

## A Student's Conception of the Sanitation Strike

Personally, I think that the sanitation workers strike is highly justified. It is a peaceful method of bringing the inferior and dangerous conditions under the scrutinizing eye of the general public. In the past there have been numerous incidences where sanitation workers have been fatally or otherwise wounded in the process of performing their jobs. One specific employee with whom I am acquainted is a typical example of this. While picking up garbage downtown he noticed his skin was beginning to peel as a result of some chemical a housewife had placed in her can which had managed to seep through his gloves. Even today the portion of his skin that was in contact with the chemical is discolored.

In this paper I do not intend

to place the blame on any one individual for the situation could be simply a result of the working out of natural economic factors of the society. Everyone is familiar with the principle that when the type of work requires little or no skill and the position can be easily filled regardless of how necessary it is, it is poorly rewarded in material goods.

However, sometimes there are cases when principles *outra* there usefulness and I feel that this is one. Although the job may appear minor to an observer the risk involved makes it necessary and rising standards of living make it mandatory that the job be better rewarded. There have not been any resolutions passed to give the slightest indication that something in the near future is forthcoming to eradicate the worker's poor working conditions.

M.M.-3

In order to maintain the status quo and forestall progress the plight of the sanitation workers are conveniently linked with the not so popular civil rights movement. In the past legal victories on the behalf of the sanitation workers are almost non-existent and there existed only scattered complaints among individual workers. Prominent Negro leaders like Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have come at the persistent urging of Memphis ministers in support of the strike. Memphis leaders hope that through their protest and skill something for the best can be achieved.

Strikes are peaceful means of forcing employers to grant changes demanded by certain workers. They usually result from employers refusal to give workers sufficient wages or increased benefits and make needed changes in working conditions.

These factors were all apparent causes of the Memphis Sanitation strike. The specific demands of the workers are full recognition of their union and a dues check-off. The average garbage man check is greatly decreased to almost nothing after the city takes out Social Security, union dues, insurance and Shelby United Neighbor's fund monies.

Now after obtaining the interest of the NAACP the garbage strikers have an agency through which they can channel their forces and obtain results. I do not believe that if the demands of the strikes are met that will be a parable. The problem is a pressing one but it is not a new one. Intermingled with the sanitation workers plight are historical beliefs that the Negro is inferior, that whites and Negroes can not mix peacefully economically and also racial stereotypes of the Negro as an Uncle Tom and -

cheap labor coupled with old policies of segregation and desecration to name a few have a part in the trouble too. The Commercial Appeal March 29, 1968 says, "One Bay Started It." To me this is misleading. It started a long time ago but has just now found an outlet for its pent up emotions.

Negroes in this country are in the minority and thus they must work harder for their goals than members of the majority group. It is the responsibility of the exploited worker to strike and do legally anything else to obtain his rightful place in society, economically.

In this occupation which is almost entirely Negro I can't understand why the white population are also so antagonistic and impartial to the striker's cause.

2-M.M

There is no strong economic competition going on in this field and I can't understand why there is such a negative and indifferent attitude among the populace. Laws are continued in different ways for different races. However, sanitation workers should employ them if public officials or private citizens stand in their way illegally. Being in the right does not always advise justice therefore the strikers must fight and even die if necessary for their cause.

Other Opinions

Students:

Upon interviewing Larry Conroy, a student on De Mayo's campus I obtained the following reply. He said he did not feel the strike was justified because the strikers were not unionized and therefore had no -

basis for their demands. In his opinion the strike has lasted so long, because of this and this is also the reason he guesses why Mayor Sobel is so indifferent.

Another student, Danny Crawford, felt that the sanitation workers should strike for higher wages and a union to insure future bargaining power. He felt that every individual who works should make enough money to supply the basic needs for himself and his family without being robbed by the city.

### Housewife's View

Mrs. Geneva Jordan, a housewife of 926 N. Times Ld. states that she believes in the peaceful tactics of the strikers but she abhors the violence brought about by the gang of young hoodlums who too's advantage of the situation -

to loot and start several minor fires throughout the vicinity. She dislikes the thought of having her right curtailed to go places after dark, let her children go to the downtown show or out shopping after 7 p.m. These barriers are enforced by the police officials when they enforce the curfew and by unofficial persons who make threats to those not in accord with the capitulation strikers plea of Don't trade in businesses downtown.

A Businessman

"A nationally known Negro business leader has called for a cooperative effort between Negroes and Whites owning businesses in a plan to dispel tension between the races. Berkeley H. Russell said, "If you join hands with us here and now we can reduce the tremendous liability of public

welfare and high police cost  
by making elements contributing  
to these cost productive members  
of society."

### A Priest

A Catholic priest believes in the  
cause of the workers but not in  
the disgraceful looting that  
accompanied it.

The tense situation still exists  
in Memphis and therefore its  
total effect can not be estimated.  
However, this is my evaluation of the  
strike.