

Fight the Epidemic Of Pessimism

At a town meeting of the Coalition to Save D.C. General Hospital on April 4, Schiller Institute leader Dennis Speed spoke in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King. The place was Union Temple Baptist Church in Washington.

Thirty-three years ago today, Robert Kennedy, a candidate for President and the brother of the assassinated John Kennedy, informed a shocked audience in Ohio, that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. On that occasion, he quoted from memory a passage from the Greek poet Aeschylus, "Even in our sleep, the pain that will not forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until at last, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." Two months later Robert Kennedy was also assassinated. . . .

Now, in Washington, a resurrection of that sacred fight for the general welfare of all the people, promises to reawaken the living dead of our cities and of our society to that mission. The D.C. General Hospital fight is a war against a disease far more debilitating and deadly than any physical malady. It is the epidemic of pessimism that has raged and reigned since 1968 which can be eradicated by this action.

On March 31, 1968, Dr. King, speaking to an audience at the Washington National Cathedral, drew out the universal implications for America of his, and the nation's fight for the general welfare. [Speed played the following selection from King's speech.]

"One day we will have to stand before the God of history and we will talk in terms of things we've done. Yes, we will be able to say we built gargantuan bridges to span the seas, we built gigantic buildings to kiss the skies. Yes, we made our submarines to penetrate the ocean depths. We brought into being many other things with our scientific and technological power.

"It seems that I can hear the God of history saying, 'That was not enough! But I was hungry and ye fed me not. I was naked and ye clothed me not. I was devoid of a decent sanitary house to live in, and ye provided no shelter for me. And consequently, you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness. If ye do it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye do it unto me.' That's the question facing America today."

Suppose We Build, Instead

The case of D.C. General Hospital illustrates precisely the global implications of successfully winning that battle in

the nation's capital.

What if, instead of the proposal to shut the hospital, we proceeded to save it, build a new hospital immediately adjacent to it, and established, instead of condominiums, a university dedicated to developing a national and international cadre of infrastructure-builders and nation-builders? Suppose that university were a public institution that gave preferential enrollment to the citizens of D.C.

The countries of Asia, South and Central America, and Africa, not only require, but would be happy to accept American engineers, physicists, scientists, language teachers; and that university would also, if asked, provide teachers and assistant personnel to explain the most advanced research and development technologies required to build great railroads across Asia and Africa, power and water systems, and national public health care systems for the globe.

The university students would pay part of their tuitions, by teaching for two years in high schools throughout the U.S. and the globe. Priority would be given to deploying these young people into the poorest areas, in conjunction with infrastructure projects. This is not a Peace Corps proposal. It is a proposal to teach and to reproduce the most advanced inventions in science and technology, and to create machine tools that can give these technologies to these nations, and to the poorest parts of our own nation. The university should be named "The Frederick Douglass Institute of Higher Learning," in honor of D.C.'s most positive role model for the self-transformation and the high intellectual standard required of all its students and teachers.

Clearly the university must feature a medical school, and D.C. General must expand its role as a teaching hospital. Suppose we contrast with an artist's design, our vision of this area, with that of the National Capital Planning Commission? Would not this vision properly respond to that challenge made by Dr. King to the political and financial elite of America, in his March 31, 1968 speech?

A Battle for the General Welfare

Nothing of this vision can possibly occur without an all-out fight and victory to save D.C. General, not for its own sake, but for the general welfare of all the people of the United States, and all the people of the world.

.. Sometimes in history, people find themselves capable of winning victories that create what we will call a simultaneity of historical time. In these moments, words such as those from the lips of Dr. King will sound for the living with as much energy and clarity as they did at the time they were first spoken. The intervening years melt away. The dead rise again to speak, and even to walk in the form of people that they have never met. True ideas and truth are eternal, and there are times when a transparency occurs in history, which allows each individual, acting as a citizen, to speak and walk in the paths of that truth. That, and nothing less is the meaning of winning the battle of D.C. General.