

soul force

"TO REDEEM THE SOUL OF AMERICA"

JANUARY, 1971

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Vol. 3 No. 3

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daylight of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality"



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Official Journal of the
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, President
334 Auburn Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta, Ga. 30303

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JAN. 15TH.

people's day

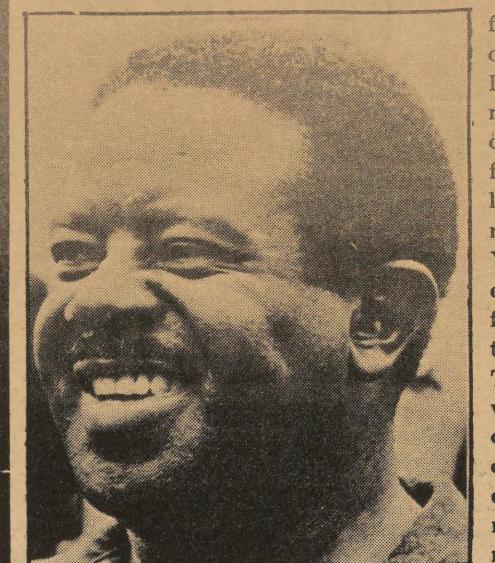
"These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression and out of the womb of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that, because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of Communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries. This has driven many to feel that only Marxism has the revolutionary spirit. Therefore, Communism is a judgment against our failure to make democracy real and follow through on the revolutions that we initiated. Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

STATE OF THE NATION

(cont'd from above)

economic and social conditions of these communities is still one of being on the bottom rung of the ladder. There is only one way for us to go and that is up and we will either go up together or we will stay down together. The cold winter days are with us now but Springtime is around the corner and I am proposing that we mobilize and lay the foundation now for a Spring offensive. That new thrust must say to the

Administration that we are aware of the dangerous course this nation is on and we are determined to turn it around. To accomplish this we must end the division and come together and restore to the nation a sense of national purpose and vision. To achieve this will undoubtedly require a brand new Administration in 1972. That perspective has to be organized for now. ■



By Dr. Ralph David Abernathy

STATE OF A NATION

The year ending marks the first in the new decade which our country has now entered. It was a significant year for measuring the depths of the crisis which American society finds itself in; a crisis of a long drawn out character and many sided in its dimensions. Yet it was a year which enables us to draw confidence from the example of struggles that erupted in several areas. These were struggles that were successful within limited objectives and therefore full of hope that they present disastrous course of the nation can be reversed. I am making reference here to the recent Postal Workers strike with which this year began the courageous struggle of the Auto Workers against the deterioration of their living standards and working conditions and the current

strike of Georgetown, S.C. and the United Farm Workers Organization in California. I am proud that SCLC has had active fraternal relations with each of these groups.

Fortunately, Nixon and Agnew were unable to stampede American voters around the "law and order" issue during the recent congressional and state elections. While the conservative forces undoubtedly scored some victories with Nixon and Agnew's help, for the most part it was the reelection of a number of stalwart liberal and progressives like Senator Hartke in Indiana and Philip Hart in Michigan and the emergence of a body of talented new political leaders like Adlai Stevenson III in Illinois and John Tunney in California which are the main

successes of these elections. As to this the solid block of twelve black congressmen, including three new ones, and we see that the electoral arena remains an area in which work must and can be successfully done.

The recent "White House Conference On Children" at which I had the honor of addressing a plenary session, revealed in its composition, that the coalition which we in SCLC worked so hard to develop during the first phase of the Poor People's Campaign is holding its own. Despite strains and stresses, encouraged by those who would divide us, large numbers of activists see the common ground for unity among Blacks, Chicano, Puerto Ricans, Appalachian Whites, and Indians. The

cont'd below

Every nation produces during its history a few great men, who appear unannounced and steal into the heart of the people. When they are gone, the people remember it is the most natural thing in the world to remember with gratitude, the greatness of these few, these great men. Such a man was Martin Luther King Jr. and by the power of his message and his courage, held up to the American people their own noble dream, and the shortcomings compared to it. And because the American people sensed and knew that Dr. King loved them, and had come not to condemn, but to call out the best potential in them, the American people grew to love him in return.

His going was so sudden and tragic that nation was traumatized and the dream that he so eloquently described and so powerfully lived was clearly highlighted by the people's response to his death. The American people did not forget. The grief was a long time passing for many Dr. King had been a symbol of so much hope to so many people. The passing of the dreamer could not obscure the great dream he had so beautifully portrayed so many times in so many ways to the American people.

Spontaneously at first, in a thousand private ways, the American people remembered Martin Luther King, Jr. At first it was through grief and tears. But there is a healing that enables people to remember the beauty as well as the grief.

January 15th, the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a new holiday on the calendar— "The People's Holiday".

Congress and the President have failed to give this date official legal recognition, but a year ago, Dr. Ralph David

Congress and the President have failed to give this date official legal recognition, but a year ago, Dr. Ralph David Abernathy proclaimed January 15th as "The People's Holiday," and the people responded. Millions celebrated the birthday of this great Black man and world leader of this century.

Congressman John Conyers, with twenty-four other Congressmen and Senators, introduced a bill in the U. S. Congress calling for the Congress to establish January 15th as a national holiday. Nine states declared some sort of special observance for the day. Over thirty-eight cities and school districts declared special observances, officially. Hundreds of communities and churches held special observances. School children had special assemblies and essay contests. January 15th was already a special day, celebrated in a special way, for millions of Americans. And like the slaves who had been set free near the end of the Civil War, the American people knew that sooner or later the government would catch up, and make the People's Holiday an official National Holiday.

This January 15th, 1971 will be even a greater day, because millions more of the people will speak. Several states already and at least thirty cities will have official observations. Unions are beginning to demand that January 15th be a paid holiday for workers. Students are honoring Dr. King in school assemblies and activities. All across the nation on the 15th of January, the people are using their holiday to salute Dr. King with religious services, marches, and demonstrations, and movements.

Once again, we will challenge the Federal Government to act. This time, we will present to Congress in Washington, millions of signatures calling upon the national legislature to declare each January 15th a national legal holiday.

As we prepare for the "People's Holiday" in 1971, we should think about why we celebrate on this day and how we should celebrate it.

First of all, we should never allow America and the world to forget the greatness of Martin Luther King, Jr. His vision will always be relevant to the solution of human problems, and we should always look to him for guidance.

It was Dr. King who awakened the world. It was Dr. King who awakened the world to the evils of racism, genocide, poverty, war and oppression. And it was he who began to lead us toward overcoming these evils with a mass movement of people. So we should resolve each January 15th, especially in this perilous new decade of the '70's, to continue that movement until Dr. King's work is completed.

We must also create new demands and new strategies for our movement. We must become more militant and fulfill the potential of mass civil disobedience which was a strategy that Dr. King was moving forward in the later days of his life. We must teach a whole new generation of young people about the legacy of Dr. King and about his techniques for seizing power for the people— through the ballot, through coalitions of the oppressed, through and organized force for the working poor, and through the masses of the young. It is this revitalized mass movement of people which will really celebrate and honor Martin Luther King, Jr. Let us begin the renewal of our struggle on January 15th—

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP CELEBRATE JANUARY 15TH?

■ COMMUNITY GROUPS—Organize memorial observances, highlighting specific community grievances.

■ UNION MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS—Ask your local to declare it a special day. Declare to the community in a special resolution why your local is celebrating January 15th.

During the day be included as a holiday in your next contract, and make it a "non-negotiable demand."

Get your union to support officially, the ongoing work of Martin Luther King, Jr., through

■ STUDENTS AND FACULTY—Organize special anti-war and anti-racism and anti-poverty rallies on your campus.

■ SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS—Demand special observances in your school during January.

■ COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS—Organize a special black studies program, for all students white and black, during the month of January.

■ CLERGYMEN AND CHURCH MEMBERS—Special sermons on the Sunday before January 15th, preaching about the Movement for justice.

■ MEMORIAL OBSERVANCES—Organize special anti-war and anti-racism and anti-poverty rallies on your campus.

■ SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center.

■ DEDICATE SPECIAL OBSERVANCES IN YOUR SCHOOL DURING JANUARY.

■ ORGANIZE A SPECIAL STUDY PROGRAM, FOR ALL STUDENTS WHITE AND BLACK, DURING THE MONTH OF JANUARY.

■ ORGANIZE AN ANTI-POVERTY RALLY ON YOUR CAMPUS.

■ YOUR LOCAL CHURCH SHOULD MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY ASKING IT TO FACE THESE PROBLEMS IN THE SAME SPIRIT AS DR. KING SO OFTEN FACED THEM.

■ ORGANIZE A STUDY OF THE NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE.

■ KEEP MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY IN YOUR OWN WAY, WITH YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION THAT WILL HELP YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TO REJOICE IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM, POVERTY AND WAR.

■ EVERY CITIZEN—WRITE YOUR CONGRESSMAN, AND YOUR SENATOR, URGING SUPPORT OF H.R. 7703, THE BILL TO MAKE JANUARY 15TH EACH YEAR MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY, AN OFFICIAL HOLIDAY.

■ WRITE YOUR STATE GOVERNOR, STATE LEGISLATOR, MAYOR, MEMBER OF CITY COUNCIL, AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, ASKING THAT THEY, TOO, MARK THE DAY WITH SPECIAL OBSERVANCES.

■ REMEMBER THE POOR, GOVERNOR, STATE LEGISLATOR, MEMBER OF CITY COUNCIL, AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, ASKING THAT THEY, TOO, MARK THE DAY WITH SPECIAL OBSERVANCES.

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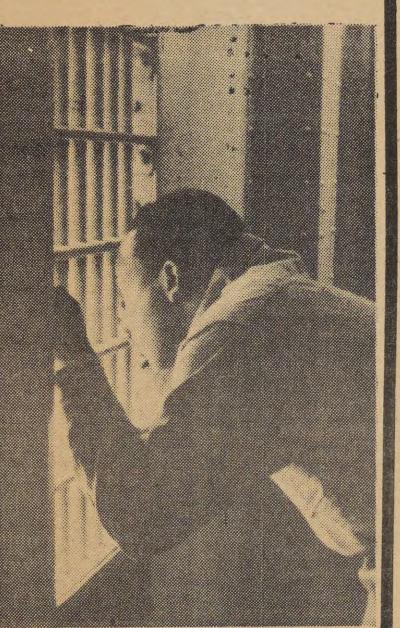
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WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION, KYOTO JAPAN

(Left to right) Hosea Williams, Nat'l Prg. Coord.; President Abernathy; Wyatt Tee Walker, SCLC 2nd Vice-President.

(Editor's Note: An unprecedented World Conference on Religion and Peace was held October 16-22, 1970, in Kyoto, Japan. It was the first known assembly of leaders of every major religion in the world, from every continent and nearly all nations. In a major address which clearly aroused the Conference, Dr. Ralph David Abernathy challenged religious leaders to take specific actions toward building world-wide nonviolent movements for justice and peace. Excerpts of the SCLC President's speech follow.)

As leaders of religions, we must work together in this revolution, putting aside the comparatively minor differences over doctrine. We can have unity without unanimity. We can have diversity without division. And eventually, we can have a world community without the scourge of racial hate and oppression, the suffering of poverty, the madness of war.

It is time, my brothers and sisters, for a mighty act of soul-force, to raise up before all men the ancient dreams of brotherhood and justice. We must produce brave words, but more than brave words, we must produce mighty acts. We must first set the houses of religion in order. The blind cannot lead the blind, and the lame cannot help others walk.

LETTUCE BOYCOTT

The farm workers in the lettuce fields of California and Arizona have been on strike for over two months now, and representatives from Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers Organizing Committee are spreading across the country from California to organize a new nation-wide boycott: iceberg lettuce.



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STRIKE

In Georgetown, S. C., 600 striking steel workers, black and white, have been waging a four month struggle for basic rights that most workers have enjoyed in the U. S. for years, the right to organize and bargain collectively. Despite the news blackout by the major media, these workers see their struggle as part of the national and international move on the part of workers to establish the fact that the human survival of the working poor should not be subordinate to the will of the business bureaucracy.

For several weeks, SCLC's labor organizing staff have been working with the striking workers and union officials, as a part of the overall effort to organize the poor, in an attempt to mobilize and organize a broad base of support in this small port city.



The Georgetown Steel Corp., owned by a West German corporation, is a clear example of corporate imperialism in reverse, black and white workers being exploited to insure greater profits for foreign investments. Georgetown Steel Corp. was obviously attracted to the South Carolina town because of the super propaganda promoted by the state government that South Carolina has the lowest rate of union recognition of any state in the U. S. During the Charleston, S. C. hospital strike, it was disclosed by the official tourist guide that South Carolina has little or no union recognition and literally no strike action on the part of workers. Consequently, a haven for labor exploitation.

The present state government has used most of its available tools to crush this struggle on the part of the workers. Newspapers and TV have refused to give serious coverage to demonstrations and strike actions. The mayor and city officials have refused to grant permits for marches through town, and on November 7th, 150 strikers and supporters were brutally beaten by highway patrolmen.

SCLC president, Ralph David Abernathy, speaking at a march-rally in Georgetown of more than 1200 supporters and strikers, said: 'No, you are not represented in government, because it is the Governor who has sent troops to intimidate you... Senator Strom Thurmond has submitted legislation to stop food stamps for striking workers... Senator Hollings has written a bill... but refuses to take a stand with workers who are fighting to remove their poverty conditions. No, there is no representative government in S. C., but SCLC will toil with you in your struggle because your victory will be a victory for all the working poor.'

Carl E. Farris, SCLC national labor coordinator, sees Georgetown as a classic opportunity to begin to forge the union of southern black and white workers. "The curious mystique of race that has been exploited by the establishment for more than a century, subsides in the face of the overpowering issue of mutual exploitation."

The strike continues. The movement is gaining a broader base of support. Broad-shouldered white steelworkers, who could be mistaken for Nixon supporters, have joined hands with blacks to sing "We Shall Overcome" injustice. ■

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