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Dead End Awaits the Black Power Road

EDITORIAL

The arrest of Stokely Carmichael and two of his SNCC lieutenants on charges of inciting last week's riot in Atlanta may mark a turning point in what appears to be a struggle for supremacy between the moderate and the extremist elements in the civil rights movement.

The importance of the decision by Atlanta's Mayor Allen, who has taken a strong lead in behalf of Negro rights, lies in one simple fact. Public officials, assuming that the requisite proof is in hand, must be willing to prosecute a Carmichael or anyone else where a serious offense is involved. If for a political reason or some other reason they will not take firm action against a leader, how can they expect those in the lower echelons to respect and obey the law? And, of at least equal importance, why should anyone suppose that the moderate civil rights leaders will speak out and act against violence if the civil authorities are unwilling to do so?

This is a testing year, a year in which events may determine whether good sense or "black power" in its extreme manifestations will carry the day. It will be tragic if, because of weak knees in city hall, it should be made to appear that the rock-thrower and the Molotov cocktail are the wave of the future.

There is risk of oversimplification in discussing the moderate as opposed to the extremist wings. There is good reason to believe that a very large majority of Negroes do not support and are even opposed to the extremist tactics. This does not necessarily mean, however, that all moderates will condemn the extremists out of hand. Some of them may even derive a certain vicarious satisfaction from the excesses of a Carmichael or an Adam Clayton Powell, even though they know in their hearts that an appeal to black power, for example, can eventually lead only to a dead-end street as far as any perma-



'Trouble I got, man—what I want is progress!'

nent advancement of civil rights is concerned.

In this connection, it is interesting to note the results of a recent survey conducted by a respected polling agency in Watts, Harlem, Chicago and Baltimore. The questions were asked by trained Negro pollsters. And the responses revealed that most Negroes, even in the ghettos, want pretty much

the same things that most white people want. They want better housing. Not surprisingly, since they are the principal victims, they are worried about crime, and they are more interested in adequate police protection than in talk about police brutality. They want their children to have a sound, disciplined education. In Harlem only 2 percent of those interviewed said that school integration was their greatest problem. The real educational problem, in the majority opinion, is the pressing need for better neighborhood schools.

Again, a cautionary note is in order. It does not necessarily follow from the survey findings that most of the people in the ghettos are against violence in pursuit of their reasonable objectives. In Watts, for example, 48.4 percent of those interviewed think the rioting there helped their chances for equality in jobs, schools and housing. Only 23.8 percent believe the rioting was harmful to attainment of this objective.

The obvious inference from this is that the demagogue, the racist-in-reverse, will find his best opportunity in the ghettos and that this is why he makes his major pitch there. It should be borne in mind, however, that the ghetto is not synonymous with the Negro community in the United States. Many

gation of last month's trouble in the Anacostia area is a case in point.

That affair, involving a clash between Negroes and police, has been under study by a group of prominent citizens appointed by Commissioner Tobriner. Its co-chairman is Sterling Tucker, a respected Negro leader.

The study group has reached no conclusions. In fact, it is just beginning the job of drafting its report. Yet Adam Clayton Powell, whose position in Congress entitles one to expect something better from him, has charged into print with the accusation that the investigation is a "whitewash" and that the committee has too many "mild-mannered Negroes." Following this lead, Julius Hobson, who heads the group known as ACT, paid his respects to "pasteurized Negroes" on the committee who, he said, would sell other Negroes short "for a few pieces of silver." To the extent that anyone in Washington takes Powell and Hobson seriously, this sort of demagogic prejudgment is as harmful as it is outrageous. And it should not be allowed to go unchallenged.

Although not aimed specifically at the Powell-Hobson combination, the executive board of the District chapter of the NAACP has just approved a resolution which is a reflection of responsible thinking by moderate leadership.

The resolution, offered by H. Carl Moultrie, president of the local branch, said that the NAACP "must condemn with equal vigor the gathering of crowds to protest the arrest of an individual, or individuals, as it does any form of police brutality." If witnesses think the police are guilty of brutality in making an arrest, the resolution continued, there are appropriate avenues, including the NAACP, through which corrective action can be sought. But "violence on the part of a person, or persons, or groups of persons, must be unequivocally condemned." The resolution ended with an expression of hope that "all other organizations do the same as we in calling for law and order."

So far the call from other organizations has been considerably less than deafening. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, however, has just denounced "black power" in any context of violence. As the struggle within the civil rights movement shapes up, and if public authorities follow Atlanta's example in cracking down on violence and incitement to violence, the country should hear before long from other moderate voices.

For if one thing is clear, it is that future progress in civil rights depends upon co-operation within the framework of law by whites and Negroes whose dedication to equal treatment and equal opportunity is genuine rather than opportunistic. If anyone doubts this, let him look at what is happening to the 1966 civil rights bill in the Senate.