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Birth of SCLC

On January 10, 1957, more than 100 Southern leaders gathered in Atlanta, Georgia, to share and discuss their mutual problems of the Southern struggle. By unanimous agreement, the body voted to form a permanent organization that would serve as a coordinating agency for local protest centers that were utilizing the technique and philosophy of non-violence in creative protest. Two months later, close on the heels of the successful Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott, SCLC came into being, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Martin Luther King, Jr., was elected president.

Structure of SCLC

Affiliate organizations all across the South make up the body of the Conference. The making and execution of basic policy is the responsibility of the Executive Board, geographically representative of the entire South. Of the thirty-three board members, twenty-four are elected by the Conference and nine by the Board. Every affiliate may have from one to five voting delegates at any deliberative session of the Conference, depending upon the type of financial affiliation. The annual meeting of the Conference is held in the early fall and the Executive Board meets in the Spring. Policy decisions are handled by an Administrative Committee between meetings of the Conference and the Board. SCLC maintains a modest but versatile staff at its home office in Atlanta, Georgia.

Membership in SCLC

SCLC is not a membership organization *per se*. As indicated, affiliate groups and organizations constitute the actual membership. In turn, individuals belong to the affiliates (churches, civic organizations, fraternal groups, etc.). The minimum affiliate fee is \$25.00 per annum entitling the group represented to one voting delegate in all deliberative sessions. An affiliate may have as many as five (5) voting delegates (\$125.00), but regardless of amount given, this is maximum number of delegates allowed. Affiliation requires an application in writing to national office that indicates general structure and purposes of group seeking affiliation. All affiliates are confirmed by the Executive Board or Administrative Committee. Upon confirmation, affiliate certificates and suitable credentials are forwarded to member organization indicating

SCLC's services are immediately available. The SCLC Newsletter and other printed material relevant to the social struggle are forwarded to the membership of the affiliate group periodically.

SCLC—A Nonsectarian Agency

From its inception, SCLC has been nonsectarian in character. Conference supporters are people of all faiths, religions and creeds. The word 'Christian' in SCLC's name is natural and unique to the social structure of the Negro community in the South. The Negro church is his only forum, owned, operated and controlled by him; it affords the broadest opportunity for social intercourse; it is generally the headquarters of the Negro's struggle for full citizenship; the pastor has been the community leader and champion of the Negro's civil liberties. Most of the protest centers in the South are clergy-led, thus accounting for the high incidence of ministers who make up the leadership of the Conference. Laymen too, play a significant role, several serving on the Board and holding top offices. SCLC welcomes the good wishes and support of any person or group of persons who have as their ultimate goal actualizing democracy in America through peaceful and non-violent means.

Aims and Purposes of SCLC

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has the basic aim of achieving full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro in all aspects of American life. SCLC is a service agency to facilitate coordinated action of local community groups within the frame of their indigenous organizations and natural leadership. SCLC activity revolves around two main focal points: the use of nonviolent philosophy as a means of creative protest; and securing the right of the ballot for every citizen.

Philosophy of SCLC

The basic tenets of Hebraic-Christian tradition coupled with the Gandhian concept of *satyagraha* — truth force — is at the heart of SCLC's philosophy. Christian nonviolence actively resists evil in any form. It never seeks to humiliate the opponent, only to win him. Suffering is accepted without retaliation. Internal violence of the spirit is as much to be rejected as external physical violence. At the center of nonviolence is redemptive love. Creatively

used, the philosophy of nonviolence can restore the broken community in America. SCLC is convinced that nonviolence is the most potent force available to an oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and dignity.

SCLC and Nonviolent Mass Direct Action

SCLC believes that the American dilemma in race relations can best and most quickly be resolved through the action of thousands of people, committed to the philosophy of nonviolence, who will physically identify themselves in a just and moral struggle. It is not enough to be intellectually dissatisfied with an evil system. The true nonviolent resister presents his physical body as an instrument to defeat the system. Through nonviolent mass direct action, the evil system is creatively dramatized in order that the conscience of the community may grapple with the rightness or wrongness of the issue at hand.

SCLC and Leadership Training

In its bold new program, SCLC has undertaken one of the difficult tasks so vital to the present-day struggle in the South. The Leadership Training Program is directed at the organization of communities at the 'grass-roots' level. It is believed that the great success of the Negro community's struggle for full citizenship will be determined by the training of this second-line leadership. Leadership Training embraces the work of the Citizenship Schools and the Correspondence Institute. Both include in their course of studies such subjects as: *Registration and Voting; Social Protest; Understanding Politics; Use of the Boycott; How to Picket; The Nature of Prejudice, etc.*

SCLC's Citizenship Schools

The Citizenship School is the direct result of one phase of the Leadership Training Program. Interested persons, who have a general knowledge of reading and writing, are trained intensively in the skills of adult education using subject matter relevant to the social struggle. They return to their individual communities as instructors and set up a Citizenship School that the 'grass-roots' people may be trained for full participation in civic life. Periodically, the instructors return to the training center for refresher courses to keep them abreast of significant changes and to further develop their skills.

SCLC and Voter-Registration

The right of the ballot is basic to the exercise of full citizenship rights. All across the South, subtle and flagrant obstacles confront the Negro when he seeks to register and vote. Poll taxes, long form questionnaires, harassment, economic reprisal, and sometimes death, meet those who dare to seek this exercise of the ballot. In areas where there is little or no attempt to block the voting attempts of the Negro, apathy generally is deeply etched upon the habits of the community. SCLC with its specialized staff works on both fronts: aiding local communities through every means available to secure the right to vote (e.g. filing complaints with the Civil Rights Commission) and arousing interest through voter-registration workshops to point up the importance of the ballot. Periodically, SCLC, upon invitation conducts a voter-registration drive to enhance a community's opportunity to free itself from economic and political servitude. SCLC believes that the most important step the Negro can take is that short walk to the voting booth.

SCLC and Civil Disobedience

SCLC sees civil disobedience as a natural consequence of nonviolence when the resister is confronted by unjust and immoral laws. This does not imply that SCLC advocates either anarchy or lawlessness. The Conference firmly believes that all people have a moral responsibility to obey laws that are just. It recognizes, however, that there also are unjust laws. From a purely moral point of view, an unjust law is one that is out of harmony with the moral law of the universe, or, as the religionist would say, out of harmony with the Law of God. More concretely, an unjust law is one in which the minority is compelled to observe a code which is not binding on the majority. An unjust law is one in which people are required to obey a code that they had no part in making because they were denied the right to vote. In the face of such obvious inequality, where difference is made legal, the non-violent resister has no alternative but to disobey the unjust law. In disobeying such a law, he does so peacefully, openly and nonviolently. Most important, he *willingly* accepts the penalty for breaking the law. This distinguishes SCLC's position on civil disobedience from the 'uncivil disobedience' of the racist opposition in the South. In the face of laws they consider unjust, they seek to defy,

evade, and circumvent the law, BUT they are *unwilling* to accept the penalty for breaking the law. The end result of their defiance is anarchy and disrespect for the law. SCLC, on the other hand, believes that civil disobedience involves the highest respect for the law. He who openly disobeys a law that conscience tells him is unjust and willingly accepts the penalty is giving evidence that he so respects the law that he belongs in jail until it is changed.

Source of SCLC's Funds

SCLC's budget is supported by mass rallies, individual and organizational pledges, direct mailing fund appeals, and affiliate fees. Some portion of the budget is realized through the personal appearances of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other members of the Conference. Under its bold new program, SCLC launches in 1961 its 'Dollars For Freedom' campaign which is again directed at the 'grass roots' population of America. More recently, special fund-raising projects in the form of benefits featuring outstanding artists of show business, have added to the financial support needed to carry on the work throughout the South.

SCLC and the Sit-ins

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference views the Sit-In Movement of southern college students as the most important development in the southern struggle. The Conference's record evidences that at every opportunity, it has done everything within its power and resources to aid and abet the students in developing their skills in non-violent protest. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the coordinating organization of the student movement, was born as a result of a conference called by SCLC at Raleigh, North Carolina, in the spring of 1960 at the height of the Sit-Ins. It continues to serve in an advisory capacity through its professional staff and its president, Martin Luther King, Jr., symbol of the students' nonviolent mass attack on segregation. Some of the most significant victories in the Sit-In Movement of southern college students have come as a result of the leadership and guidance of SCLC affiliates, e.g., Nashville Christian Leadership Council, Nashville, Tenn., Petersburg Improvement Association, Petersburg, Va., etc.

SCLC and Segregation

SCLC is firmly opposed to segregation in any form that it takes and pledges itself to work unrelentingly to rid every vestige of its scars from our nation through nonviolent means. Segregation is an evil and its presence in our nation has blighted our larger destiny as a leader in world affairs. Segregation does as much harm to the *segregator* as it does to the *segregated*. The *segregated* develops a false sense of inferiority and the *segregator* develops a false sense of superiority, both contrary to the American ideal of democracy. America must rid herself of segregation not alone because it is politically expedient, but because it is morally right!

SCLC and Constructive Program

SCLC's basic program fosters nonviolent resistance to all forms of racial injustice, including state and local laws and practices, even when this means going to jail; and imaginative, bold constructive action to end the demoralization caused by the legacy of slavery and segregation—inferior schools, slums, and second-class citizenship. Thus, the Conference works on two fronts. On the one hand, it resists continuously the system of segregation which is the basic cause of lagging standards; on the other hand, it works constructively to improve the standards themselves. There **MUST** be a balance between attacking the causes and healing the effects of segregation.

SCLC and the Beloved Community

The ultimate aim of SCLC is to foster and create the 'beloved community' in America where brotherhood is a reality. It rejects any doctrine of black supremacy for this merely substitutes one kind of tyranny for another. The Conference does not foster moving the Negro from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage for this would thereby subvert justice. SCLC works for integration. Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living — *integration*. Only through nonviolence can reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community be effected. The international focus on America and her internal problems against the dread prospect of a hot war, demand our seeking this end.

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