

# Poor People—a Puzzle for an Affluent City

COURIER-JOURNAL  
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ter school desegregation. It has drained off frustration that might have erupted into violence.

Some have also credited FIGHT and its 400-member white middle-class auxiliary, Friends of FIGHT, with a general rise of popular democracy in the city. Last year, seeing jobs as the key issue, FIGHT set up approaching industries to get up special training programs. Xerox took on 15 trainees, but since Kodak is still the biggest power in the city, with over 40,000 employees (over 1,200 Negroes), FIGHT asked Kodak to take the lead.

A "Kodak Management Letter" of April 25, 1966, said there would be a slight shift away from the previous policy of simply employing the person best suited for the job available, to training the unemployed individual to the qualified. Minister Franklin D. R. Florence, president of FIGHT, praised this policy and approached Kodak in September with a proposal that Kodak train, over an 18-month period, between 500 and 600 persons so that they would qualify for jobs FIGHT would recruit and coordinate trainees. The training would include some fundamental education, such as writing and arithmetic.

Kodak's president William S. Vaughn agreed to discuss it, and turned negotiations over to Kenneth D. Howard of the industrial relations department.

Within a week, negotiations broke down. Communication seemed impossible. According to copies of the correspondence between Florence and Vaughn from Sept. 14 to Oct. 22 (distributed by Kodak), the sides could not even agree on what had taken place at the meetings. Florence was insisting on the FIGHT proposal, while Kodak maintained that its usual hiring practices were already helping minority groups and that FIGHT should cooperate with these procedures. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the FIGHT negotiators did not trust Howard. The formidable Rev. Mr. Florence is quick to sense when a white man is ill at ease in his presence, and he could not respect a man who seemed to be afraid of him. But perhaps non-union Kodak was not accustomed to bargaining with a "power" organization.

A study today of the FIGHT-Kodak correspondence, a long with conversations with both sides in their own offices—FIGHT's shabby storefront and Kodak's carpeted State St. tower—is ample evidence of the psychological gap between the two worlds of "black power" and executive suite.

Nevertheless, the gap was bridged in December, when personal talks were resumed in a new atmosphere between FIGHT's Rev. Marvin C. Chandler and Kodak's Asst. Vice President and Asst. General Manager of Kodak Park, John G. Mulder. When they had achieved some basis of agreement, the committee was enlarged.

On Dec. 20, Mulder and Florence signed a brief statement, whereby the FIGHT organization and Kodak agreed to "an object of the recruitment and referral (to include screening and selection) of 600 unemployed people over a 24-month period, barring unforeseen economic changes affecting the Rochester community." FIGHT, at its own expense, the statement added, would provide counseling for the employees selected by Kodak.

Two days later, Kodak's new president, Dr. Louis K. Eilers, disowned the agreement and said Mulder had never been authorized to sign it. Sensing how the Negro community would receive this blow, Mulder had gone personally to Chandler's home to break the news himself. To Rev. Mr. Florence, an admirer of Malcolm X, this was one more crime in the white man's long history of betraying the blacks.

On Feb. 20, I talked with Kenneth D. Howard and two Kodak public relations officials. They stressed—as Kodak had already stated in various press releases and in a two-page ad—that the company cannot have an "exclusive" recruiting arrangement with any one group; that it cannot commit itself to

hiring any specific number of people on a long-term basis, that it already has training programs with which FIGHT has refused to cooperate; that ever since the days of George Eastman, the company has been conscious of its responsibilities to the community; that it is still trying to do better. The officials said Kodak had about 100 Negroes in some sort of special training during 1966, programs that lasted from a few weeks to several months. Recently Kodak had announced 228 employment opportunities and Florence had marched a group of his men in for interviews but, Kodak said, Florence had refused to let them apply.

Kodak claims he was merely putting on a show for CBS-TV. On this point, FIGHT says Kodak is lying. I asked them to define, in their own words, the company's social responsibility. The spokesman replied that Kodak has a social responsibility; but that since Kodak is a private business, it best helps society by being successful. They did not feel there was any special obligation to take extraordinary measures to solve Rochester's particular ghetto problem.

Critics of FIGHT range from a prominent executive, who told me he had once sympathized with FIGHT's cause but now feels it is more interested in its own prestige than in jobs for the poor, to my taxi driver, who said, when he dropped me at FIGHT headquarters: "I'm not prejudiced, but if I had a gun I'd shoot them all."

Some feel Florence only made matters worse when he invited Stokely Carmichael to town. On Jan. 19, Carmichael promised to organize a nation-wide boycott of Kodak that would "bring them to their knees." The critics like to point with satisfaction to Negroes who have worked their way up without asking for special treatment (like Gerald H. Dickerson, 29, who took a course at the Manpower Training Center and wrote a letter to the newspaper about it) and point with alarm to the Negro couple in the white neighborhood who faked threatening letters to themselves before a mysterious fire broke out in their home.

Critics of FIGHT also resent the arrival of national TV crews from CBS and NBC; and Kodak officials are still smarting from stories by James Ridgeway in the New Republic (Jan. 21) and by Nicholas van Hoffman in the Washington Post (Jan. 9), in which Kodak claims to be misquoted.

FIGHT's most influential opponents are the local newspapers, both published by the Gannett chain.

Gannett papers won the Pulitzer prize in 1964 for their "Road to Integration" series directed by Rochester Times-Union executive editor Vincent H. Jones—and their editorials have supported attitudes and programs that would make the Negro more at home in the Rochester community. Stories by their best reporters, Brian Donovan and Desmond Stone, have been fair and thorough. But publisher Paul Miller has been against FIGHT from the start. On Dec. 12, in an address to the Council of Churches, Miller accused some clergy of widening the "gulf between the pulpit and pew" by bringing in this divisive force that has attacked the Community Chest and Kodak, "a company famed the world over for its sometimes ponderous but ever humane approach to all things."

In line with this criticism, the Episcopal Bishop, George W. Barrett, has appointed a special committee to assess FIGHT and to determine by this April whether the diocese, which has already contributed \$19,000, should continue its support.

On the other end of the spectrum, far less responsible opponents have attacked FIGHT in other ways. Some parishioners have held back on their pledges because their churches gave financial backing to FIGHT. One minister in a well-to-do section of town was so tormented by threats and phone calls that he eventually took his own life. The phone calls continued to his wife.

Certainly the most controversial figure is Rev. Mr. Florence. To be anti-Florence is by no means to be anti-Negro. Some people who have devoted years

to social work in Negro neighborhoods, particularly in settlement houses, feel Florence will do the Negro cause more harm than good. They claim he could never "deliver" 600 hard-core unemployed.

His manner, the embodiment of "black power," jars white sensibilities. Florence will come to no one with his hat in his hand. In public meetings he is rude to white questioners and his language, unless interpreted, borders on incitement to violence.

Yet there are two Florences: the public strong man who must demonstrate his black pride in a sometimes offensive way; and the witty, articulate spokesman who, in a situation of mutual respect, can inspire real confidence. In two TV panel discussions I saw, when the moderator was out to pin him, Florence won hands down. For him, the issue is no longer jobs but dignity. He maintains that Kodak has arrogantly broken a moral agreement and they never have produced John Mulder and never will—to support their claim that he was not authorized to sign. He accuses Dr. Eilers of living in the 18th century, and says that FIGHT is only trying to solve local problems in partnership with business, rather than by resorting to the Federal government.

He recalls that in a previous crisis situation, during World War II, industry turned farmers into tradesmen overnight because the national good demanded it. A similar crisis situation, he says, exists today. Finally, he will take up with several industries a broader combined training program (such as the one that 18 business, civic and religious leaders are working on now to train 1,500 hard-core unemployed) only if the broader plan includes basic points of the Dec. 20 agreement.

In one sense, Bishop Sheen stands above this controversy. He has met twice with Florence, and Florence feels he was well received; but the bishop has avoided any public discussion of FIGHT—except to say that he is confident that the FIGHT-Kodak dispute will be solved.

In another sense, however, Bishop Sheen is very much involved. He loves the poor. He has begun to revolutionize the Church in Rochester. Both his vicar general and his priest-elect were elected. Diocesan

finances have been handed over to laymen. Church building programs are being taxed for the benefit of the poor. He has moved the confirmation age to 18 and instituted a puberty rite, preceded by sex education and practical training in charity and a spirituality that will relate the Church to the world. He has said Mass in a ghetto home. He has urged a complete rethinking of diocesan structures, an ecumenical approach to inner-city programs where churches would share facilities on an inter-denominational basis. Soon he will call a series of pastoral conferences where experts will deal with the problems of family life, seminary training, etc.

His role as a dynamic innovator has surprised some who, on the basis of his writings and TV appearances, had categorized him as a conservative. I asked him about this apparent transformation and he replied: "No one ever asked me where I stood on these questions before. The label never fit. Nearly everything I have done here I've been thinking about for ten years."

At the same time, he acknowledged that he was tremendously influenced by the Council and John X. III. He continues to read steadily—books like "The Comfortable Pew" and "The Suburban Captivity of the Church." Now his philosophy is summed up in the phrase from John's Gospel: "God so loved the world." Since the world is God's concern, it must be the Church's concern to influence and save the whole community in which it lives, the world "with its needs and demands." To demonstrate this, he said he would give a retreat for Catholic youth in the Masonic Temple.

He emphasized that he was not afraid of the fast pace of change, nor was he discouraged by defections from the Church.

In an admiring editorial, the Times-Union said of his Chamber of Commerce address: "Bishop Sheen spoke largely in images and parables. Many will draw different meanings." One priest who sees the bishop's talk as a challenge to both the Church and industry to solve the ghetto's problems is Rev. P. David Marks, assistant pastor of the Immaculate Conception parish and member of FIGHT. Father Marks was appointed episcopal vicar for urban ministry by Bishop Sheen. The once large and prosperous congrega-

tion of Immaculate Conception is now down to about 600. Father Marks describes his parish's mission as the service of all, whether they are Catholic or not, who live in the parish boundaries.

As urban vicar he will focus the Church's attention on the poor. The Church, he says, serves the social needs of the European immigrants of generations ago; but now that their descendants have moved into the middle classes, there are new poor who need the Church's ministry. This means that the Church must be an instrument for social change; and the general community, he feels, is resisting real change because, in their affluence, they have not felt the pinch of unemployment.

I arrived at John Mulder's home on Lake Ontario in the midst of a one-hour Young Life meeting. About 230 teenagers were crammed into his living room to sing hymns, put on a skit and listen to their student-leader talk about Christ. As the crowd was leaving, we discuss-

ed, in general terms, the crisis the community was going through—a crisis that he thought both the community and the company would come through in time.

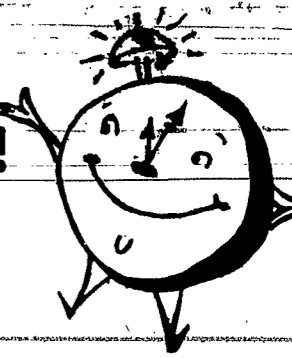
On his bookshelves I saw Charles Silberman's "Crisis in Black and White," Claude Brown's "Manchild in the Promised Land" and Ben H. Bagdikian's report on the poor in America. "In the Midst of Plenty"; he had been trying to understand the mentality of the Negro poor by studying and listening to them.

Both John Mulder and Bishop Sheen are confident that Rochester's problem will be solved, but neither predicts how. Rev. Mr. Florence and Rev. Herbert D. White of the Rochester Council of Churches Bureau of Urban Ministry would make Rochester's case of conscience a national one.

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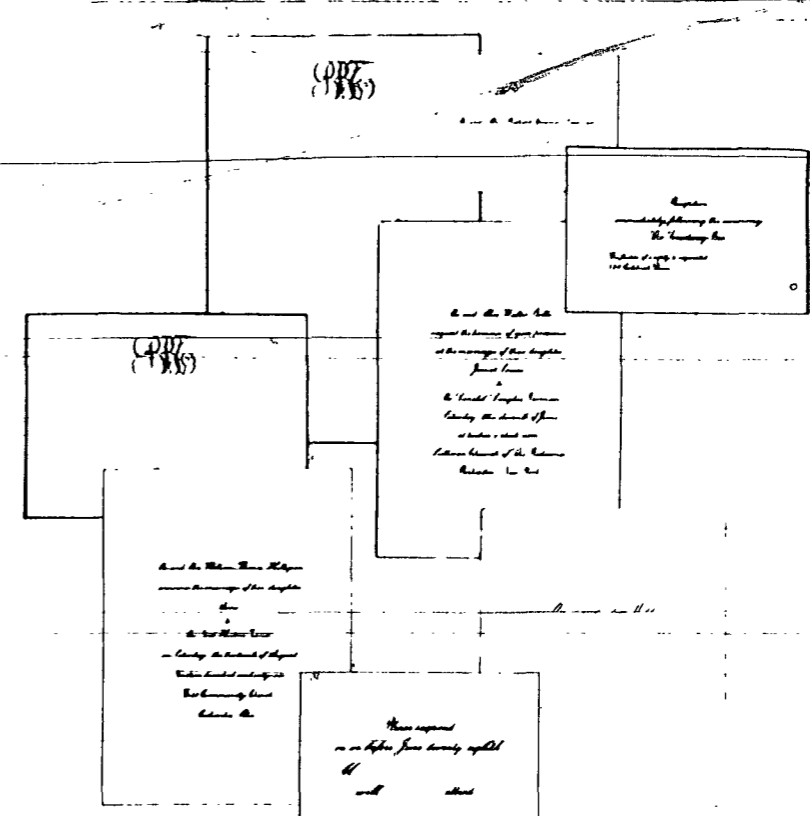
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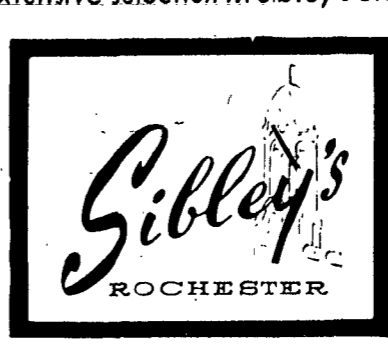
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