue throughout the Campaign to plague an organization run largely on faith and dreams (and still sorely grieving the loss of its prime dreamer scarcely a month before) with many more plans and decisions than clear communications of either.

Administration of the Poor People's Campaign was loosely divided into three levels, sometimes operating as a unit, sometimes not. At the top was the executive staff of SCLC, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Rev. James Bevel, the Rev. Mr. Young, and Hosea Williams. They made the major decisions, set the major policies, and to the degree circumstances allowed, the minor ones as well. Below this was a middle echelon of administrators, both paid SCLC staff members and full-time volunteers; they took responsibility for the day-to-day functions of the Campaign—feeding and transporting the people, planning for incoming caravans, and later maintaining construction, education, and social services at Resurrection City. The third level was a large group of part-time volunteer helpers and others—mostly students — who were both workers and demonstrators.

Most of the middle echelon people were included with the executive staff in its deliberations, but on any question debated in the nightly staff meetings (which frequently ran long after mid-

night) there rarely emerged a concensus to be passed down as a single decision. More often, the people at the middle echelon, who might have taken part in the discussions the night before, would receive at least two orders during the course of a day. — orders reflecting in number and substance whatever viewpoints had come up in the meeting. An order received from above in the morning was almost certain to be countermanded later in the day.

From this there developed at the middle echelon the practice of acting without regard to any decision passed down from above unless it concurred with one's own view of a situation which, more often than not, demanded immediate attention. Within this middle echelon, communication between the various segments usually was maintained on an *ad hoc* basis and aimed as much as anything at avoiding a duplication of efforts. As the operation of Resurrection City became a major task of the Campaign, the administration came more and more into the hands of those whose authority, especially fiscal, fell far short of the mounting responsibilities they faced.

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By Wednesday, May 15, when Resurrection City was three days old, most of the first cadre of poor people — more than 400 from Quitman County, Mississippi, and Memphis — had moved into the plywood structures that they had helped complete. At that point, the planners, most of them in the middle echelon of the Campaign's administrative framework, were hurriedly preparing for the arrival of 800 members of the Eastern Caravan and approximately 500 from the Midwestern Caravan, both expected to arrive on Friday, the 17th.

It had become clear that construction was not moving forward rapidly enough to provide accommodations for all of them at Resurrection City as they arrived. But Friday was still two days away, and during that period of grace more churches in suburban Maryland and Virginia could be enlisted to serve as reception centers, feeding and housing the incoming campaigners until they could be accommodated in the City. With luck, ample arrangements could be ready in the churches by Friday and all 1,300 people expected on the two caravans would have a place to stay, at least temporarily. Originally the churches were to have been used for a short period of time —perhaps overnight—to receive and orient the people before they moved on to the City. Now it was foreseen that many of the churches might have to house people for two, three, even four days.

Then came Wednesday afternoon. New reports from the Midwestern Caravan put its number at 1,000 as it entered Pittsburg. According to schedule, they would spend the night there and depart for Washington the *next morning,* Thursday. Twenty-six busloads of people were coming a full day earlier than those planning and dovetailing the arrivals ever expected them.

The planners, mostly the middle echelon people, had been working from an old schedule that had been obsolete for several weeks. For a week since the Midwestern Caravan had left Chicago, the Campaign information center had received progress reports from its volunteer reporter travelling on one of the Caravan buses. He had called in twice daily, giving details of the reception provided at each stop, the number of people joining at each city along the way, and how closely the schedule was being followed. This information was in turn passed on to newsmen who were following the progress of this and other incoming groups. Thus the frantic workers at the SCLC headquarters did not realize until the eve of arrival that the 1,000 journey-wearied travellers would be upon them the next evening, while suburban Maryland newspapers, and major news agencies, even Tass, had known the correct arrival date for at least a week.

At a meeting called late Wednesday

night at the headquarters, after the accurate schedule had become known to the workers there, the decision was made to contact the leader of the Caravan in Pittsburg and have him hold there until things in Washington could be straightened out. It soon became clear at that meeting, however, that the only first hand communication between the Caravan and Washington had been through the information center. Consequently, no one at the headquarters knew how to contact the Caravan leader.

By 3 a. m. Thursday, several attempts to locate the Caravan leader had failed. A call to the United Press International office in Pittsburg revealed the name of a church where a reporter said he thought a rally had been held earlier in the evening. A call to the church was taken by a sleepy assistant pastor who could confirm only that the Caravan was in Pittsburg and that the rally had been held at that church earlier in the evening. He didn't know where the Caravan leader was staying, but thought his pastor did. The conversation ended as he promised to find the pastor and have him notify the Caravan leader to call SCLC headquarters in Washington.

He finally called later Thursday morning and agreed to postpone departure for Washington until Friday. He said he had tried to call several times Wednesday and before, but the switchboard operator at SCLC headquarters, under strict orders, would not accept his collect calls. It was not learned why he did not pay for a call himself.

The planners had gained time now, but only for the one Caravan. On Wednesday at about the time they were realizing that it would be upon them one day earlier and 500 persons stronger than they had anticipated, a call had come from Chicago (again to the information center, not SCLC headquarters) with the report that a new group had just been recruited there and would leave for Washington within the hour. Travelling directly, nonstop, this Caravan would bring an additional 500 unexpected campaigners into Washington on Thursday morning. "Sweet Mother of God, are you sure?" was the reply to this news from one of the harried planners. No one dared guess how many such *ad hoc* groups might be forming in other cities across the country or, more alarming at that point, how many might already have departed for Resurrection City without bothering or being able to notify anyone in Washington.

Thursday and Friday, the situation was as near panic as it ever got, but everyone stayed at work, stayed "on the case," as a Campaign slogan put it. The Midwestern Caravan, its members waiting impatiently in Pittsburg, was again ordered to postpone departure, this time until Saturday at least. The people's patience was near its limits. There had been trouble three days earlier during the stopover in Detroit when a force of mounted policemen had charged a crowd outside their rally there. The Rev. Mr. Abernathy had dispatched the Rev. Mr. Young and Hosea Williams to Detroit after the incident, and the Caravan's departure the next morning had been held up by day-long attempts to hold a demonstration protesting the police action. Now they had been asked a second time to wait in Pittsburg.

The Caravan leader explained to his people what he knew of the situation in Washington and put their next move to a vote. They decided to move on toward Washington, with the idea of staying over in Baltimore if necessary. Waiting there was no worse than waiting in Pittsburg, it was reasoned, and the Caravan would be just that much closer to Washington and Resurrection City. But Baltimore, which had provided food and shelter to the Eastern Caravan just departed, had nothing prepared for these 1,000 from Pittsburg when they arrived there on Saturday afternoon.

Again the Caravan leader put the next move to a vote. The choices offered were sleeping on folding chairs and gymnasium floors in Baltimore or the possibility

of sleeping outside on the ground at Resurrection City. They voted unanimously for Resurrection City, with or without food and shelter.

In the meantime, on Saturday, at an afternoon meeting hurriedly called in the office of the mayor of Washington, SCLC staff people reached an agreement with the owner of the District of Columbia Stadium for the use of his auditorium on an emergency basis to shelter the incoming campaigners for two or three days while construction was being completed at Resurrection City.

Also on Saturday, some of the suburban churches were demanding that their facilities be vacated in preparation for Sunday services. (One such demand came very near provoking a test, unprecedented, of whether a group of poor people would be evicted forcefully from a church by a well-to-do congregation, never unanimous in its Good Samaritan impulse.) The group coming directly from Chicago (380 actually made the trip) had arrived on time Thursday and been accommodated at two churches in the area of central Washington. By Friday night these churches too were beginning to demand that some of their guests leave, particularly a restive group of young men —a number of whom identified themselves as Blackstone Rangers—who were finally coaxed away, largely on the prospect of there being girls at Resurrection City. Early Saturday evening, the Midwestern Caravan moved into Washington and on to D. C. Stadium. By midnight more than 1,300 people, most of them hungry and weary from travel, were sheltered there.

The excitement of the previous weekend was almost forgotten now. The thrill of watching history pass by as the first buses from Marks and Memphis had rolled into the city of Washington, the passengers anxiously singing freedom songs as they made their way to join the Mothers' Day march Mrs. King had led through the bombed-out ghetto area the previous Sunday, now began to seem like something that had taken place a month or more in the past.

On Sunday morning, buses began shuttling between the stadium and the food tent at Resurrection City where an early lunch was being served. Shortly before noon, the stadium owner arrived with several police officials to investigate reports that his property had been damaged during the night. (Reports said someone had stolen candy and beer from a concession stand and damaged the public address system.)

After the inspection, the owner issued an ultimatum. He would return in the afternoon with a force of policemen. Anyone remaining on the premises after 4 p.m. would be arrested for trespassing.

Thus began the Dunkirk-like run for Resurrection City. Every available vehicle was rushed to the stadium. The people jammed aboard buses, trucks, and even into automobiles flagged down on the street. Minutes before the 4 p.m. deadline the last evictee had left.

Resurrection City residents numbering some 900 in the morning were now more than 2,500. Plans for orderly reception of new arrivals were tossed aside. The meticulously detailed specifications for locating and fabricating the plywood tents—which had never seemed very essential—were forgotten in the squatters-like scramble in the rain for a bit of space and material to build a shelter. Though many of the people got wet, no one had to sleep without some sort of roof over his head that night and few even missed a meal. Elsewhere, 400 members of the Southern Caravan were settling down in churches across the river in Arlington. And in the Far West, four separate caravans were gaining momentum and moving eastward toward Washington with some 500 new campaigners, among them the Indians and Mexican-Americans. The Mule Train with 75 was still in Mississippi.

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"Ghandi would have filled the jails by now," an India-born reporter observed during the third week of the Campaign,

adding, "At the time of the Salt March, he had more than a hundred thousand people in prison in just over a month's time." Dr. King, discussing the proposed Poor People's Campaign months earlier, had talked of nonviolently paralyzing the city of Washington, blocking with human bodies its bridges and thoroughfares. The surviving SCLC leaders would talk later of filling the city's jails, of sharing the pains of poverty with Washington's more affluent residents, and of permitting the nation's lawmakers no new business until they took up the old business of poverty.

In fact, just before the stadium was secured for shelter, when it looked as if they were about to be engulfed by many more people—all of them potential demonstrators—than could possibly be accommodated and fed, the leaders had considered initiating arrest-s e e k i n g demonstrations immediately.

Mass arrests at that time would have solved the pressing problem of housing and feeding not only the people they knew were coming but also the unknown numbers that they feared were forming—like the *ad hoc* Chicago group—all over the country. In the following weeks, such demonstrations might have avoided the stifling ennui that would develop in Resurrection City among residents who seemed to want nothing so much as to offer themselves limply to the police.

The need for housing was critical. For all the leaders knew with certainty, another week might bring thousands more campaigners to Washington, eager to demonstrate and be arrested. It seemed clear that sooner or later arrests would be sought anyway. So why not begin now? One answer was that the philosophy of a nonviolent movement, while not inflexible, is stern enough not to permit the use of such tactics merely to overcome its proponents' carelessness.

One aspect of the philosophy had been evident at Selma several years before (recalled by the Rev. Mr. Bernard Lafayette, National Coordinator of the Campaign) when the leaders there had discussed providing demonstrators with protective gas masks and helmets and then decided against it in the belief that an oppressor's pain must be suffered raw and pure in order to create the kind of love that would wear down and eventually redeem him. In Washington the philosophy accounted in part for the leaders' reluctance to make things easier at Resurrection City—to put gravel on the quagmire roadways, to install showers, to make travel money quickly available to anyone who wanted or needed to go home—and reluctance, finally combined with an incapacity, to impose some vitalizing routine on the City's day-to-day operation.

On the day they might have chosen the Indian reporter's option, leaders of the Campaign were already committed to the slower course. They had lodged their demands with the various agencies of government and would spend several weeks collecting responses. Although it was unlikely that the demands would be met, the leaders were probably as bound to the step-by-step means—in which the escalation to civil disobedience is a latter resort—as they had been even to go on with the Campaign at all after the assassination of Dr. King.

Also, basic to the decision not to initiate mass arrests immediately was the fact that the Campaign leaders did not at that point know much about their followers. At a press conference on Thursday afternoon (May 16), the Rev. Mr. Lafayette sought to persuade groups of individuals not then on an incoming caravan to postpone converging on Washington until Solidarity Day, set for May 30, but subsequently rescheduled for June 19. Campaign leaders called for more time to get the City in order, to "workshop" the present residents in the philosophy and practice of nonviolence, and to screen out those among them who might be unable to pledge themselves to the principle. The diffusion of attention between the demands of the City and demands of the Campaign was such that

none of these intentions was ever fully carried out.

Registrars were able to maintain a reasonably accurate count of Resurrection City residents as they arrived — approximately 5,000 in all during the six weeks —even when the stadium eviction disrupted the reception process. But they could only guess at the number of people leaving, especially during the periods when heavy rains forced temporary evacuations. Several attempts to conduct a census, not being vital to survival, fell to the same confusion that frustrated the other less essential aspects of the City's operation.

(Early in the Campaign, a worker was sent to the Office of Economic Opportunity library for information on the nonblack minorities participating. He learned there that the experts' estimates even of the numbers of Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and Indians living in the United States are not much better than the computations made at Resurrection City. Accurately counting other than white Americans requires more imagination than the Bureau of the Census apparently possesses. It also requires more sensitivity than the OEO statisticians seem able to muster as they continue nationwide distribution of a booklet — reckoning with sliding scales of income the number of poverty families in 1965, midway between the censuses — in which the word *Negro* is spelled throughout with a small *n.)*

As the weeks passed, the position and tasks of the middle echelon workers at Resurrection City became more and more difficult. They came to measure their success at the end of a day by basic accomplishments such as all three meals having again been served. Their work was maintaining little more than survival.

Whenever a member of the executive staff appeared at the City, he was immediately swamped with a multitude of nagging details. Residents wanting bus fare back to Mobile or Detroit, reimbursement for building materials, or a hundred other things, joined the pack of newsmen in pursuit of the Rev. Mr. Abernathy, the Rev. Mr. Jackson, or Hosea Williams. The Rev. Mr. Abernathy was usually left above most of this detail. The Rev. Mr. Jackson's tenure as City Manager ended before the day-to-day demands and the weather became so debilitating. The daily demonstrations then seemed to take much of the pressure off. By the time Williams replaced him, it probably was too late for anyone to put the City in the kind of order that would have made it an unemcumbering base for the demonstration-confrontation part of the Campaign.

Williams set about managing the City and directing the demonstrations with the vigor of a newly elected reform mayor. One of the at least half-dozen plans of community organization — an elected City Council with neighborhood representatives and a grievance procedure — was encouraged anew. Williams' appointment of new people to head the various segments of City administration was welcomed by some who had been there from the first, but others were alienated. His open criticism of the food service operation brought the dietitian to tears, but not to resignation. A threatened strike by the workers at the middle echelon, calling for the reappointment of the Rev. Mr. Jackson as City Manager, did not materialize. A few of them dropped out, but most stayed "on the case."

Williams provided a new image of reform just by being at the City, but he was there only relatively more than the other leaders, and the orders he issued did not carry down much more effectively because of his presence. The recipient of a plan or an order still followed it only if it fit his judgment of what needed to be done. Given the greater familiarity of these people with most exigent matters at hand, they usually were correct.

The memory of Williams at this time is of a man trying with some desperation and rather heavy-handedly to do everything. Dressed in a light blue or khaki jump suit, he would march through the

City, bullhorn in hand, calling the people to lunch, later, calling them to line up for a demonstration, and taking time in between to conduct the mail call. He attempted several measures of reform at the City Hall, one of which was to lock himself inside and regulate the lines of residents demanding to have their problems heard. By the end of a day his voice would be hoarse from exercise on the bullhorn and public address system, announcing new plans, new policies, organizing and reorganizing into, it finally seemed, the stratosphere.

The unrecognized hero of the Campaign was a gentle young SCLC staff man from Savannah named Benjamin Van Clarke, Williams' assistant. From the beginning he was the rare constant at Resurrection City (like the man who was there every morning for a while with an urn of hot coffee) on hand at City Hall all day and most of the night listening to the problems, soothing the tempers, keeping the faith, the only high-level SCLC staff member who seemed deeply at home there. On one of the last days, as he called a meeting of the City Council for what must have been the one hundredth time, one could listen and almost believe even then that the whole thing was about to take new life and flourish.

Even after no more than 500 residents could be counted in the City, Williams continued to the end to operate as if he had 3,000, as if he were commanding an invisible army. It was argued that much could yet be accomplished with the cadre that he did have, a sort of pure hard core from which the less dedicated had been eliminated, most by self-selection out, over the weeks. Most of the 500 were still there when Resurrection City's camping permit finally — the Rev. Mr. Young later would say in effect, mercifully — expired.

The chaotic process by which decisions and plans were made and passed on to be acted upon was exasperating to anyone who craved to get on with whatever he perceived as urgent business at hand, whether it was a question of seeking arrest or merely getting money to purchase plumbing pipes. Because they were fewer, because they were relatively better organized and more tightly maneuverable, and because they choose to avoid being caught up in the confusion, the Indian and Mexican-American groups never moved into Resurrection City. If they had arrived before it had begun to immobilize itself, their presence might have altered the City's eventual course. As it happened, they arrived in Washington late, and by then, their voices — like even the voice of Williams and other individual SCLC leaders — simply could not cut through and translate thoughts into action. It was a separation that came between people and common goals, between individual voices and concerted action, an unintentional *de facto* detachment which everyone finally seemed powerless to alter.

A mild expression of the exasperation was heard during the most moving demonstration of the entire Campaign. More than 400 poor people of all colors set out for the Department of Justice, seeking a rendezvous with Attorney General Ramsey Clark. They marched by groups, the Mexican-Americans out front, followed by the whites and then the Indians, with the blacks in the rear suddenly beginning to sing as they emerged from Resurrection City and rushed to catch up, their song spreading forward and quickening the pace. The marchers picked up a large escort of policemen as they crossed 17th Street and began the easy climb over the rising ground that leads from there up to the Washington Monument. Then just as the line stretched out in the open, its strength fully visible for the first time, a dark storm cloud floated overhead, generating an unseasonably powerful wind. The dozens of Monument flags were set straight out and cracking like whips at the very moment the first marchers passed by and on over the crest of the hill. It was as if the Almighty Himself were saluting the poor

people passing below in review. And then, as if to reassert celestial authority, the cloud opened and drenched them all with a short, hard downpour. Ten minutes later, the sun was shining again. They spent the afternoon and early evening outside a door of the Justice Department building.

The Attorney General refused several times to yield to the demand that he meet with more than a small group of the demonstrators. After his final refusal, Hosea Williams emerged from the negotiations and, with anger in his voice, announced that the time had now come to escalate the Campaign. He began leading the bulk of the demonstrators in a march around the block covered by the building, while Rudolfo (Corky) Gonzales remained with his predominantly Mexican-American group in front of the door. Williams' group circled the building twice, flirting with arrest each time as they swung off the sidewalk and out into the street between the line of policemen and Gonzales' waiting group. But when it was learned that the police intended to make no arrests under the several ordinances the marchers were violating, Williams announced that everyone would now march to a nearby church for a mass meeting to plan strategy. Gonzales, never ruffled or miffed, replied dispassionately that his group would stay, that the strategy was already made, and they did not need to sit up all night in some church like a group of bureaucrats discussing it. Williams then led his group back to Resurrection City. (It was not the split between the groups that newsmen were fond of searching for. Gonzales and Williams were together the next day to lead another demonstration back to the Justice Department.)

Brief moments of Dr. King's dream appeared in settings like the food tent at Resurrection City where two residents — one who likely was the son of a former slave and the other whose skin was white but whose appearance suggested peasant rather than slave-owning ancestry—stood in the dinner line one evening swapping bites from the same baked potato. Or on the lawn of a West Virginia Senator's suburban home where residents of Resurrection City joined more than 100 of his poor white mountain constituents to tell the former Ku Klux Klansman they did not share his view that the assassinated leader had gotten what he deserved.

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Because SCLC leaders had been among the inventors and decorated veterans of the civil rights struggle, interpretation of a nonviolent movement to initiates and outsiders properly belonged to them. If a press briefing were scheduled to precede a march on the Capitol at mid-morning and no leader appeared at Resurrection City before mid-afternoon, this was explained as "one of those days that comes along occasionally in the movement." If newsmen were upset because of botched schedules that seemed to get demonstrations started just moments before their afternoon deadlines, it was made clear that a movement is not run for the benefit of the press. And if newsmen and others were frustrated at not knowing what was planned for the next day, or for the afternoon, or for even an hour later, they were told that this was a movement, not a military campaign. Interpretation was not spared the Campaign participants either, however.

In the latter days, two weeks after the Justice Department demonstrations, when groups of Resurrection City people were beginning to form their own strategy on the spur of the moment — seeking arrest in one particular instance when they were supposed to be maintaining a picket vigil at the Department of Agriculture—Hosea Williams rushed in at the call of lawyers who had informed him of the tactic and impending arrests, gathered the people up out of the doorways where they were sitting, led a march around the building, and then sent most of them back to Resurrection City with the admonishment: "We don't have a movement yet." In this and other cases, the leader was lagging

behind his followers. Nevertheless, he remained the final instrument for determining, almost cosmically, just when movement had in fact arrived, the people waiting in his absence for the paddy wagons notwithstanding. Movement in this case was being defined in the frame of some larger strategy, apparently known only to Williams, and oblivious to the abundantly obvious mood of his people.

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From the beginning there was a tacit agreement that the police would not enter Resurrection City unless they were called. Keeping the peace within the confines of the City was the responsibility of the marshals, a force at one time or another joined by almost every young man there and made up of several groups of varying legitimacy and longevity. Observers noted that being a marshal was the most popular occupation of the Campaign, the amateur sociologists among them theorizing that any isolated subsociety of Americans will first establish, before any other institution, a police department. Through most of the Campaign, however, being a marshal was simply the only thing there was for a young man to do. In fact, for anyone involved in the Campaign, either at Resurrection City or elsewhere, a useful job, even a job that gave the appearance of being useful, was an uncommon prize.

The poor at Resurrection City acted in the manner of poor people the nation over, doing violence to each other much more frequently than together they do to anyone else. Many of them had come from neighborhoods (if the backside of Marks, Mississippi, can be termed a neighborhood) where one has to provide for his own safety when threatened, neighborhoods where the basics — food, shelter, and clothing — as well as the luxuries — hot running water, sanitary toilets, adequate dental and medical care, a concerned system of education, and a base from which the collective voice could demand to be heard if not listened to — are things less constantly available than even they were at Resurrection City. Among the inhabitants there was fighting and loving, stealing, and singing.

The last time I went inside the City was one of its last and tensest nights. Earlier, in the afternoon, several demonstrators had been injured by the police as they sought arrest in a nonviolent demonstration at the Agriculture Department. Later there had been an incident at a street crossing as those not arrested returned to the City. Police said they had used tear gas to drive the marchers inside the City after being attacked with rocks. A mass meeting had been called for 9 p.m.

Rumors were flying about. Some said the police were about to gas the entire area and sweep through the City. (They did gas it three nights later, responding, they said, to a rock barrage on cars passing by on a street nearby. This midnight gassing was to be so severe that more than 200 residents had to be evacuated, some to hospitals.) Others said the City was about to explode from within. I went that night out of a desire to see for myself what might be happening and with the feeling that if the Campaign were indeed ending there and then, I had an obligation to see it out, to witness its end because I had thrilled at its beginning. Perhaps I really went only because I fully expected that we — three companions, two of them black, the other white like me — would not be allowed in.

But the police at the outer limits passed us through and the marshals at the City gate uncharacteristically let us in with only a cursory check of credentials. The prevailing mood of the meeting, held around the City Hall and using the City's public address system for amplification (from which newsmen on the outside took their stories) was anger directed at the rock throwers who had exposed others, women and children, to the reaction of the police. SCLC leaders and residents of the City debated for more than two hours. One speaker, not a resident, called for a "black power meeting" the next

day, hinting broadly that the present leaders had had their chance and proved themselves incapable of "dealing effectively with the oppressors of poor black people." This challenge was rebutted by the Rev. James Bevel, Campaign philosopher and a sort of high guru of nonviolence, who in typical eloquence put down the notion of violence with a "lesson in revolution," the essence of which was that "if you pass by a power plant on your way to burn a liquor store you ain't talking about revolution," and that fighting police on their terms "is like going after a tank armed with a peashooter." It was not so much that violence was immoral, which he held it was, but that it was ineffectual and utterly foolish as well.

Hosea Williams, who acted as moderator of the meeting and refereed use of the microphone by residents contending for a chance to have their say, told the gathering that the time had come to decide whether they wanted to have a Resurrection City or not. He warned them, in a bit of CIA baiting (which may or may not have been based in fact), that there were agents among them who might attempt to set fire to the City or otherwise provoke the police to come in. They must be alert to any infiltrators. (I suddenly realized that there was no way for me, or anyone else, to prove quickly to an impassioned challenger in that dark place that I was not an infiltrator. The lonely low-key panic recalled an incident when, caught as a tourist in the midst of a torchlight parade of chanting Communist Party marchers on a dimly-lit Calcutta slum back street, I had never felt so glaringly pale-skinned and, in that instance, American.) The Rev. Mr. Abernathy arrived shortly before midnight. He asked, as a personal favor, that the women and children go to bed while the men organized a sentry watch to protect them from infiltrators while they slept. He and the other leaders left as the City settled down for the night.

Nothing happened to me in Calcutta, and nothing happened there in Resurrection City, despite the rumors, despite the tension, and depite the fears. In fact, given the injection into the City and Campaign of every noxious ingredient generally assumed to frustrate people to anger, even rage — from the fact that the city and nation never really permitted them a status other than p o t e n t i a l rioters; to the few ghetto-bred young men who hit the street in Washington looking for action, girls, anything but the dullness offered at Resurrection City; to the pervasive heat and rain; to the miasmal hours of inaction; to a security system (later mirrored at the convention hall in Chicago) not infrequently abusive; to leaders who seemed at times to neglect them — it is remarkable that the people remained so peacefully faithful to nonviolence. One resident, representative of many of the young men there, rejected the idea that formal leaders were needed to shape and guide what was already a beautiful community. Instead, he said, the people should congratulate themselves for being a ghetto that did not exhibit common ghetto characteristics. No one had been murdered. No one had died of an overdose of drugs.

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Law and order outside the City was, of course, the task of the regular police. Their usual duty with the Poor People's Campaign was to join an outgoing demonstration and march with it from the City to its destination and back. They were always out in force and in times of stress their resources and reinforcements seemed limitless. Almost 200 of them were counted in an alley adjacent to Resurrection City the night Sen. Robert Kennedy's funeral cortege passed there en route to Arlington Cemetery. They were mixed racially about three-to-one white to black.

Most of the time their duty was ludicrous as is any emergency-oriented official's. They darted about the acres of grass around the Washington Monument on their motor scooters, helmeted out-

riders escorting the marchers and looking like water bugs, feet and wheels obscured by the grass. Their officers were chauffeured in motorcycle side cars, looking menacingly like the ride-by shots in old war films in which the monocled officer patrols up and down the line of marching soldiers, shouting orders. On occasion the police used their machines to keep the marching lines straight and out of the street, running at dragstrip acceleration parallel to the curb, the officer crouching and bracing himself with black leather-gloved hands clasping the gunnels of the side car, barking orders into his bullhorn. To a person suddenly out near its path, a motorcycle can be as terrifying as a rabid dog loose in the street.

Once near the end of the Campaign, a group of women from Resurrection City took a walking tour of the Capitol area. After obeying a police captain's order that they break up into small groups or be arrested, members of one of the small groups decided they needed to use the ladies' room, located inside the Capitol building. The captain deployed his men. Twelve burly corporals surrounded the two dozen women and escorted them to the side door of the building where another officer informed them that Congress had just adjourned, that if they did not believe him they could check the flagpole where the absence of the banner would prove that the lawmakers had called it a day. No matter, the women repeated, they just wanted to use the ladies' room. The officer retreated inside the building and after a conference with the sergeant-at-arms came back to report that they could enter the building—but only four at a time, that being, he said, the capacity of the ladies' room. (As they were being escorted across the upper terrace of the Capitol, a trio of camera-bearing tourists, unaware that they were missing the best photograph they were ever likely to see, had waited impatiently for this procession to pass by so they could get their snapshots of the Washington Monument, off below at the opposite end of the Mall. The episode seemed to symbolize how little effect the poor people were having on the city—its officials as well as its tourists.)

The same sort of response had come several weeks before when the Rev. Jesse Jackson led some 100 Resurrection City residents to the Department of Agriculture the day after the same group had walked out on a sizeable lunch check at the department's basement cafeteria. During what was taken to be a stall until the cafeteria could be shut down for the day, Joseph M. Robertson, Secretary Orville Freeman's assistant for administration (normally engaged in the business of explaining the intricacies of the Agriculture Department to legislative committees) negotiated with the Rev. Mr. Jackson and the Rev. Mr. Abernathy for a meeting with Freeman. The negotiation turned into a demand from Robertson that the check be paid (it was) and from Jackson that the marchers be allowed to come in out of the driving rain. ("Do you mean that the Department of Agriculture is going to let hungry people stand outside its gates in the rain?")

The three retired to an anteroom off the main lobby to continue their negotiations. Shortly, as if on signal, the drenched marchers began filing through the front door of the marble-columned building and heading, it appeared, toward the cafeteria downstairs. This brought the negotiators rushing out of their conference. Robertson was quick to charge, as soon as he could work his way through the crowd that immediately surrounded the leaders, that this entrance was a breech of the "good faith" in which he had agreed to negotiate.

"This," he said in the tight-lipped manner of men who have learned to speak without using contractions, "is not a non-violent act."

"The people are getting wet," said the Rev. Mr. Jackson. "They just want to come in out of the rain and use the restroom."

"The restroom can only be used according to schedule," Robertson said, holding his ground.

"That, Brother Robertson," the Rev. Mr. Jackson observed, "is a biological process that does not subject itself to schedules."

Robertson left and after conferring upstairs returned with his verdict. Yes, wet and hungry people could come in out of the rain. But they must stay in the first foyer and "remain quiet and orderly." A force of policemen and building guards was on hand by now to see that they did.

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When the time for arrests finally came, the police force assigned to the Campaign — generally the same faces were seen throughout — had been waiting five weeks. They had been on hand every day to escort marchers from Resurrection City to whatever department or agency building they were visiting, walking with the people an average of maybe four miles per demonstration, and standing by outside as the demonstrators went into the buildings to stay no one knew how long. Like the newsmen, they had had to be on hand whether there was a demonstration or not, and the fact that few demonstrations left the City before 2 p.m. did not preclude the possibility that one would get off early in the morning.

Their high-level superiors accompanied most demonstrations (and when the time came, proved themselves as capable as their troops of hurling gas canisters) as did Justice Department officials and a small group of plains-clothes men who tailed the marchers in an ubiquitous light green Ford, uniquely distinguishable by its Vermont license plates. Behavior of the police was subject to a potentially constant public scrutiny by the television cameras that were as much a part of the campaign as portable bullhorns. That the presence of the cameras had an effect on their behavior was borne out at the Justice Department demonstration. Hosea Williams pointed out that many of the patrolmen on the front line of the force keeping the people on the sidewalk had removed their badges and charged that they were trying to conceal their identities in case they might need to use their billy sticks on the marchers. The badges were all in place again when the television cameras panned on them.

By the time Campaign leaders moved to seek arrest, they had long before lost the jail-filling potential that might have made massive civil disobedience a successful tactic. At the Agriculture Department three days before Resurrection City's camping permit expired, the demonstrators' clear intent to seek arrest was obvious. The police could have accommodated them without force and certainly without trifling with the violent reaction that they and most of Washington had expected of the poor people since their arrival in the city, and before.

The first arrests went smoothly as the policemen walked or carried demonstrators from doorways of the main Agriculture Department building to the paddy wagons. After 17 were arrested for blocking doorways, the strategy shifted to a wide intersection at the rear corner of the building. The demonstrators marched down the sidewalk to the corner where they waited for the traffic light to turn to green. When it turned they started to cross — some of them sitting down in the street and the rest continuing on to the opposite corner where they grouped and waited to repeat the operation.

As they watched, the police began a tactic that escalated the tension. Rather than giving the sitters a one or two minute warning to move on and then placing all of them under arrest, they immediately set to the task of clearing the street, seizing the sitters by any available appendage, dragging them to the curbside, and heaving them over, sometimes into the crowd. Some were taken to the paddy wagons that had been backed up to the intersection, but there was no pattern to the arrests. One person would be car-

ried to a paddy wagon while another next to him would be thrown over the curb. Those injured in the drag-off lay on the ground where they had been thrown.

As the street was cleared, the policemen formed lines along the curb, standing shoulder-to-shoulder and facing the demonstrators from a distance of perhaps three feet. They held this position, leaving the crosswalk clear and allowing the demonstrators to repeat the crossing and sitting, a few more being arrested at each drag-off.

Either because of some verbal abuse, because part of the crowd bulged out as someone was hurled into it, or for no reason at all, the line of policemen crossed the curb and surged into the group congregated there, a number of them driving to the center and flailing out with their riot sticks like men with machetes cutting a jungle path. This happened at least three times; each time two or three of the policemen abandoned their sticks and set on the demonstrators with their fists, as if to make a more personal attack of it. At least two were heard to remark that they had been waiting a long time for this opportunity. During each surge, the onslaught continued after one, two, and three bullhorn orders to "hold the line, get back."

That day only about 80 of the demonstrators were arrested. The policemen showed no more restraint the next afternoon in a garden-like setting back at the Agriculture Department building where some 150 demonstrators had returned with food and cots to resume a vigil begun several days before. A third of them settled down in front of the main entrance and the rest deployed themselves in several doorways at the back of the building. (The building was closed for the weekend.) In front a force of approximately 60 policemen was keeping watch on the demonstrators from under the trees across the street. (All of these policemen were white; a smaller group of their Negro colleagues was bivouacked on the Mall about thirty yards to the rear.)

Suddenly a policeman who had emerged from a door to the side of the main entrance was scuffling with a young boy who had been standing nearby. Seeing the commotion, the policemen under the trees broke ranks and sprinted toward it, scattered like track runners after a false start, looking over their shoulders to see if they were all together in the charge, and continuing on after a second order to stop. When the first ones got there, the policeman — whom witnesses said the boy had called a "cracker" — was already marching him to the paddy wagon. The boy and a companion were charged with disorderly conduct and hauled away.

It was learned from a Justice Department official who was present at all the demonstrations that the arrest procedure for the street sitters the day before was what lawmen call a "process of attrition," by which they drag everyone off to the side, fulfilling the first order of their priorities which is to keep the street open to traffic. They arrest only a few persons at each drag-off, aiming, it is assumed, to discourage others from seeking arrest.

According to the Justice Department man, this was the plan set in advance by the police, and, in his words, "It went off beautifully." He apparently ignored the fact that several demonstrators were injured and that the policemen were only fleetingly controlled as they applied their "process of attrition."

There was one man seen from time to time during the Agriculture Department demonstrations who enjoyed free passage through the police lines and whose orders seemed to carry considerable weight. He wore blue coveralls with the word *"POLICE"* stencilled in yellow letters across his back, setting off his steel grey crewcut hair and dark glasses. His equipment included handcuffs, a long riot stick, a tool kit like that carried in a holster by telephone repairmen, a canvas satchel which resembled those other

policemen used to carry tear gas canisters, and, most puzzling, a large hunting knife which was strapped to his waist. Newsmen and other policemen said he was a medic, but that did not explain his knife or his order the day after the street arrests for "thirty-five hand fire extinguishers." What for, one wondered? For use in lieu of gas to disperse crowds? (The Department of the Army, in its 1968 manual on civil disturbance control, has put out instructions for making a crowd dispersal weapon from an ordinary fire extinguisher.) Or to put out fires? Fire seemed hardly a threat where the most combustible thing in sight was as fireproof as the Washington Monument.

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The belief has been defended, especially in the South, that all justice resides in Washington, that redress of an individual or class grievance is largely a matter of locating within the federal structure the proper office or channel through which one's case can best be presented. It is federal legislation that has marked any advance in civil rights, and federal courts in which individual rights have been best protected. One has not looked with much hope to Montgomery, or to Richmond, or to Austin for leadership in the effort to end poverty; and mayors—even many southern mayors — have learned to make their pleas to Congress for the money they cannot expect to get from their state legislatures.

This faith in Washington has come in large part by default, a reaction to the daily attacks on the federal government and bureaucracy by the Wallaces and the Maddoxes and smoother proponents of the notion that all rights — including the freedom to be without food or to watch one's children so ill educated they can hardly read their own certificates of graduation — are wholly subject to local option. And in this atmosphere, the faults of an undertaking like the federal poverty program have been raised hesitantly, so threatening were already the critics even of its existence.

In this view, the majority of representatives and senators have been seen as men concerned with poverty but unable just now to find the funds necessary for a serious effort to narrow the gap between their have and have-not constituents. As for the war, it has been viewed as the result of honest bungling by a group of amateurs in world diplomacy who wandered uncomfortably into the role of imperialists and whose only real fault was puerile overzealousness in protecting the people of South Vietnam from the aggression of a fanatic band of communist puppets bent on ruling the world. As arbiters of the world's destiny, their positions, if nothing else, would seemingly have forced upon many of them an enlightenment (even if it amounted to nothing more than self and system preservation) that has never been expected of state legislators, and would have made them more urgently concerned with the fact that their society is, among its other maladies, rotting out at the bottom. It did not seem unreasonable to hope that they could be made to see in the Poor People's Campaign what Dr. King had called, "a moral alternative to riots," the stormy aftermath of his assassination being the hardest example to date of another alternative.

Going to Washington with these expectations vaguely in mind — hoping in effect that Washington could be confronted, and then made to intervene against itself — it soon became discouragingly clear that although the Poor People's Campaign at times failed to match the nobleness of its cause, the response of official Washington — legislators and administrators — was little better than the poor people might have received in a state capitol. The collective wisdom and sensitivity of the U. S. Congress, it turned out, does not far surpass that of the Georgia General Assembly, if at all. Some members, after failing to forestall the encampment of poor people on public land, spent the duration of the Campaign working to see

that they were evicted and to assure that similar encampments would never again be permitted. Powerful members who had in the past vowed never to legislate tribute to rioters or reward insurrection — some of them adding the use-worn phrase about "getting at the root problems" — now, even before the first cadre of poor people arrived in the city, said they refused to work under the gun of demonstrations. The President early acknowledged the "respectful" manner with which the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and the other leaders had presented their demands (in the President's words, "viewpoints"), gave assurances that "we have made extensive preparations" for the encampment, and added that "the poor would be better served if Congress and the appropriate administrative agencies could have time to take proper action." This, in a May 3 press conference, was one of President Johnson's few public comments on the Poor People's Campaign.

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The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is the best example of a Washington agency which has enjoyed a protective allegiance among civil rights advocates in the South, most notably because it has been, since 1964, the instrument by which racially segregated schools are supposed to have been eliminated. In addition, as administrator of federal welfare funds, HEW's sufferable standards of what should be paid have stood out in ugly contrast to the failure of state after state to come up with a share that might make public assistance more, in many cases, than a cruel joke. Restrictions that have made the bulk of their needy citizens ineligible for help traditionally have come not from Washington but from state legislatures.

The purpose of the Poor People's Campaign demonstration at HEW, like that of the initial demonstration at other departments and agencies, was to receive a response to the demands presented by the Rev. Mr. Abernathy and other leaders several weeks earlier. Following what by then had become a familiar pattern, the poor people departed Resurrection City in the afternoon accompanied by their police escort and marched the mile and a half to the department headquarters. The demonstrators would normally have been stopped at the front door while their leaders and department officials haggled over how many of the group would be allowed in to meet with the cabinet member in charge. This time, however, the entire group—some 350 strong—was permitted to march directly into an auditorium on HEW'S ground floor. Secretary Wilbur Cohen's emissaries and the demonstration leaders would conduct their negotiations there.

As the people took their seats in the auditorium and began singing, the policemen who had escorted them to the building took positions in the corridor to the rear and joined building guards in sealing off a bank of escalators leading to the upper floors. Outside the building and across the street, a police bus (windows barred for paddy wagon duty if necessary) had brought in reinforcements. Office workers stood on tiptoes peeking in from the rear of the auditorium, and above them a number of faces were in view, jammed cheek-to-cheek in the tiny windows of the film projection booth.

There were rumors that the secretary was not in the building, that he had already left for the day. (It was after 4:30 p.m.) A vote prompted by Hosea Williams, who had just arrived to take charge of the demonstration, indicated that the group was prepared to wait there until Cohen came out to talk with them — to wait all night or be arrested, if necessary.

Soon several of Cohen's emissaries came into the auditorium and whispered with Williams. Williams announced that Cohen was in the building and had invited him and four representatives from the group to meet in his office upstairs. The group promptly voted the offer down; "Brother Cohen" must come to

them. The emissaries departed, leaving an assistant secretary there who took a seat beside Williams and sat stiff-faced as the demonstration leader opened the floor to anyone who wanted to talk about health, education, or welfare.

Several people stood to describe abuses suffered at the hands of local welfare officials. Rudolfo (Corky) Gonzales spoke of land and language and culture taken from his Mexican-American people. "The southwestern part of the United States," he said, "is a colonized area." Referring to HEW and the government in general, he said: "If they can turn a kid into a technician in six months or a killer in six weeks, they can come into the ghettos, the reservations, the barrios, and the mountain villages and give us jobs."

An elderly man dressed in overalls and wearing a full grey beard stood, leaning lightly on his cane, and delivered a rambling account of how the government and the Social Security Administration, in particular, had bilked him over a period of many years. He concluded the long and detailed story — the rapid midwestern twang rushing almost to pass his thoughts and he pulling his best cues out of a past that was beyond the memory of most of his listeners—by laying the blame for his situation and the nation's squarely on the heads of the "true villains": Wall Street manipulators, Eastern tycoons, and the Bank of England.

It was shortly past 6 p.m. when Cohen finally arrived, followed into the auditorium by newsmen and the ubiquitous mantis-like television microphone which hovered over his shoulder as he made his way to the front. His response to the Campaign's demands was contained in a 35-page letter to the Rev. Mr. Abernathy which, after introducing a trio of staff members accompanying him, he summarized for the group.

HEW would "give information" to state and local welfare offices regarding the use of "courtesy titles" in dealing with their clients. Abolition of freedom-of-choice plans for school desegregation, he said, had just been accomplished in a Supreme Court ruling; HEW would, however, continue to press for effective desegregation of school systems within its jurisdiction. (Later it was learned that at the moment he was speaking a number of final fund cut-off orders for recalcitrant Deep South school systems were sitting unsigned on Cohen's desk, some of them dating back as far as February.) In the area of welfare, Cohen said, HEW would continue to encourage states to simplify their eligibility regulations. He was hopeful that pressure could be brought on Congress to at least postpone for a year its freeze on federal funds for state aid to dependent children. (This, Congress's answer to illegitimacy among the poor, due to have gone into effect this July but subsequently postponed until 1969, will leave mothers and children to the doubtful mercies of state legislatures, hard prone to limit allocations for welfare and now enjoined from applying regulations that have served to keep child assistance rolls within what they consider to be an adequate budget. Secretary Cohen reportedly had delayed his school fund cut-off orders to avoid angering southern members while the HEW appropriations bill was before Congress. Enforcement of a civil rights law was thus subverted by fear of the power of men who once had fought it openly on grounds that "morality cannot be legislated" and who have now applied their own notions of morality in the welfare freeze law that will serve to starve needy children, legitimate and illegitimate alike.)

Repeal of the welfare freeze, Cohen noted, would not answer the old question of inequalities of welfare payments among various states (ranging from less than $35.00 for the monthly sustenance of a Mississippi family to more than $280.00 for a family in New York). For this, Cohen had a solution which he announced, with some pride, he had proposed in a speech just the day before: a federal standard administration of welfare by which recipients would receive

the same regardless of state.

Williams accepted the HEW response for delivery to the Rev. Mr. Abernathy and said he found Cohen's proposal for a federal welfare standard encouraging. Then after singing two verses of "We Shall Overcome," the people filed out of the auditorium and, joined by the police escort, began the long walk back to Resurrection City.

A second visit to HEW was one of a series of demonstrations conducted by the National Welfare Rights Organization, which had kept small demonstrations going throughout the Campaign, most visibly during the lulls when no larger demonstrations left Resurrection City. (The Kennedy assassination and funeral and complications at Resurrection City brought one six-day period of virtual inaction.) This group, some 40 residents of Resurrection City who had a personal interest in welfare, came to spend the afternoon at HEW. Some of them wanted to learn how they could become eligible for public assistance, some wanted to learn why they had been removed from welfare rolls, and others wanted assistance in getting their checks sent to Washington from their local welfare offices.

After settling into the downstairs auditorium—the same one used by the large demonstration—the group divided its duties and went about them methodically. A small group set out for offices on the upper floors of the building to "establish the freedom of HEW," that is, to establish the freedom of HEW officials to talk with poor people and vice versa. Another small group went to monitor an administrator who had promised to help expedite the payments of those who had received no checks since leaving home. A third group stayed in the auditorium to discuss the many obstacles involved in being certified eligible for assistance.

The group that had gone upstairs to "establish the freedom of HEW" was able to persuade some officials to come down to the auditorum. "We really put the bee on them," said one member of the group, a minister from Marks, Mississippi. "The secretaries up there told us they had been ordered in a memo to have nothing to do with us if we came in the building. Some said they didn't have time to come down and talk with us, that they were too busy. Then we asked why was it they were never too busy to run to the windows and watch us march by outside. There was one lady so shocked to see us walk into her office she took off her glasses to get a better look, and when she did get the better look, she dropped the glasses."

Downstairs a group of minor officials congregated at the rear of the auditorium until one of the demonstration leaders urged them to come forward and "get acquainted with the people you're supposed to be serving." They moved forward hesitatingly at first but soon seemed to relax as they chatted with the people and took notes. The stories they took down indicated once again that if welfare poses a paralyzing threat to the initiative of the poor, a great many of them are in no danger at all: a young man from Birmingham, crippled from birth, denied assistance because "they said I'm able to work;" another from rural Alabama, disabled, in the hospital a year-and-a-half, saying he had been promised one dollar a month "so they could say I'm being helped, but I haven't seen even the dollar yet."

As the officials were listening and recording these experiences, a small group of more reserved looking men and a woman came into the auditorium and quietly seated themselves toward the back. They were from the Office of Social and Rehabilitation Services, or, as one of them related in a tone hushed with what seemed great respect, "the basic unit of the department dealing with public assistance." This, then, was the ultimate welfare office. The poor people had come to the right place.

The official (a subordinate, it turned out) who had spoken reverently of his office and later of his bosses, as one of

them moved in to survey the small groups of officials and poor people, was asked what "the basic unit" was going to do about these people's problems. "Well," he pondered, "it's been handled like this before and I assume it will follow the same pattern; we'll take down the complaints and work back through the regional and state agencies and then report back to this group, the NWRO. Ultimately, as you know, any corrective action will, of course, have to come through the state agencies." The same man commented on Cohen's proposed federal standardization of welfare, taken at the larger demonstration as a significant new response to Campaign demands. "Yeah," he said, "the secretary first started on that idea a couple of years ago."

While they were upstairs Secretary Cohen had invited several of the Resurrection City residents into his office. They returned to the auditorium with stacks of brochures and booklets and an 8 x 10 autographed color photograph of the secretary standing in front of the HEW building.

A NWRO leader, speaking through a bullhorn from the front of the auditorium, said, "We came here to stay until we at least made a beginning on our business. We've satisfied ourselves that we have made a beginning. But we'll be back tomorrow." Then repeating the theme promoted throughout the Campaign by NWRO, he said, "Groups like this one should organize and bring their business to local welfare offices just like we're bringing our business to HEW."

The upstairs windows were crowded with office workers watching as the people boarded their yellow school bus for the ride back to Resurrection City. As the bus entered rush-hour traffic, the people began singing. The songs were old ones with appropriate variations—"I'm gonna lay down my shuffling shoes, down by the welfare door, down by the welfare door. Ain't gonna shuffle my feet no more." The volume of the singing increased as the bus left the Mall area where there were few pedestrians and inched its way down Independence Avenue past the queues of workers waiting to board their suburb-bound buses. But the songs were not penetrating the sealed windows to the air-conditioned space inside where the commuters sat, less than six feet from the singers, reading their newspapers. The freedom to speak (or sing) indeed did not imply a right here or elsewhere to be listened to, as the Rev. Mr. Abernathy had said.

One of the senior welfare administrators, among those of the high-level group who had appeared briefly to survey the auditorium in the afternoon, was seen later that evening with a companion at a restaurant in downtown Washington. After their second or third drink, the gist of conversation became audible to a chance eavesdropper nearby. The subject—not poverty or hunger or health or welfare—was office politics, a question of filling a clerical position apparently having transcended the flesh and blood evidence of the department's failure represented in their offices not three hours earlier. Perhaps the man long ago had given up concerning himself with whatever part he might once have seen himself playing in the failure. Perhaps he had once had hope and lost it, and now was surviving by feeding on the various forms of ignoring the loss. Perhaps he believed, as his subordinate had, that such matters as poor people and welfare really are best handled elsewhere. Or perhaps his greatest concern that evening *was* office politics.

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The Poor People's Campaign was unique among the several assemblages of Americans this summer, a season in which the demand for "participatory democracy" was heard in many quarters. Standards of membership were simple and participation was virtually unlimited. Anyone who wanted to join perhaps the last pursuit of America's agile conscience, questionably represented in Washington, was free to come along. Although the judg-

ment may be made that its leaders brought the Campaign's slow decline upon themselves, it also is true but not so obvious that a mammoth corporation like Lockheed Aircraft is really no more efficiently constituted than Resurrection City, the aircraft makers' cost-plus defense contracts providing much of the cushion that takes up what many employees readily admit is an incredible waste of time, energy, and direction, and is for some destructive of a needed sense of place and achievement.

In its early stages especially there was much more hope within the Campaign than among outside observers, who saw no prospect of moving an election-year Congress in which the poverty program had always surpassed poverty itself as an issue. When they bundled their belongings into cardboard boxes and hoisted their children aboard the Greyhounds and mule wagons in June, many of the poor people set out for Washington fully believing that by the end of the summer —by fall at the latest—their efforts there would have brought nothing less than the end of American poverty.

In the hours of marathon eulogies immediately following Dr. King's assassination, America was exposed to its finest lesson in his philosophy, and the choice he had offered between chaos and community was more generally understood then than ever it had been when the prospect for his success had seemed much greater. It was not idle at that moment to indulge in the seemingly final hope that now at last the nation would rally to redeem itself. Rational people discussed the possibility of marshalling hundreds of thousands of people, not necessarily poor people, to present themselves at the White House or Congress every month until something of a reparation was forced from those high places. One was so conditioned by the conspiring events of the spring and summer, he could expect anything, and even the least promising hopes clung to the faith that somehow the expectations need not yet have been only for catastrophe, despite every objective indication of an accelerating trend in that direction.

But a grieving mass did not rally and the Poor People's Campaign could not. Pressures—violent or not, it did not seem to matter—won no victories for the poor in 1968. Civil disobedience moved well into the new lexicon and emerged (along with terms like "permissiveness") to mean a license to shoot policemen.

In the end it seemed silly to have speculated back in February that Washington might try to kill the Poor People's Campaign with kindness, that the lawmakers might act quickly to draw up bills aimed at satisfying the Campaign's basic demands, guarantees of a decent job or a decent income—goals that were in full accord not only with justice and precedent but also with accepted concepts of subsidizing the non-poor that are as old as the Republic itself.

The fact that the poor people had come to Washington asking first of all for jobs went almost unnoticed and surprisingly so since the solution most generally offered by legislators for ending poverty is to put people to work. The demand for jobs, however, was overshadowed by its corollary, calling for an adequate income to be guaranteed to everyone who should not work — mothers, children, the disabled and the sick. Official Washington did not give serious consideration to meeting either of these basic demands.

It was the hardest indictment of the nation not only that its least powerful citizens should continue to be forced to live in poverty but now also that they had to be the ones to come hungry to this seat of affluent power demanding food of a society that calls itself civilized and allows children to starve. Perhaps the clearest measure of response to the Campaign was that the poor finally had to settle for hunger as their issue of confrontation, and it was a condemnable nation, rendering its verdict in superabundance, that denied them victory.