

# OUR MAIN BATTLE IN ALBANY

SLATER KING

**I**N THE STRUGGLE in Albany, we have often felt that we have been fighting against tremendously powerful forces not just in the state of Georgia, but also within the Federal Government itself as witnessed by the indictment and convictions of innocent Negro leaders in the Civil Rights struggle.

There have been a few rays of hope. A federal judge granted an injunction in June 1964 against the city of Albany prohibiting interference of our right to peacefully protest. So we have picketed and marched in protest of the killing of an innocent Negro by a white policeman and other injustices.

Most of the public facilities covered under the Civil Rights Bill have been desegregated. We have a few restaurants that have called themselves "private clubs" rather than integrate. We are testing these in Federal Court.

In all of the small and rural communities that surround Albany, the Negroes have been so "cowed" down and intimidated by hangings, being burned alive and all sorts of mayhem and torture, physical as well as psychological, until they will not even attempt to use the integrated facilities presumably made available to them through the recently enacted Civil Rights Bill. In one neighboring community where a few young Negroes have attempted to use the local previously "all white" theatre, police have stood in front of the theatre allowing whites to come and go but blocking the paths of Negroes attempting to enter. Their excuse is that they are keeping order. It is a definite axiom to say that in the majority, the police force and the machinery of the Southern local and state enforcement agencies will be used not for the Negroes' protection but as a repressive instrument against them. The city of Albany hired six Negro policemen. There is a tremendous rapport between them and the Negroes of Albany. They have been very humane men who have restrained themselves greatly in the exercise of their police powers.

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They have dramatically reduced the number of Negroes brought before the judge on Monday morning for cases involving drunkenness—fighting—and gambling. White policemen practiced quite a bit of brutality and killed quite a few Negroes. All of this has been cut out by the Negro officers.

We have begun to build political power by dramatically increasing the number of Negro voters and by turning out ninety per cent of that vote, a higher percentage than ever before. There is a certain irony in my being under a one year and one day *federal sentence* (presently under appeal in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, La.) and receiving an invitation to the President's inauguration last January.

We in Albany, Georgia feel a great sense of reward in the enactment of the Civil Rights Bill despite its many limitations. There were college students who were "sitting in" and conducting other demonstrations to protest segregation but we were the first community where there was the involvement of the total community protesting segregation. This caused thousands of blacks to be jailed (in 1961-62). After other communities, such as Birmingham and others followed our example, it was clear that this country would have to enact the Civil Rights Bill to stop the developments of embarrassing spectacles such as Albany and Birmingham, which were being viewed by an international audience.

It is pathetic that most of the Negroes who were arrested here for marching and sitting in and for the whole spectrum of Civil Rights activities will not enjoy the fruits of their labors because many aren't employed and many who are employed don't make enough to eat out or travel to enjoy these facilities that are now open to them. The people who will enjoy these new freedoms are the small group composing the "Black Bourgeoisie." Not only have most of them not helped financially nor physically in the Civil Rights struggles, but many of them ridiculed those Negroes who did.

The Civil Rights Bill has helped in many ways in desegregating the restaurants, gas stations' rest rooms and many other places. It will also help in opening a few jobs, but for the majority of these jobs the Negroes do not have the technical training necessary.

There are still thousands of Negroes here who are part of what is called the sub-strata of American society. The Civil Rights Bill will not help them. These black families have grown up generation after generation bordering on illiteracy. But most regrettable, they

have lost all hope that America will help them. Today for these Negroes who form the sub-strata of American life, it looks more bleak and hopeless than ever. With the Civil Rights Bill passed, the lines in the battle are not as clearly demarcated as in the past. It is harder to get issues around which people will rally and yet the average Negro family finds that economically if anything it is *recessing* instead of *progressing*.

### ***injustices continue***

In Albany in March 1964, there were 23 Negroes at the Department of Labor office waiting for jobs. The manager of the office, who is paid by federal funds, had them arrested for vagrancy. They were then fined \$23.00 by the judge or given 30-day sentences to be served on the streets. Then some of their families got further into a financial bog by borrowing the money from "loan sharks" to have the men released while some served the 30 days time. We wired the Secretary of Labor in Washington. The Department of Labor made a perfunctory check but no remedial action was ever taken. Then in March 1965, the same manager of the United States Employment Service threatened to have Negro employees removed forcibly from the offices and arrested if they did not agree to work for \$1.00 per hour. The men felt that they should get a minimum of at least \$1.25 per hour.

Do not these type actions make men think that they must use desperate means to alleviate their condition as it becomes more desperate?

In Albany we feel that we must continue to run Negro candidates for office in that it is extremely educative for the Negroes and whites and it spurs voter registration among Negroes more than anything else. SNCC and SCLC\* used this to launch a voter registration drive in the Second Congressional District. Attorney C. B. King ran for Congress and made a very impressive race. Thousands of new voters were added to the books. He received in excess of 8,000 votes and was number 2 in Albany, Bainbridge, Newton, Cordele and other cities in the Second Congressional District. His television appearances helped to educate blacks *and* whites. However, all money for his campaign was raised in the Negro community.

We applied for a Federal Savings and Loan Association to the Gov-

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\* Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

ernment. After many, many months of arduous labor and great expense (approximately \$4,000) and the intercession of some Congressmen, our application was denied because it was reported that we had not shown that a need existed. This attempt was begun in that we feel Negroes must have not only political but some economic power as well.

There were many white gas stations in the Negro community that had segregated rest rooms and Negroes working only in menial positions. The movement caused a re-evaluation. The Gulf Oil Company sold a franchise to a Negro to operate a first class Gulf Station. Negroes rallied to his support so, until he won the "Award" repeatedly for the greatest volume in gallons pumped of any Gulf Section in Albany.

The other large stations such as Shell, Texaco and others were so impressed by what they saw of the Negroes' urgent desire to patronize other Negroes until all of them located in Negro neighborhoods have built large new modern stations and have sold the franchises to Negroes, all of whom are doing very well.

One of the largest employers of Negro women in the city of Albany, Bobs Candy Company, had a vote supervised by the National Labor Relations Board and they voted overwhelmingly for the union. There are also other factories where Negroes are heavily employed where they are working to bring the unions and they will do so!

In my opinion the most important thing that the Movement has done is that it has touched the blighted lives of youngsters where not a ray of hope shone through before. Our Movement has given them hope because for the first time they feel that there is a possibility of changing the order through a belief in themselves and hard work.

I have looked at the black and white workers in SNCC and felt that if there is any such thing as God working through people, I know that he works through them. For I have seen the hope, the faith and belief which they have instilled into other youngsters' lives. I have seen the new vistas of the heart and mind that have been opened; and I have seen the conservatives, black and white, almost go into a state of apoplexy whenever a discussion of SNCC comes up. And for the first time, I can imagine what type of persons the Pharisees must have been and I can imagine what type of persons the Disciples must have been—intense, devoted, earthy, erring, but still moving forwards.

As we looked harder and more objectively at the Negro community and saw the many scars and the signs of the internal wounds that affect us we felt that rehabilitative surgery would have to be performed.

We also felt that the Negro community would have to begin practicing an "In-group" type of socialism. Such as the establishment of a "National Association for the Economic Advancement of Negroes," that wealthy Negroes and more "advanced" whites would make heavy contributions to help educate the Negro in proper business methods. We have for so many generations been intentionally kept out of the mainstream of American life until proper managerial methods are very hard for us to come by. The little wealth that Negroes have accomplished prior to this time has been through the white man's paternalism towards a Negro, or by the lone Negro through hard work singularly and painfully being able to accumulate. I say *painfully* because he had to discover the proper method through trial and error and most often does not see fit to pass his skills and "know how" on to other Negroes but jealously and selfishly guards the secrets with the attitude "I caught hell getting mine, now you get yours." No longer do we have the time for trial and error. It does not work in our highly competitive society, especially with communications as highly developed as they presently are. Further there are very few paternalistic feelings left with most whites and it is not white paternalism that we seek anyway.

All through the Negro community, each family is fighting many of the same battles simultaneously. Some problems in Albany, common to Negro communities throughout the country, are listed below.

A great sense of guilt, a legacy from the past, where the white slavemasters and now the more highly developed television and slick white magazines have taught us to hate ourselves and all vestiges of our "Negritude" or our blackness.

The Negro male image has been annihilated, destroyed, and too often it seeks its consolation in liquor, sex, trivialities, self-hatred, and abandonment of family.

No parental supervision for girls or boys whose mothers go early, and work late as domestics in the white homes. The social consequences of this especially for teenage girls results in adding a terrific burden to the already burdened Negro family, and the boys walking the streets staying out of school.

Eighty-five per cent of the Negro women domestics in Albany who must work for \$15.00 per week most often leave their children to take care of themselves because they cannot afford to pay nursery school fees for their children. Each year between eight to fifteen children are burned to death when they are left alone and often they turn

over the kerosene stove or pull wood or coal out of the open fireplace. Earlier this year, four children, the oldest 6, left at home by their working parents, were burned critically. One has died.

There is lack of relevance of the Negro church and yet the symbolism that it holds for the average Negro. Negro churches in Albany run as high in cost as \$150,000 yet have no nursery schools, no credit unions or recreational centers. How can we make the church more relevant?

The need for the Negro to know something of his past historically, because the regular school books have no Negro history, and perpetuate rather than eliminate a sense of shame.

Most Negroes are victims of the loan sharks. Just last week a Negro grandmother's house was taken because her grandchildren wanted a car valued some months ago for five hundred dollars. The loan company let her have the money and when two payments defaulted, took the house. A modest appraisal of the value of the house would be five thousand dollars. This kind of exploitation is repeated weekly. The largest income reported by the Department of Internal Revenue in Albany is the owner of a loan company whose main victims are "fleeced" Negroes. As I write this, this white "loan slavebaron" is on a hunting safari in Africa costing many thousands of dollars, most of which is paid for by the property of foreclosed blacks.

The city abolished *all* of the playgrounds, swimming pools, parks rather than integrate them. Then they planned the ruse of having *all* of the "white" swimming pools open. These have been "allegedly" purchased by "private" investors. We are contesting this in Federal Court where the case is to come up in appeal soon, and we have been to jail for attempting to use these facilities. But as of now our children have *no public recreational facilities*.

Over 2,000 of our children daily walk the streets of Albany as vagrants from school. The city does not care because it does not want our children to have an education. They have hired an incompetent Negro truant officer whom the Negro community is going to have to fight to have removed from his position.

As we looked at all of these ills that plague the Negro community, we felt that we needed a central place so that many forces in the Negro community could come together at regular intervals to communicate and to help drive out the "guilty mist" that plagues so much of our community; to let mothers honestly begin to discuss with one another their family difficulties and to see what could be done to rid themselves



of these problems; to know that thousands in this community share their plight and their ills.

We wanted to incorporate a center where successful black businessmen would give certain hours of their time for free counseling: real estate brokers, people who know about finance, doctors, lawyers. We would get fathers to spend time with boys helping to supervise recreational facilities or crafts.

We have to begin a free day care center for those parents who could not pay for their children. This very modern day care center, under the direction of Mrs. Wendy Roberts, began April 1, 1965. which should help eliminate the many fire deaths that we have had each year.

To make the Negro church more relevant, to plan recreation for our kids who have none now, we incorporated the Dougherty County Resources Development Association, Inc. We have been granted a beginning sum from the United Presbyterian Church under its commission on Race and Religion. The sum is far less than we need so we are asking support from all of our friends in this great endeavor.

In conclusion I see as our main battle now an attempt to make a success of many rehabilitative programs in the Negro community covering the whole gamut of our lives. Much surgery has to be performed to remove the scars and defects left after three hundred years of mental and physical slavery.

The attempt will also be made to build strong political and economic power in the black community.

I do not think that there will be much integration here for some years to come. But as the Negro gains in his economic and political power, belief and pride in himself, he will no longer be thought of by the white majority as the "untouchable" in American life as the white man now regards him and for the first time there will be a possibility of meaningful integration.