

CAMPUS RESPONSE ALMOST IMMEDIATE

Students Active in Peaceful Action Against Discrimination, ROTC, Chessman

(Continued from Pg. 2, Col. 8)

only a token victory. All the world had marveled at those brave young faces, beautiful under the taunts and spittle. If they had not stood fast, the battle would have been lost; it was their bravery alone that won it. But it was a battle offered by their elders, and like all the quarrels amongst their elders nowadays, it ended in a morally meaningless compromise.

From the first sit-ins, the young have kept the command in their own hands. No "regularly constituted outside authority" has been able to catch up with them. The sit-ins sweep the South so rapidly that it was impossible to catch up with them physically, but it was even harder for routinized bureaucrats with vested interests in race relations and civil liberties to catch up with them ideologically. The whole spring went by before the professional leaders began to get even a glimmering of what was happening. In the meantime, the old leadership was being pushed aside. Young ministers just out of the seminary, maverick young teachers in Jim Crow colleges, choir mistresses and school marmes and Sunday school teachers in all the small cities of the South, pitched in and helped — and let the students lead them, without bothering to "clear it with Roy." In a couple of months, the NAACP found itself with a whole new cadre sprung up from the grass roots. The only organization which understood what was going on was CORE, the Committee On Racial Equality, organized years ago in an evacuated Japanese flat, "Sakai House," in San Francisco, by Bayard Rustin, Caleb Foote and a few others, as a direct-action, race-relations offshoot of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (the FOR) and the Friends Service Committee. CORE was still a small group of intellectual enthusiasts and there simply weren't enough people to go around. To this day, most Negroes know little more of CORE than its name, which they have seen in the Negro press, and the bare fact that its program is direct, non-violent action. This didn't deter the high school and college students in the Jim Crow high schools and colleges in Raleigh and Durham. They set up their own direct non-violent action organization and in imitation of CORE gave it a name whose initials spelled a word, COST. Soon there were COST "cells" in remote hill-country high schools, complete with codes, hand signals, couriers, all the apparatus of youthful enthusiasm. Needless to say, the very words frightened the older Negro leadership out of its wits.

The police hosed and clubbed the sit-inners, the Uncle Tom presidents of the captive Jim Crow colleges expelled them in droves, white students came South and insisted on being arrested along with the Negroes, sympathy picket lines were thrown in front of almost every chain variety store in almost every college town in the North. Even some stores with no branches in the South, and no lunch counters anywhere, found themselves picketed until they cleared themselves of any implication of Jim Crow.

The effect on the civilized white minority in the South was extraordinary. All but a few had gone on accepting the old stereotypes. There were good Negroes to be sure, but they didn't want to mix. The majority were ignorant, violent, bitter, half-civilized, incapable of planned, organized action, happy in Jim Crow. "It would take another two hundred years." In a matter of weeks, in thousands of white brains, the old stereotypes exploded. Here were the Negro children of servants, sharecroppers and garbagemen — "their" servants and sharecroppers and garbagemen who had always been content with their place, directly engaged in the greatest controlled moral action the South had ever seen. They were quiet, courteous, full of good will to those who abused them; and they sang, softly, all together, under the clubs and the firehoses, "We will not be moved." Long protest walks of silent Negroes, two abreast, filed through the

provincial capitals. A major historical moral issue looked into the eyes of thousands of white spectators which were so locked in "our way of life" that they were unaware they lived in a great world. The end of Jim Crow suddenly seemed both near and inevitable. It is a profoundly disturbing thing to find yourself suddenly thrust upon the stage of history.

I was at the first Louisiana sit-in with a girl from the local paper who had interviewed me that morning. She was typical, full of dying prejudices, misinformation and superstitious fears. But she knew it. She was trying to change. Well, the sit-in did a good job of changing her. It was terrific. A group of well-bred, sweet-faced kids from Southern University filed into the dime store, hand in hand, fellows and girls in couples, and sat down quietly. Their faces were transfused with quiet, innocent dedication. They looked like the choir coming into a fine Negro church. They weren't served. They sat quietly, talking together. Nobody, spectators or participants, raised his voice. In fact, most of the bystanders didn't even stare rudely. When the police came, the youngsters spoke softly and politely, and once again, fellows and girls hand in hand, they filed out, singing a hymn, and got in the paddy wagon.

The newspaper girl was shaken to her shoes. Possibly it was the first time in her life she had ever faced what it meant to be a human being. She came to the faculty party for me at Louisiana State that night. Her flesh was still shaking and she couldn't stop talking. She had come up against one of the big things of life and she was going to always be a little different afterwards.

The response on the campuses of the white colleges of the South was immediate. There had always been inter-racial committees and clubs around, but they had been limited to a handful of eccentrics. These increased tremendously, and involved large numbers of quite normal students. Manifestations of sympathy with the sit-ins and joint activities with nearby Negro schools even came to involve student government and student union bodies. Editorials in college papers, with almost no exceptions, gave enthusiastic support. Believe me, it is quite an experience to eat dinner with a fraternity at a fashionable Southern school and see a can to collect money for CORE at the end of the table. More important than sympathy actions for and

with the Negroes, the sit-ins stimulated a similar burst, a run-away brush fire, of activity for all sorts of other aims. They not only stimulated the activity, they provided the form and in a sense the ideology. Non-violent direct action popped up everywhere — so fast that even the press wire services could no longer keep track of it, although they certainly played it up as the hottest domestic news of the day. The actions dealt with a few things: compulsory ROTC, peace race relations, civil liberties, capital punishment — all, in the final analysis, moral issues. In no case were they concerned with politics in the ordinary sense of the word.

Here the ROTC marched out to troop the colors and found a line of students sitting down across the parade ground. In another school, a protest march paraded around and through and between the ROTC, apparently to everybody's amusement. In other schools, the faculty and and, in one place, the governor joined in protest rallies against ROTC. There were so many peace and disarmament meetings and marches it is impossible to form a clear picture — they seem to have taken place everywhere and, for the first time, to have brought out large numbers.

Off-campus, as it were, the lonely pacifists who had been sitting out the civil-defense propaganda stunt in New York, called their annual "sit out" and were dumbfounded at the turnout. For the first time, too, the court and even the police weakened. Few were arrested.

The Chessman execution provoked demonstrations, meetings, telegrams, on campuses all over the coun-

try. In Northern California, the "mass base" of all forms of protest was among the students and the younger teachers. They provided the cadre, circulated petitions, sent wires, interviewed the Governor, and kept up a continuous vigil at the gates of San Quentin. All this activity was unquestionably spontaneous. At no time did the ACLU or the regular anti-capital-punishment organizations initiate, or even take part in, any mass action, whatever else they may have done. Chessman, of course, had a tremendous appeal to youth; he was tough, he was an intellectual, even an artist of sorts; before his arrest he had been the kind of person they could recognize, if not approve of, among themselves. He was not very different from the hero of "On the Road," who happened to be locked up in San Quentin along with him. As his life drew to a close, he showed a beautiful magnanimity in all he did or said. On all the campuses of the country — of the world, for that matter — he seemed an almost typical example of the alienated and outraged youthful "delinquent" of the post-World War II era — the product of a delinquent society. To the young who refused to be demoralized by society, it appeared that that society was killing him only to sweep its own guilt under the rug. I think a lot of everyone (Chessman's supporters included) over thirty-five, seriously underestimate the psychological effect of the Chessman case on the young.

At all points, the brutal reactionary tendencies in American life were being challenged, not on a political basis, Left versus Right, but because of their

patent dishonesty and moral violence. The most spectacular challenge was the riot at the hearing of the Un-American Activities Committee in San Francisco. There is no question but that this was a completely spontaneous demonstration. The idea that Communist agitators provoked it is ludicrous. True, all that were left of the local Bolsheviks turned out, some thirty of them — Stalinists and the two groups of Trotskyites. Even the "youth leader" who, twenty-eight years before, at the age of thirty, had been assigned to lead the Y.C.L., showed up and roared and stomped incoherently, and provided comic relief. Certainly no one took him seriously. There was one aspect about the whole thing that was not spontaneous. That was the work of the committee. They planned it that way. Over the protests and warnings of the city administration, they deliberately framed up a riot. When the riot came, it was the cops who lost their nerve and rioted, if rioting means un-

controlled mob violence. The kids sat on the floor with their hands in their pockets and sang, "We shall not be moved."

Spectacular as it was, there are actions more important than the San Francisco riot. Here and there about the country, lonely, single individuals have popped up out of nowhere and struck their blows. It is almost impossible to get information about draft resisters, non-registrants, conscientious objectors, but here and there one pops up in the local press, or, more likely, in the student press.

Even more important are the individual actions of high school students whom only a hopeless paranoiac could believe anybody had organized. A sixteen-year-old boy, in Queens, and then three in the Bronx, refused to sign loyalty oaths to get their diplomas. As kudos are distributed in a New York suburban high school, a boy gets up and rejects an award from the American Legion. Everybody is horrified at his bad manners. A couple of days

later two of his prizes are offered to the two runners-up, who reject them in turn. This is spontaneous direct action if ever there was. And the important thing about it is that in all these cases, these high school kids have made it clear that they do not object to either loyalty oaths or the American Legion because they are "reactionary," but because they are morally contemptible.

The Negro faculties and presidents of the Jim Crow colleges who not only opposed the sit-ins, but expelled dozens of the sit-inners, now found themselves faced with deserted campuses. They were overtaken by a tremendous groundswell of approval of their youngster's actions from Negro parents, and were dumbfounded by the sympathy shown by a broad strata of the white South. One by one they swung around, until Uncle Toms who had expelled students taking part in sit-ins during their Easter vacations in other states, went on public record as saying, "If your

son or daughter telephones you and says he or she has been arrested in a sit-in, get down on your knees and thank God."

Not only did the New Revolt of Youth become the hottest domestic copy in years, but it reached the ears of all the retired and semi-retired and comfortably fixed pie-card artists of every lost and every long-since won cause of the labor and radical movements. Everybody shouted, "Myself when young!" and pitched in with application blanks. The AFL-CIO sent out a well-known leader of the Esperanto movement who reported that the kids were muddled and confused and little interested in the race-union movement which they, mistakenly in his opinion, thought of as morally compromised. YPSL chapters of the Thomasite Socialists rose from the graves of twenty years. Youth experts with theories about what their grandchildren were talking about went on cross-country tours. "Dissect" had a

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