

A Mood of Tension and Violence

WASHINGTON—Within hours after Martin Luther King was struck down at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, the Negro ghettos in many parts of the country exploded. The assassination of the apostle of nonviolence brought the fears of a long hot summer to frightening reality — months early.

Plas for calm, for the need now more than ever to follow Dr. King's teachings came from his friends and followers—the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, his successor at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Roy Wilkins of the N.A.A.C.P., Whitney Young of the Urban League, and others. But the ghetto-dwellers did not listen to them. The voice which seemed to express the mood and the temper was that of Stokely Carmichael, the young black militant. He went into the streets of the nation's capital, proclaiming, "White America has declared war on black America!"

Rioting Builds

In more than 40 cities across the country, young Negroes took to the streets. Some were there—ironically in light of Dr. King's life and work—in an almost gleeful mood as they rampaged, burning, breaking and looting. At first, the police in most cities acted with restraint and forbearance. But the violence mounted into a second night on Friday, and into Saturday. The National Guard was called out to quell the rioters and restore order in Detroit, Chicago, Memphis and elsewhere.

One of most destructive outbreaks came in the shadow of the Capitol and the White House. The young rioters burned and looted not only in the Negro ghettos but also in the downtown areas. Friday afternoon, President Johnson declared a

state of domestic violence and disorder in Washington and called out Federal troops; but they were only partially successful in calming the city. There were sporadic outbreaks in Washington and around the nation all day yesterday, with thousands under arrest, at least 19 dead by nightfall and an uncounted number injured.

As the rioting continued, there was the critical question of what can be done now, not just to stop this outbreak, but to prevent another. The first step, almost everyone agreed, was apprehension of Dr. King's killer if possible. Attorney General Ramsey Clark was guiding Federal agents in that task; he said yesterday that he expected an early solution.

From all sides there were also demands that the nation must take affirmative steps to end the conditions that Dr. King was fighting against — inequality and poverty, hatred and bigotry.

Until last Thursday night, President Johnson had shown not the slightest indication of acting on or heally even listening to Dr. King's demands, in his planned spring and summer poor people's campaign in Washington for "jobs or income now" for the nation's underclass.

As long as the war in Vietnam continues to drain away \$20. or \$30-billion a year—even if Mr. Johnson finally gets his 10 percent Federal income tax surcharge—there will be no room in the Federal budget for the overdue and now (thanks to Dr. King's murder) self-evident urgency to act sweepingly on Dr. King's noble dream for America. Obviously allowing room for bargaining losses, Dr. King had been talking in terms of a Federal package costing about \$10-billion a year—W.P.A.-type jobs for the otherwise unemployable,

guaranteed incomes, massive infusions of money and talent to ghetto education, vocational training, housing, transportation and real improvements in the cruel catalogue of ills that everyone knows oppresses the poor and the racially disinherited of this land.

Johnson's Reaction

For a number of reasons, Dr. King's demands are not tied to any specific legislation, although a number of bills meeting his specifications — even exceeding them — already have been introduced. The outstanding one is the proposed Full Opportunity Act of Representative John Conyers, Jr., a respected moderate Negro Democrat from Detroit.

But the \$30-billion Conyers bill as it stands is going nowhere in Congress. Dr. King knew it and sought to avoid embracing even an attractive prospective flop, a measure whose endorsement by him would merely give his enemies in Congress an easy

out. President Johnson's reaction to the King demands now, in the fiery aftermath of the assassination, cannot be underrated. Mr. Johnson announced last Friday that he would go before a joint session of Congress and, by television, before the nation, at 9 P.M. tomorrow to propose "constructive action instead of destructive action in this hour of national need." The President could—freed now of the chains of candidacy—make a dramatic and astonishing switch by proposing some of Dr. King's revolutionary demands and hoping—ironically for Dr. King—that the national agony of rioting and looting will apply more pressure to a basically anti-revolutionary Congress than a summer of non-violent demonstrations.

While he lived, as recently as last week, Dr. King himself constantly reminded his followers that the President's conversion was a possibility. He liked to recall the day in December, 1964, when Mr. Johnson told him at the White House: "Martin, we just can't get the Voting Rights bill through Congress."

Significantly, and almost unknown outside a group of influential sympathizers with Dr. King's plans this summer who have been deeply concerned that he "have a win" in Washington, a major effort has been underway to deliver an unmatched outpouring of both lobbying aid in Congress and substitute employment and training programs from the private sector. This non-government response is designed to avoid the appearance of total failure of the poor people's campaign. Corporations, foundations and the urban coalition have been prepared to fill some of the Congressional commission gap.

If they now redouble their efforts, if the President chooses to go as far as "war or peace in Vietnam will let him, and if Congress reacts at last to the national scandal and crisis of the ghettos, the result may be a fraction of Dr. King's dream. If not, the dream is certain to become a nightmare. Dr. King recognized that possibility, too, and warned that it would "send this nation to hell."

The next few weeks may be a testing time for the American state as well as the American soul. Dr. King's apocalyptic prophecy of a "Fascist" reaction of repression of the Negro revolution by force of arms seems only a pistol shot away this weekend in more than 40 American cities.

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