

October 23, 1959

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Committee on Administration  
FROM: Ella J. Baker, Director  
RE: S.C.L.C. as a Crusade

The more I think of a unique role for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Inc., in the present struggle for human dignity, the more I seem to focus on the phrase "Crusade for Citizenship".

The word CRUSADE connotes for me a vigorous movement, with high purpose and involving masses of people. In search for action that might help develop for SCLC more of the obvious characteristics of a crusade, a line of thinking was developed which I submit for your consideration.

THE NATURE OF S.C.L.C.

1. S.C.L.C. is a service agency through which autonomous bodies can achieve coordinated action and share their experiences and resources.
2. S.C.L.C. DOES NOT establish local units nor solicit individual memberships.
3. It seeks to supplement rather than duplicate the work of existing civil rights organizations.
4. S.C.L.C. has limited funds and staff.

Hence, to play a unique role in the South, S.C.L.C must offer, basically, a different "brand of goods"; that fills unmet needs of the people. At the same time, it must provide for a sense of achievement and recognition for many people, particularly local leadership.

SOME POSSIBLY DIFFERENT IDEAS

The following suggest possibilities for developing the crusading potential of S.C.L.C.

- a) Searching out and sponsoring indigenous leaders, especially in the hard core states.
- b) Recruiting 1,000 ministers and/or other leaders who will give 8 hours a month for person-to-person contact with people in their communities - to push voter-registration.
- c) Stimulate religious bodies, civic and fraternal organizations (composed of women, especially) to utilize the facilities for reducing functional illiteracy among Negroes.
- d) In cooperation with such an agency as F O R - map out a

program for developing action teams in nonviolent direct action.

FOR ILLUSTRATION

Time will not permit full discussion of the ideas projected above, but a few brief comments might be suggestive:

Indigenous Leadership - This seems to offer a means of expanding voter-registration activities immediately in Mississippi. In the Mound Bayou area, a young Negro Catholic priest and a Baptist deacon have been conducting weekly citizenship classes, from which more than 50 persons have become registered voters. One person had tried twelve (12) times before and failed. This year in the gubernatorial primary and county races the Negro vote was felt. For the first time, in years, the Negro Mound Bayou vote was counted. Even a hundred dollars could be meaningful here. Again, Rev. G. R. Haughton from Jackson, and another younger minister and a layman in Greenville, Mississippi - could be useful in visiting other areas of the State.

1,000 Ministers - This is but an enlargement upon the idea advanced by Mr. Earl Davis in Montgomery, of having ministers participate in house-to-house canvassing. It could take on crusading proportions. It is possible to contact 4 persons an hour; and in 8 hrs. a month, one minister could reach 30 persons, at least. If one thousand gave 8 hours, it would mean 30,000 persons in one month. For 10 months, this could mean 300,000 persons. If initiated and accepted by the leadership of S.C.L.C., it is quite possible, I believe, to commit 1,000 leaders to give eight hours a month, to work directly with the people.

Functional Illiteracy - Contrary to often accepted belief, the United States is not the most literate nation in the world. Russia claims 99.9% literacy. In the U.S.A., some 2,299,000 have never attended school; and 9,635,000 are functionally illiterate. That is below fifth grade competence. In Atlanta, it is estimated that there are 50,000 functional illiterates and every 3 out of 5 are Negro. There is increased momentum in the adult education field. The U. S. Department of Education has specialists available, and the Laubach method is being used over television in several states. Recently, the Atlanta Literacy Council was formed through the Atlanta Baptist Missionary Union.

It was not my idea that S.C.L.C. should conduct classes, but that we could interest such groups as the Womens Division of the National Baptist Convention, the National Council of Negro Women, and national college sororities in such projects.

The real value to S.C.L.C. would be that more people would be equipped with the basic tools (reading and writing), and would then be ready for effective social action.

This is the kind of a program for which funds could be secured. I have talked briefly with Dr. Edward Brice, Specialist in Fundamental and Literacy Education, U. S. Office of Education; with Dr. C. H. Parrish of Louisville and Dean Brazeal of Morehouse College. Both Dr. Parrish and Dean Brazeal have connections with the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.

Action Teams - The need for training persons in techniques of nonviolent resistance is self-evident, I believe. This calls for specialized ex-

perience which could be provided by a person like Rev. James Lawson, Jr. of Nashville. I have broached the subject to him, and he says he would be available to help plan and supervise such a project under the joint-sponsorship of F O R and S.C.L.C. These action teams would be composed of persons who are committed to doing spade work in their communities.

The suggested projects would not prevent SCLC from continuing its program of workshops and voter registration assistance where possible; but would add to the leavening influence of our efforts and help generate more of a crusade by putting more people in motion. The 8 hours a month proposal could serve to not only give those participating a feeling of accomplishing a specific task each month, but also make them feel a part of a large and vital movement. On the other hand, the literacy project could provide a "respectable" channel for helping the cause without too close identification with more militant aspects of the struggle. The literacy project could well serve as the basis for calling a Southwide meeting of women, as we proposed before.

Incidentally, the Laubach method is being used in 80 countries, and 253 languages, with phenomenal results. The slogan, "Each One Teach One" certainly has crusading value.

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