

## A Proposal by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for the Development of a Nonviolent Action Movement for the Greater Chicago Area January 5, 1966

Chicago is a city of more than a million Negroes. For almost a century now it has been the northern landing place for southern migrants journeying up from the Mississippi Delta. It was the Promised Land for thousand who sought to escape the cruelties of Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee; yet, now in the year 1966, the cycle has almost reversed. Factories moving South, employment and opportunities on the increase, and recent civil rights legislation are rapidly disintegrating the cruelties of segregation. The South is now a land of opportunity, while those who generations ago sang, "Going to Chicago, sorry but I can't take you," now sink into the depths of despair.

Educational opportunities in Chicago, while an improvement over Mississippi, were hardly adequate to prepare Negroes for metropolitan life. A labor force of some 300,00 have found little beyond low paying service occupations open to them, and those few who possessed skills and crafts found their ranks rapidly being depleted by automation and few opportunities for advancement and promotion. In 1960, Negroes who represented twenty-three percent of the population accounted for forty-three percent of the unemployed. This was not including the thousands of new migrants and young adult males who were entering the laboring market, but who had not yet made their way to an unemployment office, knowing full well in advance that only a few dirty jobs were available to them.

Those few Negroes who were fortunate enough to achieve professional and managerial status found themselves victimized in their search for adequate housing. Two distinct housing markets were maintained by Chicago Real Estate interests, carefully separated and controlled; and those who were able to make what should have been a living wage, found that they had to pay ten to twenty percent more on rental of homes, purchase of property, and insurance and interest rates than their white counterparts.

Langston Hughes asks, "What happens to a dream deferred?" But these dreams were not deferred, they were denied and repudiated by vicious though subtle patterns of exploitation. So the dreams do not "dry up like raisins in the sun." They decay like sun-ripened oranges that are devoured by worms and birds until they fall to the ground, creating a rotten mess. But centuries ago Victor Hugo proclaimed that, "When men are in darkness, there will be crime; but those who have placed them in darkness are as much responsible for the crime as those who commit it." And so the social consequences of our repudiated dreams, denied opportunities and frustrated aspirations are very much present.

Chicago is not alone in this plight, but it is clearly the prototype of the northern urban race problem.

### PAST APPROACHES

During the past two years there has been a conscientious creative attempt to dramatize the evils of this system of northern segregation by the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations. CCCO and its member groups have worked in a united action program and through independent organizational activities to call attention to the various sore spots in Chicago society. Negotiations have taken place with the school board, city officials, labor move-

ment, real estate interests and many other points of power in the high command of Chicago metropolitan life. These efforts represent the foundation stones upon which any movement must build. The CCCO "Get Rid of [Schools Superintendent] Willis Campaign" is as significant as any campaign ever organized in this country. A similar campaign held in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Louisville, Kentucky, or Atlanta, Georgia, would have indeed met with unparalleled success in the area of school desegregation; but before the Goliath of Chicago their efforts made only limited impact.

The problems of Chicago, indeed the problems of the northern city, demands something new.

### THE SCLC PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In our work in the South two principles have emerged. One, the crystallization of issues, and two, the concentration of action.

In Birmingham we confronted the citadel of southern segregation. In 1963 not one aspect of Birmingham community life was desegregated. In approaching this complex segregated society, the issue was simplified deliberately to: Segregation. Early newspaper critiques challenged the simplification and offered a thousand rationalizations as to why such complex problems could not be dealt with so simply and suggested a hundred more "moderate, responsible" methods of dealing with our grievances. Yet it was the simplification of the issue to the point where every citizen of good will, black and white, north and south, could respond and identify that ultimately made Birmingham the watershed movement in the history of the civil rights struggle.

The second point was the concentration of action, and we chose lunch counters, a target which seemed to most social analysts the least significant but one to which most people could rally. It was a target wherein one might achieve some measure of change yet which sufficiently involved the lines of economic and social power to a point beyond itself - to the larger problem.

The concentration of action led to an immediate local victory at the level of the lunch counter, but pointed beyond the lunch counter to the total problem of southern segregation and produced a ten-title legislative victory on a national level in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### THE PROBLEM IN CHICAGO

For the past months the SCLC staff has been working in Chicago trying to apply the SCLC philosophy to the problem of Chicago. Their work has been concerned with strengthening community organizations and recruiting new forces to join in a nonviolent movement, but they have also given a great deal of thought to the crystallization and definition of the problem in Chicago in terms which can be communicated to the man on the street, who is most affected. The Chicago problem is simply a matter of economic exploitation. Every condition exists simply because someone profits by its existence. This economic exploitation is crystallized in the SLUM.

A slum is any area which is exploited by the community at large or an area where free trade and exchange of culture and resources is not allowed to exist. In a slum, people do not receive comparable care and services for the amount of rent paid on a dwelling. They are forced to purchase property at inflated real estate value. They pay taxes, but their children do not receive an equitable share of those taxes in educational, recreational and civic services. They may leave the community and acquire professional training, skills or crafts, but seldom are they able to find employment opportunities commensurate with these skills. And in rare occasions when they do, opportunities for advancement and promotion are restricted. The means that in proportion to the labor, money and intellect which the slum pours into the community at large, only a small portion is received in return benefits. [James] Bevel and our Chicago stall have come to see this as a system of internal colonialism, not unlike the exploitation of the Congo by Belgium.

This situation is true only for Negroes. A neighborhood of Polish citizens might live together in a given geographic area, but that geographic area enters into free exchange with the community at large; and at any time services in that area deteriorate, the citizens are free to move to other areas where standards of health, education and employment are maintained.

As we define and interpret the dynamics of the slum, we see the total pattern of economic exploitation under which Negroes suffer in Chicago and in other northern cities.

1. Education: \$266 per year is the average investment per Negro child; per white pupil it is \$366 in the city of Chicago. Suburban communities spend anywhere from \$450 to \$900 per pupil annually. Hence, slum education is designed to perpetuate the inferior status of slum children and prepare them only for menial jobs in much the same way that the South African apartheid education philosophy does for the African.
2. Building Trade Unions: Building trade unions bar Negroes from many employment opportunities which could easily be learned by persons with limited academic training.
3. Real Estate: Real Estate Boards restrict the supply of housing available to Negroes to the result that Negro families pay an average \$20 per month more in rent and receive fewer services than persons in other neighborhoods.
4. Banks and Mortgage Companies: Banks and mortgage companies charge higher interest rates and in many instances even refuse to finance real estate in slum communities and transitional communities, making the area easy prey for loan sharks.
5. Slum Landlords: Slum landlords find a most lucrative return on a minimum investment due to inefficient enforcement of city building codes as well as inadequate building codes, overcrowding of living space, and a tax structure on slum property which means the more you let the building run down, the less you pay in taxes.
6. The Welfare System: The welfare system contributes to the breakdown of family life by making it more difficult to obtain money if the father is in the household and subjects families to a dehumanized existence at the hand of impersonal self-perpetuating bureaucracy.
7. Federal Housing Agencies: Federal housing agencies will not insure loans for purchasing real estate in Negro communities and make little money available for financing any low-cost housing or renovation of present housing.
8. The Courts: The courts are organized as a tool of the economic structure and political machine. Judges are political appointees and subject to political influence.
9. The Police: The police are little more than "enforcers" of the present system of exploitation and often demonstrate particular contempt for poor Negroes, so that they are deprived of any sense of human dignity and the status of citizenship in order that they may be controlled and "kept in line."
10. The Political System: The established political system deprives Negroes of political power and, through patronage and pressure, robs the community of its democratic voice in the name of a Democratic Machine.
11. The City Administration: The city administration refuses to render adequate services to the Negro community. Street cleaning, garbage collection and police protection are offered menially, if at all.
12. The Federal Government: The federal government has yet to initiate a creative attempt to deal with the problems of megalopolitan life and the results of the past three centuries of slavery and segregation on Negroes.

## CONCENTRATION OF ACTION

There are two possible ways to concentrate on the problems of the slum: one would be to focus on a single issue, but another is to concentrate all of our forces and move in concert with a nonviolent army on each and every issue.

In the South concentration on one issue proved feasible because of a general pattern of state and local resistance. However, in Chicago we are faced with the probability of a ready accommodation to many of the issues in some token manner, merely to curtail the massing of forces and public opinion around those issues. Therefore, we must be prepared to concentrate all of our forces around any and all issues.

## MOBILIZATION OF FORCES

Presently our movement constitutes the member organizations of CCCO and the staff resources of SCLC. Some time has been spent strengthening and orienting these present forces, but they must be supplemented immediately by additional power factors which will help us organize and raise issues before the entire Chicago community.

Foremost among these power factors is the church. The church constitutes a ready ally for a nonviolent movement, because basically we are raising questions of human rights for those who are numbered among the children of God but who have been denied these rights by the structures of our society. This has already begun through the work of Jesse Jackson, Rev. Clay Evans and three Baptist Ministers Conferences.

During the month of January an effort should be made to involve every minister in the city in at least an informational meeting concerning the plans for a nonviolent movement in Chicago. This can be accompanied through meetings with existing ministers conferences, convocations at seminaries in the area, and special efforts to reach the Roman Catholic community through the Catholic Interracial Council and the offices of the Archdiocese.

Students in the fifty-one colleges in the Chicago area are another potential force for the movement. We must also count the entire Negro high school population as an available force to be mobilized. This mobilization should be carried out by concentrating first on key area schools (areas to be defined) with the understanding that contacts are being made in other schools who may be organized for supporting action in a few days time.

There should be approximately 100,000 unemployed Negroes in the city of Chicago, a considerable percentage of these would be young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. Many of these are in gangs or are drifting idly from corner to corner. This group must [be] mobilized into an action unit, prepared to demonstrate whenever the occasion seems tactically important. Their organization must be in their own behalf and must focus on meaningful employment and training opportunities through which they might achieve active participation in our society.

In two or three selected neighborhoods, household units must be organized into some type of union to end slums (or householders union, tenant union, or community union). These neighborhoods would be organized on a door-to-door basis to bargain collectively with landlords and the city in an effort to change the conditions which create slums. It would provide protection against eviction and exploitation and help resolve many immediate problems, but its main function would be to band together to demand that the conditions which create slums be ended. This would be a tremendous power in dealing with both political and economic factors which affect life in the slums.

Some explorations are under way in Longdale, East Garfield Park, Kenwood and Englewood.

## DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO ACTION

In our present understanding of the nature of slums and the nature of a movement, the task of developing an action program which involves the whole of Chicago and encompasses many issues should not be too difficult. From the bases of power, which are discussed in the previous section, we will have the forces which can be mobilized to dramatize issues as they occur.

During the first phase of the movement organization and education are the primary purposes. This will be done largely through mass meetings, neighborhood rallies and work shops and should continue through the month of February. Demonstrations must also be thought of as educational and organizational tools, and there may be some occasions which call for demonstrations. When this is the case, it must be clear that the purpose of the demonstration is to dramatize and so define this incident as one link in the chain of economic exploitation which occurs in slum life.

Phase 2: By the first of March, community response and live issues should have evolved to the point where some consensus has been reached around specific targets. At this point we should be able to develop the detailed day-by-day strategy which would seek to demonstrate the total chain which enslaves us. Demonstrations should be scheduled at points which should reveal the agents of exploitation and paint a portrait of the evils which beset us in such a manner that it is clear the world over what makes up a slum and what it is that destroys the people who are forced to live in a slum.

Phase 3: By the first of May we should be ready to launch the phases of massive action, but just as no one knew on January 2, 1965, that there would be a march from Selma to Montgomery by March of that year, so now we are in no position to know what form massive action might take in Chicago. However, as we begin to dramatize the situation, we will be led into forms of demonstration which will create the kind of coalition of conscience which is necessary to produce change in this country.

## OBJECTIVES

Our objectives in this movement are federal, state and local. On the federal level we would hope to get the kind of comprehensive legislation which would meet the problems of slum life across this nation. At the state level, we should expect the kinds of tax reforms, updating of building codes, open occupancy legislation and enforcement of existing statutes for the protection of our citizens. On the local level we would hope to create the kind of awareness in people that would make it impossible for them to [be] enslaved or abused and create for them the kind of democratic structures which will enable them to continually deal with the problems of slum life. Among these would be active community organizations, a coordinated and powerful civil rights movement, religious institutions which are prepared to minister to persons in urban society as well as to the structures of that society. We would also hope that from this would emerge several pilot projects and institutions which might be of some permanent significance.

There are very few cultural, recreational and vocational facilities available to youth in this country to match the kinds of sports pavilions which exist in other countries of the world. One need only think of what it would have meant to Harlem and the whole world had New York's Lincoln Center been constructed between Central Park and 125th Street. A whole region would have been reclaimed. Perhaps the city of Chicago might be influenced to devote a similar portion of its resources to the cultural and recreational life of its underprivileged youth and centers like Lincoln Center in New York or Opportunities Industrialization Centers of Philadelphia might be outgrowths of our years of movement in Chicago.

## **DEMANDS PLACED ON THE DOOR OF THE CHICAGO CITY HALL BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

**July 10, 1966**

### **Real Estate Boards and Brokers**

1. Public statements that all listings will be available on a nondiscriminatory basis.

### **Banks and Savings Institutions**

1. Public statements of a nondiscriminatory mortgage policy so that loans will be available to any qualified borrower without regard to the racial composition of the area.

### **The Mayor and City Council**

1. Publication of headcounts of whites, Negroes and Latin Americans for all city departments and for all firms from which city purchases are made.
2. Revocation of contracts with firms that do not have a full scale fair employment practice.
3. Creation of a citizens review board for grievances against police brutality and false arrests or stops and seizures.
4. Ordinance giving ready access to the names of owners and investors for all slum properties.
5. A saturation program of increased garbage collection, street cleaning, and building inspection services in the slum properties.

### **Political Parties**

1. The requirement that precinct captains be residents of their precincts.

### **Chicago Housing Authority and the Chicago Dwelling Association**

1. Program to rehabilitate present public housing including such items as locked lobbies, rest-rooms in recreation areas, increased police protection and child care centers on every third floor.
2. Program to increase vastly the supply of low-cost housing on a scattered basis for both low and middle income families.

### **Business**

1. Basic headcounts, including white, Negro and Latin American, by job classification and income level, made public.
2. Racial steps to upgrade and to integrate all departments, all levels of employments.

### **Unions**

1. Headcounts in unions for apprentices, journeymen and union staff and officials by job classification. A cash program to remedy any inequities discovered by the headcount.
2. Indenture of at least 400 Negro and Latin American apprentices in the craft unions.

### **Governor**

1. Prepare legislative proposals for a \$2.00 state minimum wage law and for credit reform, including the abolition of garnishment and wage assignment.

### **Illinois Public Aid Commission and the Cook County Department of Public Aid**

1. Encouragement of grievance procedures for the welfare recipients so that recipients know that they can be members of and represented by a welfare union or a community organization.

2. Institution of a declaration of income system to replace the degrading investigation and means test for welfare eligibility.

#### **Federal Government**

1. Executive enforcement of Title I of the 1964 Civil Rights Act regarding the complaint against the Chicago Board of Education.
2. An executive order for Federal supervision of the nondiscriminatory granting of loans by banks and savings institutions that are members of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.
3. Passage of the 1966 Civil Rights Act without any deletions or crippling amendments.
4. Direct funding of Chicago community organizations by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

#### **People**

1. Financial support of the Freedom Movement.
2. Selective buying campaigns against businesses that boycott the products of Negro-owned companies.
3. Participation in the Freedom movement target campaigns for this summer, including volunteer services and membership in one of the Freedom Movement Organizations.