

The Genesis and the Exoduses of Free D.C. Movement: Already Left Mark Picketing Ensues The Vulnerable Ones 'Chief Spokesman' Charge of 'Blackmail' 'Business Letter' Triggered Movement An Implied Threat Cutting Its Teeth The Two Voices 13-Block Target 93 Per Cent Claimed Bishop a Target An NAACP Visitor Provisional Support Shifted to Kann's 'Vulnerable' Stores A Rival Queen Educational Success

By Willard Clopton Washington Post Staff Writer. **The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C]24 Apr 1966: E1.** Browse this issue

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The Genesis and the Exoduses of Free D.C. Movement

By Willard Clopton
Washington Post Staff Writer

THE FACT is that a great many Washingtonians—including the overwhelming majority of local civic, professional and business leaders—are opposed to pending home rule legislation.

This claim was made by the Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade in a letter sent to newspapers across the country last November.

The mass mailing appeared to be a success. Many papers published the letter and clippings of it and editorialists based on it rained in on members of Congress. The letter may have had some part in the sidetracking of home rule legislation last session.

It also had one unforeseen consequence. More than anything else, it brought about emergence of the Free D.C. Movement, a free-swinging band of pro-home rule militants. Led by Marion Barry Jr., Washington director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the movement is something new in the annals of Washington social protest.

Already Left Mark

CUTTING THE LETTER and the Board of Trade's other public statements against self-government for the Capital, Barry and his backers have sought to portray the Board as a concentration of "moneyed merchants" in league with "racist" members of Congress to deny the people of Washington one of the fundamentals of American citizenship, the right to vote.

Launched off one day by those it has antagonized and bitterly denounced the next, the Movement has left an unmistakable imprint in the two months of its existence. Since it came into being Feb. 21, there have been three developments:

* Forty of Washington's largest business firms have dissociated themselves from the Board of Trade's anti-home rule stand to the extent of adopting a position of corporate neutrality on the issue.

* At least three officials of large downtown stores, including the chairman of the Board of Trade's Retail

Word of its distribution quickly reached the D.C. Coalition of Conscience, a loose confederation of clergymen and Washington civil rights groups, including SNCC. Co-chairmen are the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church, 8th and S sts. n.w., and Washington representative of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (Martin Luther King's organization), and the Rt. Rev. Paul Moore Jr., Suffragan Episcopal Bishop of Washington.

At a meeting of the Coalition a month after the letter went out, members voiced their feeling that the Board of Trade was misrepresenting the situation here. They felt that the 1964 ballot results were more indicative—a 3 to 1 majority for home rule.

So the Coalition discussed what to do. There was talk, but only talk, of exploring the possibility of boycotting the businesses of some Board of Trade officials. Finally, the Coalition decided to visit the Board's leaders and try to talk them into retracting their statement and, if that failed, to consider picketing the Board's headquarters at 1616 K st. n.w.

On Jan. 11, a delegation headed by Mr. Fauntroy and Bishop Moore called on F. Elwood Davis and William Press, president and executive vice president, respectively, of the Board. After the

one-hour closed meeting, the Coalition's leaders issued a statement accusing the Board of waging a "staged-up campaign" to defeat home rule.

They added: "It is now time to say that the most potent opposition to effective home rule is not so much 'up on the Hill' as it is in a relatively small group of men, related to the Board of Trade and purporting to speak for the entire business community, who do not want to relinquish the inordinate power they have long exercised over the affairs of this city."

Picketing Ensues

PRESS TOLD a reporter afterward that the Board still felt that the "overwhelming majority" of the city's leaders opposed elected self-government. He said there had been no recent poll on the subject among the Board's 800 members but that a poll probably would support the statement.

He also pointed out that the Board did favor permitting Washington to elect its own voting Senators and Representatives.

Two days later, Mr. Fauntroy announced that the Board's headquarters would be picketed for 15 hours each day the following week. The picketing took place.

During this time, Barry and his group were concentrating on planning a one-

day boycott of homes over D.C. Transit's proposal (later turned down) to raise its fares. The boycott took place Jan. 24 and was 90 per cent effective.

Three days after the strike, a jubilant Barry observed that there were "a number of areas" in which boycotts could be used and spoke of the possibility of picketing members of the Board of Trade on behalf of home rule.

Nothing further happened for nearly three weeks. Then mimeographed letters dated Feb. 15 were sent by Barry to about 75 persons he thought might support a home rule boycott. The letter read in part:

"Immediately following the bus boycott, I announced that SNCC would try to use some of the same techniques to launch a campaign around the right to vote in the District. I further said that the campaign would be aimed at the individual members of the Board of Trade (the D.C. Coalition of Conscience has already launched an attack on the Board as a whole).

"Since the first announcement, we here at SNCC have done a great deal of thinking about how such an attack should be launched and carried forward. We would like very much to share our thoughts and plans with you."

Then followed an announcement of a meeting to discuss the project, to be

held the following Saturday at SNCC headquarters, 101 Rhode Island ave. s.w.

Among those invited who did not go were Washington Democratic chairman Joseph L. Rauh Jr., Republican chairman Carl L. Stipley and Richard K. Lyons, chairman of the Washington Home Rule Commission. All three were later to criticize the Movement and its tactics.

Just who attended and what went on is unclear, but a decision apparently was made to proceed.

Two days later, at a press conference at Mr. Fauntroy's church, Barry announced creation of the Free D.C. Movement. Support for it was pledged by Mr. Fauntroy, Bishop Moore and the Rev. Edward A. Hales, executive director of the NAACP's Washington branch.

Barry said that the Movement had "agreed to launch a boycott" against local merchants who refused to sign a home rule petition and to display the Movement's orange and black window stickers. He explained the Movement's rationale:

"We want to free D.C. from our enemies—the people who make it impossible for us to do anything about lousy schools, brutal cops, slumlords, welfare investigators who go on midnight raids, employers who discriminate in hiring and a host of other ills that run rampant through our city."

The Vulnerable Ones

HE CHARGED that "Southern white segregationists," led by Rep. John L. McMillan (D-S.C.), chairman of the House District Committee, and aided by Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate District Appropriations Subcommittee, "have joined together with the moneyed merchants of this city to oppose our right to vote."

"We can't hurt McMillan or Byrd, but we can hurt the moneyed merchants . . . The merchants are in business because we support them with our money. If we withdraw our support, then they will no longer be around to oppose us . . .

"Our enemies are going to make this seem like a black/white issue, but it is not. This is a fight between those

tripling to government officials in support of home rule, display a 'Free D.C.' window sticker and contribute money to the Movement."

On the last point, Diggs charged that the Board of Trade was raising \$70,000 to fight home rule and said that the Movement would need the same amount to fight back. Each merchant would be asked to contribute to the Movement in proportion to the size of his business, he said.

Later in the day, a Board of Trade spokesman denied Diggs' claim. He said the Board was considering a \$100,000 increase in its overall budget but that no part of it was earmarked for anti-home rule activity.

'Chief Spokesman'

NEITHER THEN nor since has Barry detailed the makeup of the Movement, saying only that it is composed "of people, not a list of organizations or leaders." He says he is merely the group's "chief spokesman."

Barry, 23, a Mississippi native, holds a master's degree in chemistry from Fisk University in Nashville. He taught for a while before becoming a full-time SNCC worker in 1964. He came to Washington last June after serving nine months in New York.

Slender and above medium height, he wears a mustache and a close-cut beard, speaks rapidly, smiles often and seldom shows anger. He has the respect of many of the city's civil rights leaders.

Barry apparently makes the Movement's major policy decisions, though usually after consultation with a small group of close advisers that includes Mr. Fauntroy, the Rev. Channing E. Phillips (vice chairman of the Coalition of Conscience) and a little-known figure named Lowell D. Pratt.

A tall, balding man in his 40s who resembles Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Pratt seems to have some knowledge of business and apparently the group's financial adviser. He refuses to talk with reporters.

Charge of 'Blackmail'

WITHIN A DAY or two after the press conference, the Movement came under attack from both friends



... Bureau, have stated publicly that as individuals they favor the principle of home rule.

* More than 180 Washington store owners, mostly small businessmen located away from downtown, have been persuaded to display the movement's "Free D.C. — Right to Vote" stickers in their windows.

Although the home rule controversy is many years old, the Board of Trade's November letter clearly seems to have ignited the current activity.



This was the march of the Free D.C. Movement along aptent 14th Street a month ago

who want the right to vote and those who would keep us in political slavery."

Barry then introduced John W. Diggs, 50, a Washington barber whose Barry identified as chairman of the Merchants and Businessmen's Committee to Free D.C.

Diggs announced that the Committee would try to visit every businessman in Washington and ask him to do four things: sign a home rule petition, send

and sum of home rule. Two strong supporters, Bush and Lyon, defended a merchant's right to disagree with them on home rule without having to suffer economically.

On Capitol Hill, charges were made that the movement's plan to seek contributions under threat of boycott amounted to "extortion." Sen. Alar Bible (D-Nev.), one of Congress' fore-

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'Business Letter' Triggered Movement

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ment home rule advocates and chairman of the Senate District Committee, called it "blackmail." Rep. R. F. Sisk (D-Calif.), sponsor of the home rule charter bill that passed the House, said the Movement's actions would arouse a lot of second thoughts about the wisdom of home rule.

Rep. McMillan called a special closed-door session of his committee at which David G. Brown, U.S. Attorney for Washington, stated that any attempt to demand money from a merchant in exchange for patronage would violate Federal antiracketeering statutes.

At a second press conference Feb. 28, the problem of divided direction of the Movement became evident: apparently the Coalition had not known that the Free D.C. Movement would try to obtain money "donations" along with support. Bishop Moore told the newsman that he was "shocked and distressed" by reports that the Movement "intends to threaten merchants with boycott as a means of procuring funds. This was never the intention of the Movement."

An Implied Threat

THAT SAME DAY, a small group of Senators and House members interested in home rule conferred privately on prospects for a bill this session. The talk reportedly produced little, partly because of the flap over the blackmail charges.

Barry complained that the Movement had been victimized by "dis-

tress." He pointed out, correctly, that he had not said publicly that a merchant would be boycotted for failing to donate. However, the implication was contained in Diggs's statement.

After detailing the steps that merchants were expected to take, including making a contribution, Diggs had said:

"The Free D.C. Movement has agreed to work closely with us and would call a boycott of the merchants that don't support us."

On Feb. 27, it was disclosed that Barry, Diggs and Pratt had visited two Washington businessmen six days earlier and told them they were expected to contribute a total of \$1250 to the Movement. The merchants were Milton Beckman, an owner of the Kopy Kat and McBride's Stores, and Mortimer Labowitz, president of Marton's Stores. Both favor home rule.

According to Diggs, who quit the Movement as a result of the experience, Beckman offered \$300 but was told by Pratt that the size of his business justified a \$2000 contribution. When Beckman said that was too much, the trio left.

Labowitz, a former president of the Washington Urban League, who has contributed to SNCC, was told that his share was \$500. He reportedly balked, saying he would have given voluntarily but did not like being pressured.

No boycott threats as such were reported, but Diggs said he felt that both businessmen had been "pressured" to contribute.

Cutting Its Teeth

MEANWHILE, the problem of tactics within the Movement itself began to boil again. The dispute was between Barry and his advisers and the leadership of the Coalition of Conscience.

Although the target was the Board of Trade, the Movement was "cutting its teeth" on businesses that were in primarily Negro sections of town. It felt that since the banks and other financial networks of the Board were hard to budge, that it would be better to start on something that could be

in business and those without had not suffered losses.

Meanwhile, those passing out leaflets were carrying out what Barry said was his main goal: to arouse and educate the community. The basic leaflet, still being distributed, bears a drawing of a Negro bound in chains held by two small figures representing Rep. McMillan and Sen. Robert Byrd, and a third figure labeled, "D.C. Power Structure."

The text reads in part: "Byrd and McMillan and their Southern friends who hate us have gotten together with the moneyed merchants of D.C. . . . Why should we spend our money with people who are our enemies?"

During the H Street campaign, Barry appeared to have an effective second command. Reporters were told that no statements could be issued except by Barry. The Movement's basic tactic at that point seemed to consist of several of Barry's SNCC lieutenants, Pratt and one or two civil rights workers attracted from the Deep South.

At times of special demonstrations—such as the H Street "Victory March" on March 12, when some 150 persons walked up and down the street for an hour—the Movement was augmented by students and members of other civil rights groups from other sections of the city plus a few individuals who regularly participate in civil rights protests here.

Asked about its relatively small size in relation to its achievements, one worker for the Movement once replied: "Never have so few intimidated so many with so little."

93 Per Cent Claimed

FROM H STREET, the Movement shifted its activities to a portion of 14th Street and to several locations in Southeast. Activity there generally followed the H Street format and by the end of the month, the Movement claimed that some 100 merchants, 93 per cent of those contacted, were displaying stickers.

The claim rang hollow to some backers, including some within the Coalition of Conscience, who noted that few among the 700 were influential on the

On the evening following Barry's picketing announcement, Hirschberg, Hecht's general manager, invited Mr. Phillips to his home to talk. During the meeting, Hirschberg gave the minister a statement saying that "as an individual, I favor the principle of home rule, i.e., self-government, in the District of Columbia providing a bill can be drawn which insures a sound economic base."

Mr. Phillips questioned Hirschberg about his role several weeks earlier in connection with an attempt to persuade the Board of Trade's directors to reconsider their position against home rule. Hirschberg suggested that Mr. Phillips check with the Board's president, Davis.

Mr. Phillips did, and confirmed that Hirschberg himself had led the unsuccessful attempt to soften the Board's position. The next morning, Friday, the minister issued a press conference statement on behalf of himself and

not feel that Hecht's should be picketed. The underlying tensions in the Movement were surfacing.

Provisional Support

IN ANSWER to reporters' questions, Mr. Phillips said that the Coalition's position constituted "guidance only." But he said that if any picketing of Hecht's took place under the Coalition's banner, it would not be authorized.

Barry, who had learned of the development only that morning, sat beside Mr. Phillips during the announcement and appeared taken by surprise. He said only that, as of that moment, the picketing of Hecht's was still scheduled for the next day.

The backstage activity between the Movement and Hecht's has been likened by one participant to "a game of chess with two players on one side of the board and one on the other." The Coalition was one player; Barry and his advisers were the other—but both on the same side.

The Coalition has favored picketing and praising firms that take a neutral position on home rule. If enough can be persuaded, its members reason, the Board of Trade's "overwhelming majority" claim (again, the Board of Trade's letter is crucial) can be undermined.

Barry has felt that neutrality is not enough. He feels that if one or more large stores come out for home rule, it can be used to split the Board of Trade. He wants to create a demand for home rule by the business community, not create a mere acquiescence to it.

Shifted to Kamm's

THE DAY AFTER Mr. Phillips' statement, Barry called a press conference. He told the press that after a closed meeting of more than an hour with some of his supporters, picketing of Hecht's had been "temporarily suspended." Instead, he said, picketing would take place at Kamm's and would continue, during store hours, until the management agreed to get Free D.C. stickers in its windows.

Barry said Hirschberg had headed him the same statement he had given Mr. Phillips and that Hecht's was now



Marion Barry, Washington director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, is the leader of the Free D.C. Movement, though he calls himself only its "chief spokesman." Barry, 26, has a master's degree in chemistry from Fisk University, has been a full-time SNCC worker for several years and has been its Washington head since last June.



Claire Hancock, a volunteer worker for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, has handled much of the behind-the-scenes administrative detail for the Free D.C. Movement. A grad-

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