

The future—by whom will it be built? By all those whom the struggle has marked—so the question of how it marks them is not irrelevant.

“What we want to do is to go forward all the time . . . in the company of all men.”

“But can we escape becoming dizzy?”

*[Frantz Fanon in
The Wretched of the Earth]*

“Do you want to remain pure? Is that it?” a black man asked me, during an argument about nonviolence. It is not possible to act at all and to remain pure; and that is not what I want, when I commit myself to the nonviolent discipline. There are people who are struggling to change conditions that they find intolerable, trying to find new lives; in the words of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, they want “to set afoot a new man.” That is what I want too; and I have no wish to be assigned, as it were, separate quarters from those who are struggling in a way different from mine—segregated from my companions rather as, several years ago in Birmingham at the end of a demonstration, I found myself segregated in the very much cleaner and airier white section of the jail. I stand with all who say of present conditions that they do not allow men to be fully human and so they must be changed—all who not only say this but are ready to act.

At a recent conference about the directions the American Left should take, a socialist challenged me: “Can you call degrading the violence used by the oppressed to throw off oppression?” When one is confronted with what Russell Johnson calls accurately “the violence of the status quo”—conditions which are damaging, even murderous, to very many who must live within them—it is degrading for all to allow such conditions to persist. And if the individuals who can find the courage to bring about change see

*This article is reprinted from
Liberation Magazine, February 1968.*
