

The Poor Prepare to March

ATLANTA — The sanitation strike that drew the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Memphis early this month contained at least two elements which the murdered civil rights leader had hoped to raise in Washington later in the spring.

For one thing, the Memphis dispute reminded several observers of the old-time civil rights movement. The marches, the mass meetings, the determined unity of the city's Negroes all captured a mood that many thought was lost forever.

Also, the strike carried a neat blend of economics and discrimination (most of the workers were Negroes), and it illustrated a part of what Dr. King and many others considered the central problem facing Negroes today.

Still, it seemed unlikely to many that Dr. King could take the immensely broader and more politically sensitive issue of nationwide poverty and create, amid politics and backlash, a successful crusade in Washington this year.

After Watts and Detroit, a Birmingham or Selma in the nation's capital seemed dull or dangerous or both. Now, in the emotional aftermath of Dr. King's assassination, his successors are confident that it will be neither.

The Poor Peoples' Campaign officially opens tomorrow and is being led by Dr. King's successor at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy. The drive has produced considerable stir among the poor. Dr. King had planned to bring 3,000 of them to Washington but a great many more are now expected.

Response

A Negro leader in Durham, N. C., offered 1,500 persons from that city alone. About 1,000 Mexican-Americans from California are planning to make the trip, and even a few Apalachian whites are expected.

There is stir elsewhere, too. The campaign's leadership is convinced there is a prospect of major legislation because of the sympathetic reaction to Dr. King's death and a greater awareness "of how bad the situation really is."

The possibility of a new law has in turn aroused the interest

of several large civil rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which had been pessimistic.

Also, a number of the old hands who helped guide the movement four or five years ago have turned from more recent pursuits to advise the S.C.L.C. staff on the campaign.

These include Bayard Rustin of New York, who helped plan the march on Washington in August, 1963, and the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker of New York, a key organizer of the S.C.L.C. drives in Birmingham and elsewhere in the South.

Tomorrow, about 100 men and women, including the poor, plan to visit Congressional leaders and Administration officials to make an initial appeal for "jobs or income for all." President Johnson was not on the list, they say.

If there is no response, an advance contingent will attempt the construction of a shanty village on the Mall May 13. The symbolic shacks would house those arriving May 16-18 in caravans from the South, Midwest and Northeast.

"Major demonstrations" are scheduled to begin May 20, and a "massive march" similar to the 1963 protest is set for 10 days later. The details of these activities have not been worked out.

Bernard LaFayette, national coordinator of the campaign, explained that the tactics will depend on the response of the city authorities.

Campaign sources say there has been little contact with Federal officials and little indication of how they will react. Regardless of their approach, however, there is certain to be pressure on a number of officers.

For many in the S.C.L.C. the Washington project is seen as a chance to demonstrate the organization's strength despite the loss of Dr. King. However, much of its force will stem from the impact of his assassination.

A more important reading of the group's ability to go on effectively, some observers believe, must await the S.C.L.C.'s next major campaign, one in which Dr. King has had no part.

—WALTER RUGABER



The New York Times (by Don Charles)
NEW LEADER: Dr. Ralph Abernathy, who has taken Dr. Martin Luther King's place at the head of the S.C.L.C., will lead the Poor People's Campaign in Washington starting tomorrow.