



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

197 Auburn Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta 3, Georgia

Murray 8-0331

The Right To Vote...100 Years Later

One hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation and ninety-eight years after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, less than 13.8 percent of the Negroes of voting age in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama are allowed to vote. In Mississippi, less than 6.1 percent of the qualified Negroes are allowed to vote.

Think what this means. These American Negroes are ruled—without benefit of representation—by white men in the United States today. The machinery of legislation, of judicial process, of the simplest justice, is closed to one segment of American society. No offense has been committed by these disenfranchised men and women—except the worst offense of all: they were born of a different color.

That so few Negroes are allowed to vote in the deep South is one of the world's greatest injustices. Besides the broken promise to our own citizens, think what this simple fact means to our country's status in the world today. How does American democracy look—how can it look—to our allies (and to our enemies) when so large a proportion of our population is not allowed to vote?

The Non-violent Approach

The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee is devoted to helping qualified colored voters to vote in the states where they are now disenfranchised.

One of its main functions is to advise potential colored voters as to their rights and help them to register. To do this, it must coordinate the work of many individuals and many groups.

An organized effort of students who understand their rights as Americans is mandatory to bring true democracy to the deep South. The original credo of purpose adopted by the SNCC stated:

"We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of non-violence as the foundation of our purpose, and the manner of our action. . . . By appealing to the conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, non-violence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities."

Benefits of SNCC Action

SNCC's field representatives are being opposed by white supremacists all over the South. White diehards know that voter registration is the first valid step toward true integration. They realize that as the education of the colored people proceeds, Negroes will learn their Constitutional rights. White supremacy will have lost. Therefore, SNCC's field representatives are fighting continuously against southerners who still won't accept the Fifteenth Amendment.

White extremists retaliate against the field representatives of SNCC by threats, beating, or even throwing them into jail. For example, on February 17, 1962, two staff members of the SNCC were arrested in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and charged with "criminal anarchy." This charge carries a maximum sentence of ten years at Angola State Prison in Louisiana. Bail was set at \$7,000 each.

SNCC Chairman Charles McDew and white SNCC Field Secretary, Robert Zellner, a native of Alabama, visited the East Baton Rouge jail in an attempt to see a fellow staff member who was in jail on charges of vagrancy, criminal anarchy, and two counts of disorderly conduct. At the jail McDew and Zellner were arrested and charged with being vagrants, too, though they had over \$100 between them. Criminal anarchy charges against them followed shortly thereafter, even though they had only been in town for a total of three hours.

Bail for Dion Diamond was raised to \$12,000 and then to \$13,000 and he was subsequently placed in solitary confinement. On September 7, John Hardy, an SNCC staff member, accompanied two persons to the registrar's office in Walthall county, Mississippi. The registrar ordered him out, and as he turned to leave struck him aside his head with pistol. John was then arrested in the street by the sheriff for disturbing the peace!

This case was so clearly a violation of civil rights that the Justice Department filed a suit in Federal courts asking for a court order stopping the trial. The fifth circuit court granted the request, and the State of Mississippi has appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States.

Other SNCC staff members have been beaten. Bob Moses, who has a Master's Degree from Harvard, was beaten by a relative of the Sheriff in Amite County, Mississippi. Charles Sherrod, a divinity student, has been threatened by the Ku Klux Klan in Southwestern Georgia and has been intimidated by the Sheriff of Terrell County, Georgia. Cordell Regon and Charles Jones have been arrested by public officials in Albany, Georgia. Dion Diamond had a shotgun blast pass less than a foot over his body as he lay in bed in McComb, Mississippi.

This is the pattern of harassment that SNCC representatives undergo daily. These harassments are so frequent, the SNCC members are used to them. They believe that this pattern will persist until democracy becomes a reality.

Pattern of Harassment

The work of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee is carried on by student protest groups and twenty field representatives throughout the South. The staff, a small band of dedicated men goes about its work quietly and systematically, telling Negroes of voting age about their rights under the Constitution. The requirements for registration in the various areas are explained. Frightened people are accompanied to the polls. All of this work is done according to the principle of non-violence which characterizes all of SNCC's work.

SNCC's main purpose is to co-ordinate the activities of student protest groups across the entire deep South. Today, this relatively new organization has expanded its program and has taken its place among the forerunners of the civil rights organizations. It has captured the imagination of students in colleges all over the nation because of its grass roots work in the vital area of voter registration.

Student protest groups have sprung up across the nation as a response to the courageous actions of the SNCC in the South. Some of these groups supply much needed financial assistance to the SNCC. As they continue to aid the struggle in the South, they are paying increasing attention to the housing, employment, and education discrimination problems existing in the North.

The work of the SNCC is bringing to both white and colored students all over the United States the realization that democracy really means equality—and if one group suffers because of its color, we, as Americans all suffer. As long as these injustices prevail, we are all guilty.

The twenty dedicated field secretaries of SNCC are on leave from their respective colleges and universities. They left to go into an untouched area of the struggle: the rural community. Field secretaries have gone into the farm areas of Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana in order to establish voter registration schools. The schools have been the main stimulus in getting the people of these communities to register and vote.

Unfortunately, these schools have also been the chief cause of the staunch segregationists' threats, attacks, and murders perpetrated against persons affiliated with these schools.. Though these students may be in the vanguard in the South, they also give inspiration and leadership to some Northern Communities.

The immense uproar in the South against a relatively small organization illustrates better than any words possibly could, how effective SNCC really is. The following page lists just a few of the "incidents" that have characterized the work of SNCC representatives during their ordinary day's work in the deep South. This is perhaps only the beginning—as this is being written, some field representatives are out on bail. They must go again to the courts to stand trial. If convicted, these dedicated men must appeal until justice is attained.

SNCC Needs Your Help...Desperately!

Since many obstacles are put in the way of Negro registration by the white registrars in the deep South, the course is difficult. Every contingency must be foreseen and every eventuality prepared for. But the work goes on—quietly and systematically. Those who do learn to vote in turn teach others so that in time all will reach their rightful stature as truly franchised Americans. But SNCC needs money to carry on. The pay of its field representatives is low—only \$40 per week for the unmarried men and \$60 for the married men. But because of lack of funds, sometimes even these small payrolls have been missed.

Please send whatever you can to further the work of SNCC. Any amount that you can afford will be sincerely appreciated. And every cent of every dollar you send will be used intelligently to radiate the work of educating Negroes into their rights as American citizens.

\$100 will purchase stamps for 2,500 informative letter to students across the country who work under coordinated SNCC efforts.

\$ 75 will pay office rent for one month.

\$ 60 will pay subsistence wages for one week for one married field representative.

\$ 40 will pay subsistence wages for one week for one unmarried field representative.

\$ 10 will pay typewriter rental for two months.

\$ 5 will aid in purchase of much needed office supplies.

Any amount will be of assistance in our fight.

**Please
Send In Your
Contribution
Now!**

The entire cost of printing this letter has been defrayed by a friend. Won't you please help also?

Send a check, money order, or cash for whatever you can afford. We gratefully welcome any contribution that will help us carry on this work. Please fill in your name and address if you wish to be kept informed of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee's activities.

STUDENT NON-VIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
197 Auburn Avenue N. E., Atlanta 3, Georgia

Gentlemen:

I am happy to send you a contribution of \$_____ to help SNCC in the South.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

ZONE _____ STATE _____