

ROUGH MINUTES OF A MEETING CALLED BY THE NATIONAL
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES TO DISCUSS THE MISSISSIPPI PROJECT

On King

September 18, 1964

People Present: Gloster Current, Jack Ginsberg, Joe Rauh, Bruce Hansen, James Farmer, Anna Hedgeman, Al Lowenstein, Jack Pratt, Andy Young, Robert Spike, John Morsell, Courtland Cox, Mendy Samstein

Spike: Meeting called to discuss ways of cooperating in Mississippi in the future. If possible let us try to avoid raking the coals of the past.

Kerns: Questions about SNCC. Attacked by Ivanhoe Donaldson at a panel discussion in Cleveland last night. Accused of not cooperating in Summer Project, of opposing direct action, I would like some evaluation of the Summer Project, for instance, the role of the Lawyers Guild. I object to Johnny-come-latelies. Questions about the FDP. All compromisers castigated as appeasers. Problem specifically in Jackson. And Moses. Refused to come up and see executive board in Jackson in July. He finally came and mumbled. He left a very negative impression. NAACP nominally part of COFO, but original purpose seems to have been subverted. Many ministers are returning to the North with complaints of the NAACP for non-cooperation. If we are going to be partners, let's be partners. Let's settle around the table where we are going in 1965. Let's determine the extent of cooperation. NAACP has $\frac{1}{4}$ million tied up in Mississippi.

Young: At our last meeting we expressed our frustrations with FDP and generally. Meeting ended up that we, whether we like it or not, can't escape our responsibility to make our work as smooth as possible. We don't understand each other. Must develop structure of cooperation. FDP, or COFO, or some other ad hoc organization for funneling projects into Mississippi.

In evaluating the summer project we must recognize that it ushered us into new phase of civil rights struggle, from public accommodations to politics. We have become aware of the economic issue, but political change, as implied in the MSP, must precede economic change. Our work in Alabama and Georgia will take cue from Miss. -- develop mass political movement. Now we must work to reestablish coalition we had on Saturday and Sunday in Atlantic City. Our main concern must be ~~xxx~~ to put this back together.

Spike: Mississippi is no longer a local problem. Tension is created between those who are moved by local considerations and those who must heed national considerations. Resources and attentions have been funneled into Mississippi. Question now is how to funnel them without on the one hand manipulating local people and on the other without abdicating responsibility to national picture. We must come to peace, eliminate the suspicion that exists among us. Mississippi has now become so large, it exerts leverage on national scene. This is the problem.

Young: At convention we had combination of moral (Hamer) and political power (King, Farmer and Wilkins). If this had been maintained, could have been used in election. Made vote for Mississippi an issue. Now lost for this election. But we must reestablish national pressure for the right to vote in Mississippi. That I see as the purpose of this meeting.

Kerns: Has the way now been smoothed for winning the right to vote in Mississippi?

Rauh: The obstacles have not been cleared away.

Greenberg: Must assault county by county. Have people go to courthouse, follow with legal action. Obstacles will not cave in at once.

Rauh: Of course, we still have the resolution that regulars can not be seated if don't change by 1968. But what is needed is federal legislation that where less than $\frac{1}{3}$ the Negro population is registered (meaning Miss. and Ala.) get federal registration. But such legislation depends on president and he not likely to do it, so difficulties remain.

Kerns: We should concentrate on urban areas like Atlanta. The Freedom Democratic Party is a delusion. It causes confusion among local people. FDP units are developing in several places around the country--and wherever they are, there are suspicious characters. Can we set any goals? Can we develop a coordinated approach? In Jackson Charles Evers has rapport with downtown. So there and in Biloxi and Vicksburg will have little resistance to registration. Must develop campaigns there but cut out arrests and picketing because if people jailed, others become frightened. What kind of structure can we have? I expect not one with director--I mean Bob Moses--who dictates and we must take it or leave it. IT MUST BE DEMOCRATIC. Registration will be a slow arduous effort.

Farmer: Decision-making in COFO is nub of problem. Confusion exists on how decisions are made. For instance, the setting up of this legal advisory committee. There was no consultation with member groups. I know not with us, CORE. We must agree on decision-making structure.

Morsell: Question of making the right decisions. MFDP challenge at Atlantic City was important, but it was weakened in the end. A variety of approaches is necessary. Job can not be done by any single line action, but problem is that Bob Moses and SNCC feel (perhaps because of their youth, frustration, indignation, bitterness) need for single-minded approach. They must have understanding of strategic complexity. Not now in SNCC. How are we to create this understanding because it is necessary before we can have a structure.

Cox: Accusations are being made against Bob. Nobody has asked people of COFO how decisions are made. People here must stop thinking in organization terms and stop dealing in recriminations. Need to be more worried about people of Miss. and not org. and its image. Our present structure is made up of people of Miss. and those who must face consequences of any action taken. Attempting that people in lowest economic situation be able to express need. Structure of MFDP and COFO is one in which decisions made by people of Miss. I was willing to sit and be quiet but this whole meeting has been aimed against SNCC. It doesn't help to engage in a diatribe against Bob and SNCC.

Spike: We must try to get at feelings of all the participants here.

Young: Perhaps it would be helpful to review some of the history of this. COFO was originally formed as a structure to get VEP money. The participating organizations accepted it with varying degrees of interest--some only in name. Decisions have to be made by those on scene who have lives at stake. After VEP, appeals were made to the various organizations. They responded with varying degrees of support. SNCC gave the most, then CORE. NAACP gave to its branches and SCLC to its citizenship program. Idea in COFO that those not paying for the piper, not call the tune. Whether it was wrong to invest in people of COFO and not organizing of COFO it is necessary to see present misunderstanding in this present context.

Lowenstein: The past is done. Now question on how to maximize cooperation and not drive anyone out.

Rauh: But I would like to drive out the Lawyers Guild. I think it is immoral to take help from communists.

Lowenstein: I agree with you but we must maximize cooperation. We need some ~~structure~~ understanding on how decisions are made. We need some structure. I would suggest that every group in the broadly based coalition committing people and money to Miss. have consulting role. Whether after such organization formed, individual organizations will break up commitment by district or by different types of project (e.g. literacy) I don't know. But all must go together. Right now decision-making is metaphysical. We must sit down and determine what kind of decisions are made and how, so that they do not continue to be made in limbo. We need a definite structure.

Lowenstein (cont.): We need to draw up a constitution. Have a structure with delegates from different groups and officers elected, and de-elected if need be--by these delegates. This new structure and its officers would be responsible for handling money and making other decisions. It is true that SNCC was main source of funds and resources but this is no longer the case. Now students, labor, other groups, so these must have say. We must strike balance with people of Miss. in decision-making. We must include people if they are willing to take part in the project. To sum up, right now we need commitment by people here to the formation of a new central body that this body will be regularized and democratized and broadened in its base (from however decisions are presently made). Then would be willing to submit decisions to this body, like question of Lawyers Guild and if they okay it then would have to accept it. Problem now that we have no appeal from decisions we disagree with. I was troubled at Atlantic City but different points of view were not welcomed. Seen as alien. We need structured democracy not amorphous democracy.

Farmer: Agree with Al, but wouldn't you agree that not all who contribute have role in decision-making, but only those who are part of the action?

Lowenstein: Yes, that's what I meant.

Spike: With Bob and Jim Forman not here, we can't make any decision. We obviously can't decide for COFO or SNCC (looking at Al L.). I am worrying about not structuring things too firmly at this point.

Lowenstein: I deliberately didn't structure things, rather wait on meeting with those who can make decisions. Rather I was trying to see if there is a consensus here on my proposal. If not, let's not take time of Bob and others.

Morsell: We have commitment to Mississippi, whether it be COFO or not. Commitment to our branches integral part of NAACP structure. We must consider our national responsibilities--and this is the problem. Decisions, no matter how democratic, if injurious to our national interests, we must have way out.

Lowenstein: In practice we are bound by the decisions as they are now made. We can't leave Miss., though we might talk about the possibility.

Moselle: Precisely the point. We're caught.

Lowenstein: Unless we write off Miss. or engage in open clash, then we must take this action (which I proposed). There are now lots of people coming out of Miss.--lawyers, doctors, students and others, who are committed. Under these considerations, it would be irresponsible if we were not to develop a structure. You can't put your finger in the dike. To avoid structure means to have decisions made which are not subject to general will; authoritarian decisions made by small groups; others have no way of escaping. (Unless write off Miss. or open clash.)

Thomas: The National Council of Churches was invited to serve as part of COFO exec for the MSP. Does this willingness to include NCC representative still exist?

Samstein: I couldn't say specifically, (word missing) only that general commitment to cooperation, but there would have to be more discussion.

Hedgeman: Must get Bob and 6 or 7 others and have this over again. I understand feelings of those on the firing line. I even have a good word for the Lawyers Guild.

Spike: Need clarification of what COFO is. Is COFO local groups plus local outlets or national organizations, or is COFO confederation of national organizations? This must be clear. If made up of local outlets, then we must also have confederation of national organization (Friends of Mississippi Freedom). Then we will have some basis for negotiation, for dealing with COFO. Need clarification though of what COFO is; is it indigenous? Need to know exact

Moselle: In our organization things take time to get done. We are bureaucratic. Many memos get to our desks and have to wait our decisions.

Spike: Not just bureaucratic delay. I talked to Roy and he had grave doubts about the whole thing. This is a learning experience for us. We are not going to resolve any deep ideological differences. Need to understand them.

Young: MSP involves design to change whole political picture. Gradual voter registration doesn't work. Need more creative approach in Mississippi and Alabama.

Rauh: Freedom Registration bridge to regular party. Basis for caucus in regular party and files are useful for organizational work.

Lowenstein: Question about decision-making. For instance, how was it determined that Henry should run for U.S. Senate? And how was it decided to substitute V. Gray for Dean Jones last spring? Seems that people are excluded who would like to partake in decision and then they are stuck with those decisions. So who makes decision.

Samstein: You should be careful to get correct information about what is happening. Henry chosen by FDP meeting.

Lowenstein: But people excluded or not notified or meetings, like Rev. Smith.

Samstein: Rev. Smith not a member of executive committee. Exec. comm. chosen by the district caucuses about a week before the state convention. These caucuses were held in five different cities. Each selected three people to the exec. comm. Records of meetings and names of exec comm on paper in Jackson. Every effort was made to get members to exec comm meeting last Sunday. I was in McComb when they called several times from Jackson to make certain that Weathersby from Amite County got to the meeting.

Lowenstein: I was called by two Negroes in Miss. and told that they couldn't understand what was going on. Rev. Smith considers himself a member of the exec comm. Feeling exists that local people are excluded.

Samstein: What ~~xxx~~ you are saying amounts to a very insidious indictment. It is essential that you be in Miss. and know what the facts are rather than make accusations without knowing what is really going on.

Kerns: Next meeting should be this size with Bob Moses and Jim Forman.

Young: Miss Baker should also be present.

Lowenstein: We should also bring up Aaron, Ed King and Rev. Smith so what differences that exist can be aired.

Spike: We should confine ourselves to problems of national cooperation, and not indigenous problems.

Kerns: Whole program must be reviewed. Need summit meeting of different groups to evaluate whole situation. Wilkins, Kern, Henry and Evers can determine NAACP course.

Cox: Need for low level meeting. Get expression from people so can develop programs which speak to their needs. Henry and Evers cannot present totality of situation. Next meeting should be in Mississippi with people of Mississippi and based on interpretations from them.

Young: Suggest 5 people from each group working in Miss.

Spike: This might mean as many as 35 people.

new york meeting page six

Thomas: I disagree with the proposal. National Council has no problem in communication. Have program and open to anyone who wants to add resources.

Kerns: The more I listen to Cox the more I know we need a top-level meeting. I have been listening to crying of people from Miss. for 17 years. I don't want to listen to Steptoe. We need high-level meeting so we can cut away underbrush.

Spike: Both essential. We see here represented some basic differences in ideological outlook. We need a high-level meeting but also psychological importance of low-level meeting.

Kerns: At Jackson would have to meet with Tom, Dick and Harry's. And once we have them in, can't invite them out. We have to decide what to do in 1965. Budget considerations. These top-level decisions not to be made by man in the field.

Moselle: We do have national Budget, constituents across the country. A knowledge of local situation necessary but not alone sufficient. Can acquire vital knowledge without living in Miss. Some knowledge gained by not being too close to forest. I would like another high-level meeting with Moses and Forman.

Lowenstein: At some point we need to think of volunteers who are not being represented.

Young: Let's meet with Bob, Jim, Hamer, Lewis when they return from Africa.

Farmer: We can bring up Jewett and Dennis from Miss.

Moselle: We have experience to know problems. We don't listen to caucus with Negroes in Miss. You want us to listen to people in Miss.; we don't want to be attacked. We don't mind criticism but we don't like to be attacked.

Kerns: 1. Mississippi projection must be continued in 1965 under a coordinated agency. 2. We must think organizationally, that is budget considerations. These realistic problems. Can't listen to grass roots. 3. We can go alone or be involved in broader commitment but we will have to decide at top-level meeting. We must consider many factors ~~xxx~~ in allocating resources. We are planning now to move back in Alabama. It will have to get some priority and maybe it would be more important to work in Ala than pour resources down the drain in Miss. Need top-level meeting if we are going to commit resources.

Spike: I will try to get in touch with Bob and Jim and try to set up a meeting for as soon as they get back into the country.