

SPRING CONFERENCE SPEECH

Charles Cogen, March 14, 1964

The "educational countdown" has been in progress for some time. About two years ago, Dr. Mark Schinnerer, after a study of our schools, reported that the New York City school system is dying, and that something drastic has to be done about it, and done soon.

The evidence of serious illness is in the large and increasing number of difficult schools, the continued de facto segregation, the large dropout rate, the many oversize classes, the frustrations of students and teachers alike.

At the same time, school appropriations from the city and from the state continue on a business-as-usual basis. The need is indeed for a revolutionary breakthrough in place of the present patchwork and half-hearted improvements.

In one major respect there has been a giant step forward. The collective bargaining agreement between the Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers institutionalizes the cooperation between them in the effort to improve our schools. If we can act through this medium fast enough, we may be warranted in hoping that the countdown will find us prepared.

Paralleling our advances in collective bargaining there has been a vast increase in our membership to a doubling of last year's figure. We now stand at 26,000.

On a national scale the cause of integration, in the schools and elsewhere, is moving ahead. Undisputed leadership of the "action" campaign is in the hands of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. By precept and by example, he has led the forces of integration with intelligence and dynamism. His eloquence and sound judgment have inspired masses of people, Negro and white -- some to follow his example of peaceful civil disobedience, and others to devote themselves in other ways to the developing cause of civil rights.

Reverend King is President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He has received more than 75 citations and awards for his work from all parts of the world. The latest is the "Man of the Year" award by Time Magazine.

In giving Dr. King our annual John Dewey Award, we honor ourselves by honoring him.

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