

Press Release
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CONFERENCE PROJECTS NEW DIRECTIONS

The July 20-23 National Conference on Black Power ended its sessions yesterday with more than 1,000 delegates in attendance.

Specifically designed as a leadership gathering, the conference originally expected some 200 delegates, yet over 900 delegates from 36 states and 100 organizations attended making it the most widely representative assembly of black Americans in the nation's history.

Keeping the delegates ideologically together proved to be a difficult task. Tensions were inevitable as civil rights militants and armed revolutionaries, scholars, laborers, housewives, corporation executives, teachers, ministers, ghetto organizers and students all struggled to work for black unity within a framework meaningful to all.

At one time during the 4-day meeting it appeared that the hopes for unity were shattered. Several individuals stormed a press conference and physically ejected white newsmen. The incident served to strengthen the determination of the conferees to work together as a united force. No delegates were reported to have left the conference as the result of this brief and untoward interruption.

While the publicity attractors at the conference tended to be those in exotic garb, the presence of several bishops and representatives of conventional groups went unnoticed by the press. The personal representative of the Honorable Elijah Mohammed also attended. All have come together to herald a new day in which black men would work for "power".

The heart of the conference agenda was the workshops. Over a period of three wearying and often tension-filled days the delegates sought to bring a fresh understanding of what it means to build, maintain and exercise power.

The conferees came for hard work and they found it. Although workshops terminated their deliberations by Saturday at 11 p.m., workshop coordinators and other staff leaders worked until 3 or 4 a.m. Sunday. Activities began at 7:30 each morning.

A major result of the conference was the creation of a widely-representative continuing body or steering committee. It will carry forward the recommendations of the conference and plan for next steps. This, in itself, means that a new mode of cooperation among black Americans is now more than a simple hope. It has begun.

M. Lee Montgomery, Associate Director of Community Studies at Philadelphia's Temple University, served as coordinator of one of the 14 workshops. His dealt with "The City and Black People: Civic and Social Concerns." On Friday three sessions of two and a half hours each heard papers and shared in intensive discussion on "Who Should Own the Cities?", "Relief or Rehabilitation?" and "Education for All: Adults as Well as Children."

A strong recommendation was made that community colleges be set up in all ghetto communities. A national act was called for to implement such a proposal. The peculiar insights and talents of black professionals were seen to be needed for such an enterprise which is designed to serve in urgent ways the national purpose.

One of the most sensitive issues in this workshop was the matter of non-white researchers investigating problems in ghetto communities. The workshop urged strongly that all research, both public and private, relating to problems most critical for black people be black engineered and directed.

The skills of white people and the facilitation of black power, as a part of total community relationships, were seen to have a place.

Contrasting the seemingly moderate tone of Montgomery's workshop was one led by Ron Karenga of the "US" organization headquartered in Watts, California. It dealt with "Black Power in World Perspective: Nationalism and Internationalism."

Here several distinguished nationalists, pacifists and conventional university professors made presentations calling for black international unity. "We are a black nation," asserted Omar Abu Ahmed, former chief political lieutenant to the late Malcolm X. His contention was that white America had made America effectively their private domain. Hence, black Americans had no alternative but to build for black unity and a separate black nationhood.

Participants in the workshop on "Black Power in World Perspective" demanded the end of the Vietnam conflict, expressed solidarity with their African brothers, recommended the condemnation of Israeli oppression against the Arabs, urged black youth to refuse draft for Vietnam, and expressed gratitude and support for Muhammed Ali. A new mechanism for effecting black world solidarity was also discussed.

The workshop on economic development dealt with such issues as amassing capital from the black community, the building of financial institutions, and the development or abolition of economic enterprises according to their serving the need for equitable power relationships. C. E. Wilson, an economic consultant and Professor Robert Browne of Fairleigh Dickinson University served as coordinators for this workshop.

Dr. Jacqueline Jackson and Jorji Borden gave leadership to the workshop on "The Black Home." Distortions of image of the black home were seen to be the direct result of racist research. The black woman was seen to have the crucial responsibility for ensuring psychic stability of the black home. Black people concerned with family life were urged to take the initiative in developing new family life patterns.

The workshop on "Black Power and American Religion" was led by Dr. C. Lincoln McShee, Charles Cobb. Honorary chairman was Virgil Wood of the Blue Hill Christian Center in Roxbury, Massachusetts. The workshop proposed the boycotting and exposure of all black churches which did not join the Black Revolution. The Black churches were urged to reclaim their former role of promoting "black culture," to engage in the economic development of the black community and to develop a philosophy of religion appropriate to a black value system so urgently needed for the good of all. Participants saw the "mystique

of blackness" as synonymous with beauty and spoke of black people as vital to the sanity, security and fulfillment of the life of the nation and world.

C. Sumner (Chuck) Stone, former administrative aide to Adam Clayton Powell and former editor of three black newspapers, served as coordinator of the workshop on "Black Power Through Black Politics." Participants initiated steps for a black political "third force" or where determined by black communities, a black third party, to be a balance of power in elections and to remove from critical positions all politicians serving to thwart or subvert black political power. A campaign is to be initiated, with black support from throughout the nation, to triple black representation in the next congress by the election of 12 more black congressmen in 1968. Immediate self-determination for Washington, D. C. was urged.

The militant spirit which prevailed throughout the conference was seen as a tribute to black youth. "We are here on the young people's agenda," said one older educational official from the mid-west. Older delegates were careful especially to use language which would not bring undue offense to the younger conference participants.

Rapp Brown, National Director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, earlier had reminded the delegates to "think black."

The persistent drive of those who had thought of themselves as "Negroes" was to think, talk and be "black."

The youth panels emphasized the need for black youth to set the tone of the Black Revolution. Ralph Featherstone, Byron Rushing, Samuel Anderson, Philip Hutchings, Mary Treadwell and John Wilson were the obvious leaders among the youth participants. "Black bondage will be ended when black young people become political," said John Wilson, National Fund Raising Director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Wilson's emphasis was upon creating revolution by radical diplomacy and by utilizing the skills, resources and avowed public principles of others. "If it is discovered that work within the system is impossible," Wilson added, "a whole new revolutionary system must be developed."

The workshop on "Black Artists, Craftsmen, and Communications Personnel" emphasized the vanishing place of black craftsmen, initiated proposals for new modes of cooperation between black people in the allied arts. Black self-interest and greater artistic productiveness for all were equated. Lou House, Gloria Richardson Dandridge and Ossie Davis gave leadership to the workshop for the arts.

The growing desperation of the plight of black Americans was underscored in the workshops on "Black Power and Social Change" and "Cooperation and Alliances in Distress Situations." The situation of black Americans was characterized as one of "continuing and increasing distress." So-called riots were seen to be the inevitable results of the criminal behavior of a society which dehumanizes people and drives men to utter distraction. There was no rift between traditional moderates and militants in viewing the recent killings of black people in Newark by police and national guardsmen as a "public massacre." New mechanisms for massive social change and the cohesion of black people were suggested. These proposals will be refined in the months ahead. Grace Malone, Director of Newark

Welfare and Urban League Board Member in Essex County, New Jersey and John Davis, former national vice-president of the NAACP gave leadership to these workshops. James Farmer was an Honorary Chairman.

Workshops on "Black Professionals" and on "Developmental Implications of Black Power" explored social science educational aspects of power production for black people. Here again aggressive efforts for black pride, black unity and cooperation were seen to be essential. Hoyt Fuller, Editor of the Negro Digest, and Professors Gerald McWhorter, James P. Comer and Alvin Poussaint were key panelists for these sessions.

A Black Manifesto was issued by the conference. The conference moved to take the initiative in all black-related concerns. Militant self-direction and self-determination were seen to be the spirit of the new thrusts for black power.

Isaiah Robinson, Arrangements Chairman of the conference, was assisted by William Strickland, Phaon Goldman, William Fox, Benjamin Wright, Lucius Tompkins, Robert Blair and a 100-man and woman volunteer staff in the program, registration and housekeeping details of the conference.

"This is the hardest-working conference I have ever attended," said one delegate. It was the apparent sentiment of most of those in attendance. Dick Gregory praised the conference for the openness of its agenda. Leaders of the conference indicated that their only purpose was to bring black people together to begin developing new forms of urgently needed power. Dick Gregory commented, "This is the greatest thing that ever happened to black people. It is the best thing yet for America."