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The Montgomery Improvement Association, which embodies the membership of 50,000 Negroes of the city, has received so many thousands of letters, telegrams, and telephone calls from over the nation requesting information concerning the bus protest, that interested citizens have agreed to publish a bi-monthly newsletter, in order to supply straight-forward, unbiased information to people concerned.

Thus, this newsletter is an introductory issue, which will give a brief summary of the total picture of the local situation and bring readers up to date on recent happenings. Other issues will give more details of various phases of the activities.

This publication will be sent free of charge to anyone upon request.

WHAT CAUSED THE BUS PROTEST

Over a period of years Negro citizens of Montgomery had sought to improve conditions for the minority group on Montgomery City Lines. Drivers were accused of being discourteous, calling Negroes by undesirable names, passing them by at corners, refusing to make change or give transfers, forcing them to pay fares at the front door, but ordering them to board the bus by the rear door.

Negro passengers, who constituted about 75% of the riders, were made to stand up over empty front seats which were reserved for whites, whether whites rode the bus or not. If Negroes sat in reserved seats, they were arrested.

During 1955 alone, to our knowledge, three Negro female riders were arrested on city busses, sentenced, or fined. Two of them were teen-age girls, jailed for refusing to get out of "un-reserved" seats, so that white people, who were standing, could sit down.

This practice was bitterly protested by Negro organizations, but to no avail. Hundreds of Negroes, men in particular, started walking, because they were tired of the abusive treatment.

On December 1, 1955, the incarceration of a Negro woman, who refused to vacate a seat for a white man, culminated the series of injustices that precipitated the Negro bus protest of December 5.

THE PROTEST

According to bus officials, up to 40,000 Negroes rode busses daily prior to the protest. Since then, and for the past six months, more than 99% of that number has refused to patronize the city transportation system. The protest continues.

NEGROES ORGANIZE

When thousands of Negroes walked off city transportation lines, December 5, they did so spontaneously, for they refused to pay for further impositions of injustice. They were without leadership and guidance. They were as sheep without a shepherd.

Sixty-four Negro ministers of all Protestant faiths, forgot denominations, and came to the rescue. They decided that if their congregations really intended to boycott busses, the clergies, who were helping to lead them to God, had to help also to lead them to social justice, where the worth and dignity of man would be enjoyed by all people.
Forgetting their own leader, they searched unsafely among themselves for one leader, who would serve as spokesman for the protesters. After prayerful meditation, they elected Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King holds a Ph.D. degree. He is a young man, dedicated to the work of God. He is strong, capable of enduring and suffering, he is humble and weak, yet fearless and courageous. Dr. King was unanimously chosen president of the Montgomery Improvement Association. The sixty-three other ministers and various civic leaders work with him side by side, serving in various capacities, which will be discussed later, to improve conditions for Negroes in Montgomery.

THE PROPOSALS

At the first mass meeting the protesters drew up three proposals to be submitted to the City Commission and transit officials through their elected leaders. They were:

1. More courteous treatment from drivers.
2. A first come, first served seating arrangement, with Negroes sitting from back toward front, and whites from front toward rear, until all seats were taken.
3. The employment of Negro bus drivers on predominantly Negro lines.

Of these proposals only the first was granted. Negotiations with these two groups and other civic groups failed to accomplish more.

MASS MEETINGS

Mass meetings are the "backbone" of the main artery of the protest. It is at these meetings that all information is released, where voting by the whole body takes place and where opinions are heard.

It is at these meetings that spirits are revived, morale rebuilt, moods rededicated, energy renewed. People shed their hate, learn passive resistance and cultivate love for everybody.

Mass meetings are held twice weekly, Monday and Thursday nights, on a church-rotation basis. Since the protest, fifty-two mass meetings have been held. People start congregating at three o'clock in the afternoon. Thousands attend each meeting.

The meetings are very necessary. Some of the people have walked miles daily, through cold and rain, and now through heat and hot sun. They are weary, tired, and need what the meetings give.

Different ministers and laymen speak each week.

THE CAR POOL

One of the most amazing activities of the Association is the car pool service, which works with comparable military precision. As many as 325 private cars have given free service at one time in the car pool, with gasoline furnished by the Association. This number has been reduced somewhat, however.

Help has come as contributions from all over the nation. Fourteen churches have bought new station wagons. Eight used station wagons, in good condition, have been given other churches so that twenty-two station wagons operate hourly with drivers furnished by the churches. From six o'clock until nine o'clock mornings, and from two o'clock until eight o'clock evenings, a steady flow of cars run to and fro from forty-three dispatch stations and forty-two pick-up stations, carrying workers to and from work. During the day the twenty-two station wagons work hourly transporting people free of charge.

GET TOUGH POLICY

During the last week of January various efforts were employed to break up the protest. Three Negro ministers, who were not leaders of the movement, were invited to attend a conference with city authorities. This meeting was supposed to end the protest. The ministers later repudiated their participation in the plan, and denied discussing any terms of agreement.
This seemingly infuriated public officials and a wholesale joining of the White Citizens Council ensued. Ten thousand joined in Montgomery in a short time.

Hundreds of Negroes were given tickets for minor traffic infractions. Dozens, including Dr. M. L. King, were put in jail for minor traffic violations. Reverend King’s home was bombed; so also was Mr. L. B. Nixon’s. Nobody was injured.

The intimidations had no noticeable effect and the protest continued.

When the proposals were not met, Negroes petitioned for a franchise to operate a jitney service for their people. The request was refused.

MASS ARRESTS AND TRIALS

One hundred ministers and civic leaders were indicted in February by the Grand Jury for conspiracy against the bus company, arrested and released under $300 bond each. The trial of Dr. King was the only one heard. He was found guilty of conspiring against the business of the bus company. His case was appealed. The other cases were postponed, pending the outcome of the appeal. Dr. King is free under heavy bond until his case is argued in a higher court.

NATIONAL SUPPORT

Since the mass arrests and trials, people and organizations all over the country have sent contributions which have lightened the financial burden of local people.

Various representatives from the NAACP have appeared on public programs in different cities and states to speak on the protest.

PRESS REPRESENTATIVES

Hundreds of reporters from all over the nation, including such foreign countries as England, France, India, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, Holland, Japan and Canada have visited Montgomery to cover the story.

THE SOUTH CAROLINA CASE

The decision handed down by the Supreme Court on the South Carolina case was interpreted to mean that segregation was abolished on intra-state conveyances. As a result of the announcement, the National City Lines, owner of the local transit system, abolished segregation on Montgomery busses.

The city officials brought an injunction against the bus company, constraining it to observe city and state segregation laws. The judge ruled in favor of the city and ordered the bus company to rescind the integration decree. It did.

STATE SEGREGATION LAWS CONTESTED

When the get-tough policy began, city officials cut off further negotiations. Things were then at a stand-still. Five Negroes, three women and the two young girls who had been arrested, filed suits in Federal court, contesting the constitutionality of segregation laws and requesting the courts to enjoin the city from further intimidations against Negroes to end the boycott. Intimidations stopped.

Attorney Fred D. Gray filed the suits and was threatened with disbarment by the state on the grounds that he had not been authorized to represent one of the plaintiffs. That plaintiff's name was withdrawn. The state dropped the case against Attorney Fred Gray.

The Draft Board re-classified the attorney from 1-A to 1-D. The re-classification was appealed.

The federal case was heard on May 11, before a three-judge court. The decision was handed down on June 5. It stated that "Segregation of races on motor busses of Montgomery violates the 14th amendment and is unconstitutional." Until the final judgment is rendered, and the implementation of the court's decision becomes effective in Montgomery, the protest will continue.

Edited by Jo Ann Robinson