



THE CORE OF IT!

by JAMES FARMER, NATIONAL DIRECTOR

The major war now confronting us is aimed at harnessing the awesome political potential of the black community in order to effect basic social and economic changes for all Americans, to alter meaningfully the lives of the black Americans (our plight has not been and will not be changed by past victories), and to bring about a real equality of free men.

This job cannot be done for us by the Government. In the first place, the establishments — Federal, State and Local — have too much built-in resistance to fundamental change. Any establishment by definition seeks its own perpetuation and rejects that which threatens it.

For example, too many politicians take over and seek to make the anti-poverty programs an adjunct of their political aspirations.

They attack community action programs of the anti-poverty war as being anti-city hall. School Boards, which have already lost the drop-outs and other under-privileged youth, more often than not reach out greedily to control community education programs and see that they do not shake up the school systems.

Powerful lobbies, such as the financial and the real estate interests, exert tremendous pressure to see that programs to relieve poverty do not threaten their interests.

Further, it is impossible for the Government to mount a decisive war against poverty and bigotry in the United States while it is pouring billions down the drain in a war against people in Viet Nam. The billion dollars available to fight poverty is puny compared with the need and insignificant compared with the resources expended in wars.

Thus, we must be constructive critics of the anti-poverty program, using its resources for our fight where we can, insisting that local anti-poverty boards be truly representatives of the deprived communities and the minorities which they are supposed to help, and attacking waste and pork-barreling wherever it occurs.

Yet it would be fatal to think that the anti-poverty program alone can make the necessary changes in the social and economic life of black Americans. It can be no more a solution to our problems than were the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964, or the Voter Rights Act of 1965 will be. Like those laws, the anti-poverty program has to be seen as no more than a tool, useful at times, but inadequate at best, to do the job.

We can rely upon none but ourselves as a catalyst in the development of the potential power of the black community in its own behalf and in behalf of the nation.

In this new phase of our war to change the life of the Negro in a changed America, there are two aspects: community organization and political organization. It must be clearly seen that neither aspect is an end in itself. Community organization, including social services, for its own sake is mere social uplift and has no basic importance in changing the life role of the Negro. Political organization for its own sake is sheer opportunism.

While both aspects must be undertaken simultaneously, the first, community organization, may be seen as a step to increase the effectiveness of the second, political organization.

Or another way of viewing it, is to see community organization as a tool — a tool to build a vehicle. Political organization, then, is the vehicle to take us to the desired objective.

The objective, in a word, is a new society, a free and open society.

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