

NONVIOLENT VIEW VOICED BY S.C.L.C.

Dr. King's Group Prepared
Drive in Capital for Poor

BY STEVEN V. ROBERTS

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed as his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was preparing its largest demonstration for Negro rights—the Poor People's Campaign scheduled to begin in Washington on April 22.

Dr. King and his aides were planning to have 3,000 Negroes from throughout the South camp out in the capital and put pressure on Congress to provide decent jobs or adequate income for the black poor.

The Poor People's Campaign exemplified the drastic changes in the civil rights movement since 1955, when Dr. King, then a 27-year-old minister in his first parish, led a boycott of the Montgomery bus system.

In the early days the movement concentrated on legal rights, such as the right to vote, or use public accommodations. The new emphasis is on substantive improvements in the lives of Negroes—better education, more jobs and decent housing.

Clergy in Chief Roles

In addition, the campaign for increased public spending for the poor has been linked to issue of the Vietnam war and the distortion of national priorities the rights leaders say it has created.

At the same time, the strategy of Dr. King and the conference has varied little, no matter what the issue. They have steadily espoused the ideal of nonviolence and depended more on moral than political influence to win their battles. And they have used the tactic of public demonstrations to present starkly their moral case to the nation.

In some ways Dr. King was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization composed mainly of Southern Negro ministers and other professional people he helped organize at the end of the Montgomery boycott in early 1957.

The several years prior to the start of the Poor People's Campaign were difficult ones for

the leadership conference. The slogan of "black power" was adopted by militant young black leaders and led to widening splits between them and the established civil rights organizations.

Financial Difficulties

Dr. King refused to decline help from the white community, but his group suffered from the financial squeeze that afflicted all civil rights groups in the wake of urban riots and increasingly angry statements

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by such young Negroes as H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael.

In 1966, Dr. King announced a massive campaign against slum conditions in Chicago that never made much headway and was quietly abandoned.

The campaign was just one more bit of evidence that the optimism of the beginning of the civil rights movement had underestimated the problem of improving the economic and social condition of Negroes.

Perhaps the culmination of the campaign for legal rights came in March, 1965, when the leadership conference organized a drive to register voters in Selma, Ala. The drive ended with a march of 25,000 people from Selma to Montgomery, where Dr. King addressed the crowd from the steps of the state Capitol.

Pushed Voter Drives

In the years before the Selma march, Dr. King and his aides worked on voter registration and desegregation drives throughout the South. He led a five-week campaign in Birmingham in 1963 in which four little girls were killed when a church was bombed. Meanwhile, pictures of snarling police dogs were spread across the pages of the nation's newspapers.

The leadership conference also used the economic boycott and started a project called Operation Breadbasket in a number of cities, designed to encourage companies, through negotiations, to hire Negro workmen.

In 1961 the conference helped organize the historic freedom rides in which integrated teams tested the integration of Southern buses.

Many of these activities were managed by Dr. King's aides, such as the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, who formed the backbone of the leadership conference while Dr. King was busy with other projects.

In 1957, Mr. Abernathy's house and church were bombed in Montgomery while he and Dr. King were in Atlanta at a meeting Southern Negro leaders they had called. The two ministers returned to Montgomery at the news and then flew back to Atlanta on the last day of the meeting.

The bombings, coming at the end of the Montgomery boycott, so inflamed the Negro leaders that they formed the Southern Leadership Conference before they dispersed and named Dr. King as its head.

He held the post until his death.