

## The Case Against "Tokenism"

*The veteran civil rights leader here argued that "token integration" would not satisfy African Americans, because "a new sense of somebodiness" had revolutionized blacks' self-conception about their role in American society.*

A few weeks ago, I was convicted in the City Court of Albany, Georgia, for participating in a peaceful march protesting segregated conditions in that community. I decided, on the basis of conscience, not to pay the fine of \$178 but to serve the jail sentence of forty-five days. Just as I was about to get adjusted to my new home, Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy and I were notified that some unknown donor had paid our fines and that we had to leave the jail. As the *Atlanta Constitution* suggested shortly after, we have now reached a new landmark in race relations. We have witnessed persons being ejected from lunch counters during the sit-ins and thrown into jails during the freedom rides. But for the first time we witnessed persons being kicked out of jail. [Just over a week ago, while holding a prayer protest outside the city hall in Albany, Georgia, Dr. King was arrested again and returned to jail.]

Victor Hugo once said that there is nothing more powerful in all the world than an idea whose time has come. Anyone sensitive to the present moods, morals and trends in our nation must know that the time for racial justice has come. The issue is not *whether* segregation and discrimination will be eliminated but *how* they will pass from the scene.

During the past decade, some intelligent leaders in the South have recognized inevitability. Others, however, have tried vainly to stop the wind from blowing and the tides from flowing. These recalcitrant forces authored concepts like nullification and interposition, along with such uglier evils as bombings, mob violence and economic reprisals. But the idea whose time had come moved on. Over the rubble left by the violence of mobsters, many communities resumed their normal activities on a new basis of partial integration.

These changes have been unevenly distributed and in some communities may be barely perceptible, yet enough has been accomplished to make the pattern of the future sharply clear. The illusions of the diehards have been shattered and, in most instances, they have made a hurried retreat from the reckless notions of ending public education and closing parks, lunch counters and other public facilities.

But in the tradition of old guards, who would die rather than surrender, a new and hastily constructed roadblock has appeared in the form of planned and institutionalized tokenism. Many areas of the South are retreating to a position where they will permit a handful of Negroes to attend all-white schools or allow the employment in lily-white factories of one Negro to a thousand whites. Thus, we have advanced in some places from all-out, unrestrained resistance to a sophisticated form-of delaying tactics, embodied in tokenism. In a sense, this is one of the most difficult problems that the integration movement confronts. But I am confident that this strategem will prove as fruitless as the earlier attempt to mobilize massive resistance to even a scintilla of change.

What of the future? Will it be marked by the same actions as in the past? This is not easy to answer with precision. Certainly there will still be resistance—but I am convinced the old South has gone, never to return. Many of the problems today are due to a futile attempt by the white South to maintain a system of human values that came into being under a feudalistic plantation system and that cannot survive in a democratic age.

If the South is to grow economically, it must continue to industrialize. Day after day, the South is receiving new, multimillion-dollar industries and with the growth of urban society the folkways of white supremacy will gradually pass away. The arrival of industry will increase the purchasing power of the Negro and with that will come improved medical care, greater educational opportunities and more adequate housing. And every such development will result in a further weakening of segregation.

In spite of screams of "over my dead body will any change come," the changes that have come to the South as a result of federal action must not be overlooked. There are always those who will argue that legislation, court orders and executive decrees from the federal government are ineffective because they cannot change the heart. They contend that you cannot legislate morals. But while it may be true that morality cannot be legislated, behavior can be regulated.

The law may not change the heart—but it can restrain the heartless. It will take education and religion to change bad internal attitudes—but legislation and court orders can control their external effects. Federal court decrees have, for example, altered transportation patterns and changed educational mores—so that the habits, if not the hearts, of people are being altered every day by federal action. And these major social changes have a cumulative force conditioning other segments of life.

More and more, the voice of the church is being heard—although it is still true that the church is the most segregated major institution in America. As a minister of the gospel, I am ashamed to say that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning—when we stand to sing "In Christ There Is

No East Nor West"—is the most segregated hour of America, and that Sunday school is the most segregated school of the week. But in spite of this appalling fact, the nation is beginning to shake the lethargy from its soul.

Here and there, churches are courageously making attacks on segregation and even integrating their congregations. Several parochial and church-related schools of the South are also throwing off the incubus, and as the church continues to take a forthright stand on this issue, the transition from a segregated to an integrated society will be infinitely smoother.

Probably the most powerful force, however, in breaking down the barriers of segregation is the new determination of the Negro himself. For many years the Negro tacitly accepted them. He was often the victim of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. While there were always lone voices in the Negro community crying out against segregation, conditions of fear and apathy made it difficult for them to develop into a mass chorus. But through the forces of history something happened to the Negro.

The social upheavals of two world wars, the Great Depression and the spread of the automobile made it both possible and necessary for the Negro to move away from his former isolation on the rural plantation. The decline of agriculture and the parallel growth of industry have drawn large numbers of Negroes to urban centers and brought about a gradual improvement in their economic status. New contacts have led to a broadened outlook and new possibilities for educational advance. Once plagued with a tragic sense of inferiority, resulting from the crippling effects of slavery and segregation, the Negro has now been driven to reevaluate himself.

He has come to feel that he *is* somebody. And with this new sense of "somebodiness" and self-respect, a new Negro has emerged with a new determination to achieve freedom and human dignity whatever the cost may be.

This is the true meaning of the struggle that is taking place in the South today. One cannot understand the Montgomery bus boycott, the sit-ins and the Albany, Georgia, movement without understanding that there is a new Negro on the scene with a new sense of dignity and destiny. Thousands of Negroes have come to see that it is ultimately more honorable to suffer in dignity than accept segregation in humiliation.

A special feature of our struggle is its universal quality. Every social stratum is involved—lower, middle and upper class—and every age—children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens. The whole nation was startled by the Montgomery bus protest in 1956, chiefly because every Negro allied himself with the cause in firm discipline.

The same universal involvement is now appearing in Albany, Georgia. Last December more than seven hundred Negroes from this com-

munity willingly went to jail to create an effective protest. I shall never forget the experience of seeing women over seventy, teenagers and middle-aged adults crowding the cells—some with professional degrees in medicine, law and education; some simple housekeepers and laborers and others from business. All were different in age and social status—but all were united in one objective. Negro solidarity is a powerful growing force which no society may wisely ignore.

Fortunately, the Negro has been willing to use a creative and powerful force in his struggle for racial justice—namely, nonviolent resistance. This is not meant as a substitute for litigation and legislation, which must continue. But those who adhere to the method of nonviolent, direct action recognize that legislation and court orders tend only to declare rights—they can never thoroughly deliver them.

Only when the people themselves begin to act are rights on paper given lifeblood. Life is breathed into a judicial decision by the persistent exercise of legal rights until they become usual and ordinary in human experience.

The method of nonviolent resistance is effective in that it has a way of disarming opponents. It exposes their moral defenses, weakens their morale and at the same time works on their conscience. It makes it possible for the individual to struggle for moral ends through moral means.

One of the most persistent philosophical debates throughout the centuries has been over the question of ends and means. There have been those, like Machiavelli, who have argued that the end justifies the means. This, I feel, is one of the greatest tragedies of communism. Read Lenin as he says "Lying, deceit and violence are justifiable means to bring about the aim of a classless society."

This is where the principle of nonviolence breaks with communism and any other method which holds to the same belief. In a real sense, the means represent the ideal in the making—the end in process. So, in the long run, destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends because the ends are preexistent in the means.

Nonviolent resistance also provides a creative force through which men can channelize their discontent. It does not require that they abandon it, for this kind of discontent is sound and healthy. Nonviolence simply saves it from degenerating into morbid bitterness and hatred. Hate is always tragic. It is as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. It distorts the personality and scars the soul. Psychiatrists, believing that many of man's inner conflicts are rooted in hate, are now saying "Love or perish." And this is the beauty of nonviolence. It says you can struggle without hating; you can fight war without violence.

It is my great hope that as the Negro plunges deeper into the quest for freedom he will plunge even deeper into the philosophy of nonviolence. As a race, Negroes must work passionately and unremittingly for first-class citizenship—but they must never use second-class methods to

gain it. They must never succumb to the temptation of using violence in the struggle.

I feel that this way of nonviolence is vital because it is the only way to reestablish the broken community. It is the method which seeks to implement just law by appealing to the conscience of the great decent majority who through blindness, fear, pride or irrationality have allowed their consciences to sleep.

The nonviolent resisters can summarize their message in the following simple terms. We will take direct action against injustice without waiting for other agencies to act. We will not obey unjust laws or submit to unjust practices. We will do this peacefully, openly, cheerfully—because our aim is to persuade. We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words—but if our words fail we will try to persuade with our acts. We will always be willing to talk and seek fair compromise but we are ready to suffer when necessary and even risk our lives to become witnesses to the truth as we see it.

Along with continued efforts in nonviolent direct action, the movement is determined to extend the exercise of neglected constitutional privileges—particularly in the exercise of the ballot. A campaign has been started to involve millions of Negroes in the use of the franchise. Negro workers have already suffered violence and arrests for these efforts but the campaign will continue.

I believe that beside this intensified effort, an expanded federal government program of vigorous law enforcement is also indispensable. A number of administrative initiatives have already been useful and the present Justice Department has certainly moved with forthrightness and concern in the sensitive area of voter registration. But the coming period will undoubtedly require the Justice Department to utilize the Civil Rights Act of 1960 extensively and seek court-appointed referees in thousands of communities in which the right to vote is flagrantly and brutally denied to Negroes. The majesty of federal law must assert its supremacy over the reign of evil dominating defiant southern communities.

So far, I have discussed only the problem as it exists in the South. But this is not to suggest that the problem is merely southern. No section of the country can boast of clean hands. Segregation may exist in the South in overt and glaring forms but it exists in the North in hidden and subtle ways. Discrimination in housing and employment is often as bad in the North as it is anywhere. The racial issue confronting America is not a sectional issue but a national problem.

Nor must anyone assume that the problem is almost solved and that people can therefore sit complacently by the wayside and await the coming of the inevitable. Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. The Darwinian theory of evolution is valid in biology but when a

Herbert Spencer seeks to apply it to the whole of society there is little evidence to support it.

The most superficial look at history shows that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of dedicated individuals. Without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of primitive forces and social stagnation. Unnecessary delays have already been suffered in the civil rights struggle through a lack of vigorous action.

To outline the problem is to chart the course of the Negro freedom movement. A piece of freedom is no longer enough for human beings nor for the nation of which Negroes are part. They have been given pieces—but unlike bread, a slice of liberty does not finish hunger. Freedom is like life. It cannot be had in installments. Freedom is indivisible—we have it all, or we are not free.

The Negroes' goal is freedom. I believe we will win it because the goal of the nation is freedom. Yet we are not passively waiting for deliverance to come from others out of pity. Our destiny is bound up with the destiny of America—we built it for two centuries without wages; we made cotton king; we built our homes and homes for our masters and suffered injustice and humiliation. But out of a bottomless vitality we continued to live and grow.

If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not extinguish our existence, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We feel that we are the conscience of America—we are its troubled soul. We will continue to insist that right be done because both God's will and the heritage of our nation speak through our echoing demands.