

March 24, 1962

Minutes of SBOC Regional Meeting -- Atlanta, Georgia

Present at the meeting for part or all of the time: Missen Collins, Ruby D. Smith, Wilbur; Messrs. Sherrod, Jones, Bailey, Forman, Black, Frank Smith, Holloway, Zellner, Mitchell, Barry, Monsonis.

Since this meeting followed upon the Washington Regional meeting of the day before, it was decided to follow the same agenda. James Forman chaired the meeting. After summarizing the reasons for the meetings, proceeded to item 1.

1.

1. Dion Diamond.

Attorney Jones has delayed the matter of Dion's release because he failed to file for a hearing on reduction of the bond until Wednesday, March 14. Jack Greenberg of the NAACP Legal Defense is dissatisfied with procedures, and set Wiley Branton down to assist. Branton arrived on Thursday, March 15. Several persons feel that ACLU ought to get involved in the case, but Greenberg is reluctant and feels it would be better for just one group to handle the case.

The money is available to pay Dion's bond—either through SCHE or through CORE, via surety bond. But the hearing on the bail is set for Monday, March 27, and no action will take place until then. Dion has been talked to about the reasons for following this procedure and apparently is in agreement.

2. The New York "Heads of Organizations" Meeting.

Jim Forman reported on the meeting which he and McDew attended in Greenwich, Conn., along with Wilkins, Mossell, Greenberg, and Chalmers of NAACP; Walker and King of SCLC; Smiley of FOR; Fairchild of AFSC; Young of Urban League; Lee of NCCC.

As the discussion began Chalmers broached the subject of tensions between the various organizations. SBOC apparently is a thorn in the flesh to many of the groups, and became the focus of the discussion. M.L.King made a plea for unity of the civil rights organizations, if uniformity is not possible or advisable. It may be that in some concrete situations, he said, only one or two should be active rather than all in competition.

Greenberg explained the necessary gulf between the NAACP and the Legal Defense Fund, based upon the tax problems. He and Wilkins explained how this had even caused a gulf within the NAACP, for now legal suits and actions are organized by the Fund and the local NAACP chapter is not even involved.

Albany was discussed as a good case of tensions and problems. The schism between the already present NAACP chapter and the groups that came in was dealt with. Wilkins admitted that some of the local conflict is due to local NAACP leadership which has not adjusted to the rapid changes in the civil rights field, and admitted that the national office was unhappy even with some of its own local people.

The discussion developed into a discussion between NAACP and the Direct Action groups. The NAACP approach is so different that Wilkins considers such actions as the sit-ins at the Justice department idiotic—the Justice Department being our only friends in Washington.

Towards the end of the evening M.L.King raised the question of united Fund-raising for civil rights causes, but NAACP is hesitant toward this idea.

The next day began with each group describing their nature and telling something of themselves, and the discussion proceeded peacefully until it got to SBOC. The question was raised strongly by the others whether SBOC has any distinctive role, and if so,

what it might be. SNCC used Albany as an example to point out our difference, stressing our willingness to subordinate any special interests we might have in a concern for a united movement. NAACP, for example, is clearly unwilling to merge at the local level, and made it clear that it is opposed to such united programs.

When pushed on this Wilkins made it clear that he feels there is some effort being made to supplant NAACP and to drop it out of the picture. The efforts of CORE and SCLC in building local chapters he sees as clear evidence. Jim Lawson's speech at the SNCC Raleigh Conference makes him distrustful of SNCC and he feels this is our goal also. Wilkins claimed that NAACP deserves much more credit even for the action of the past two years than it is given credit, that it deserves part credit for the sit-ins, the Montgomery situation, etc., but has been closed out by aggressive publicity and by the failure of some local people to take action.

The whole presentation was extremely defensive but honestly said, and the meeting was judged to be significant for its honest exchange of views.

M.L.King defended NAACP and its place in the civil rights field, insisting that it has a definite role which no one desires to eliminate. There is such a great need in general at this time that all the organizations and peoples are needed to attack the problem. SNCC came in for a great deal of criticism, particularly by Whitney Young for its lack of traditional organization. He sees little difference between the approach of SNCC and CORE, and suggested that the two groups get together.

Jim Forman reported that later Roy Wilkins privately pledged NAACP's willingness to work with SNCC, and also with SCLC, but made it clear that he would not work with CORE.

Jones: This meeting gives real cause for self-analysis. Apparently SNCC serves as a cutting edge of the whole civil rights movement, since all the groups are willing to work with us and support us. But it raises the question clearly for us to discuss the ways in which we do differ—there are several distinct ways which must be brought out.

Forman: It is clear that CORE is willing to work with us. Since it is New York based it has been able to appropriate much of the activity of SNCC for its own image; its willingness to work more closely with us is symbolized in the money recently given to SNCC by CORE.

Black: What are the unique differences of SNCC?

Jones: Let us take Albany as a clear example.

1. The other groups of necessity are institutions, with an institution to maintain, and cannot take too many risks. Before starting a project they must see fairly clearly where it will lead. SNCC is not tied down in this way, and takes many more risks. It can simply go to jail at crucial points. Its willingness to sacrifice in this way is a vitally important tactic.

2. Since we do not have the responsibility of building chapters at local levels, we can work to form community movements, not organizations.

Black: are there unique differences in emphasis?

Forman: Our youthfulness and lack of responsibilities give us freedom. And lack of structure means that we can work with all groups; this was shown clearly at the New York meeting.

Jones: Yes, there are clear differences, in emphasis also. We are clearer in understanding of what we want—beyond desegregation, toward integration. (Forman: no more than SCLC and CORE)) Agreed. But it is actually seen with us as an integrated working staff, in contrast to SCLC (Forman: but CORE is also an integrated staff).



Jones (continued) Our unique emphasis is that we establish clear identity with the local community by living in it to the point where we are no longer outsiders. It is only this way that we will be able to crack the deep South. In order to build up the confidence ~~within~~ of the local community we must really identify.

Bond: And when we leave, we leave behind a community movement with local leadership, not a new branch of SNCC.

Bailey: I question the uniqueness of Albany. CORE is in many places following the same patterns, e.g. in Baton Rouge. The staff really stays for long periods of time, and works toward building local leadership also.

Forman: Would it be true that eventually CORE wants to build CORE chapters at each place?

Bailey: not necessarily.

Sherrod: On what levels to people other than students participate in Baton Rouge?

Bailey: The CORE chapter was originally students, and mostly has remained so. The adults are there but peripheral.

Jones: In some way we must get around the "misnomer" of SNCC being a student movement. The adults must be with us, not just behind us, and should even be represented on the Executive Committee.

Frank Smith: I question the whole basis of the discussion. Theoretically SNCC is a coordinating group ~~as~~ for local student movements. Before comparing to the various organizations our uniquenesses and similarities we ought to decide just what SNCC is. The discussion should move in that direction.

Forman: Yes. What we have been describing in our discussion is simply the operation of the staff. The sacrifices made by our staff are our key sellingpoint at the present.

Frank Smith: We must then establish the relation of SNCC staff to SNCC.

Zellner: If one of the significant points about SNCC is its ability to work with all groups, then we must be careful not to publicize just the actions of SNCC staff, but what happens to others also. e.g., in Baton Rouge there were others in jail besides SNCC staff.

Smith: Such conflicts could be eliminated if we establish a mode of operation so that there is no conflict, and so the staff has direction. To whom is the staff responsible?

Forman: We must go right into this question now. And in addition, in relation to our relation to other groups, we must be careful about the value judgments we express about other groups. They come home to roost. This care is essential to our working with them.

Black: If SNCC were called upon to speak about the other groups, what would ~~it~~ be its position?

Forman: One of cooperation. All are needed to get the job done.

Black: Any conflicts?

Sherrod: Yes, more than inevitably exists between people. We would stress the positive side.

Frank Smith: This should be stated more often. Failure to make clear your relation to other groups has at times been harmful to SNCC.

Sherrod: For example?

Mitchell: Let's not go into that now. This will be cleared up when we return to the original subject of the discussion. First let's have some history of how SNCC was started.

Sherrod: We aren't far now from where we started. At first our role was information distribution from one place to another. We then developed a great structure, but it failed because we didn't have an office and people to handle it. Now we have stumbled into our present structure and program. We do not need to throw out the past and start something new but to put new life into the ~~same~~ old structure.

Zellner: What is new is SNCC as initiator of program. This is a great addition.

Smith: But now that is the bulk of the operation.

Sherrod: Not entirely. There are five people in the office now.

Smith: But they have failed in supplying information from other areas.

Mitchell: What did the Constitution say was SNCC's role? (Given Constitution)

Sherrod: People failed Ed King in not giving him information to distribute. SNCC had to begin to initiate program.

(General unorganized debate on who can initiate program)

Forman: The real question is: is there a present need for SNCC? What needs should it meet?

Monahan: Should it again coordinate information from local groups?

General: Yes.

Mitchell: (reads from Constitution section on directives given SNCC by the Conference). Can SNCC's work during the past year be considered as given it by the Conference? We must be more responsible, and define our tasks carefully. This raises the question of SNCC's relation to local groups again.

Forman: Can we say in any way that the Southern University protest was SNCC, as the Conference would suggest? What is our relation to spontaneous action by local groups?

Mitchell: Does SNCC really want spontaneous action by local groups which are autonomous or a tightly organized structure? Is the infiltration approach used on some of the local communities legitimate at the colleges?

Bond: Ideally, when a local group moves it is already related to SNCC.

Zellner: Then the problem is to develop these prior relationships.

Smith: We must decide: 1. What SNCC is to be; 2. What shall be its mode of operation; 3. What shall be its direction.

Jones: We must remember that we are not deciding, only suggesting to the Conference.

Forman: (Summarized as background the history of how SNCC was organized, the fact that state organizations did not emerge; outlined what is presently happening in a few local situations; told how the matter of voter registration came to be added to SNCC's program; about SNCC's staff and the nature of its communications and their changes. Noted how an original traveling staff settled down, and the lack of visitation at the colleges).

The Conference itself will have to answer the question of the relation of local groups to SNCC. It is not clear what will emerge.

Ruby Doris Smith: SNCC should have one representative from each state, even though difficult. At the Conference we must attempt to form a coordinating body from each protesting group, with one from each state acting as the coordinator for the state. This means communication on what the staff is doing would be possible,

Bond: Yes. And I suggest further, that one person from each group be the coordinating committee. This group should elect an executive committee which is responsible for the direction of the staff and program. They would be responsible for the newsletter, news, etc.. The Executive Committee has the power to hire and fire, etc.

Forman: When would the body meet?

Morganis: Twice a year, one session to be legislative, one general.

Bond: Quarterly; it depends on who pays the expense.

Black: Should there be state organizations? Who shall select the C.C. members?

Ruby Doris Smith: One person in each state should be designated as the state coordinator.

Jones: How many groups are actually left, working autonomously with money, program, etc.? We must also ask the question of the relation to adults; ~~where~~ are we concerned with publicizing student activity, adults, or what? Are we building a student movement? What shall be SNCC's nature?

Forman: What might be the alternative to building a student movement?

Jones: Our concern must not be either to build a student or an adult movement, but to intensify the total movement.

(At this point a break was taken; and Marion Barry arrived)

After break:

Forman: We must begin not to iron out the details of the structure.

First: each local group shall elect a person who shall be a member of the Coordinating Committee.

Barry: How do you define a local group?

Bond: Any group that has an individual program.

Forman: State Committees are needed also. Is the Executive Committee to be elected by the Conference or the Coordinating Committee?

Groups: Coordinating Committee - from its own membership



R.D. Smith: With at least one from each state.

Monseris: Now we're looking much like the structure that failed last time.

Barry: The key to the whole thing is a strong Executive Secretary—who can use an advisory committee but is basically responsible for decision-making. He makes all the basic decisions. (Wanted a tighter decision-making process). One single all-purpose advisory committee should be enough.

Monseris: When shall the various groups meet?

Consensus on the following:

1. Conference. Various dates and lengths considered. Decided to be educational primarily, program suggestions from the Conference to be made to the Coordinating Committee for action. Time: Easter weekend (in keeping with the tradition.)

2. Coordinating Committee: to meet:

a. late September—early October.

b. with the Conference. Elects Executive Committee then.

Membership from conference to Conference.

3. Executive Committee to meet:

a. May

b. mid-summer

c. with the Coordinating Committee

d. Christmas

e. Conference

Bond: What shall we do at this Conference about bringing this structure into being?

Foran: Let's first work out the ideal, then we'll have to work that problem out.

We have to deal with the question of the autonomy and public image of the local group.

Barry: Local groups have to maintain local identity in order to work locally. Perhaps we ought to use some nomenclature such as the "COAHR of the SNCC". or "affiliated" or perhaps even "represented on".

Black: Local projects should be done under local auspices; coordinated ones under SNCC auspices.

R.D. Smith: to use the term "affiliation in local releases helps to give a wider context and sense of movement to the action.

Barry: How much can SNCC project the action of a local group nationally, for publicity?

Foran: The question is what responsibility do we have—publicly and financially—for local groups. I think SNCC has the responsibility, even if not the resources,—for all local groups. This means publicity, finances, and legal representation. For example, there are 37 lawyers available with funds through Len Holt and the National Lawyers Guild; we should also supply ACLU and Legal Defense Fund contacts to local groups.

Smith: And if they are to draw on our resources, they will have to have affiliation and publicity for their efforts through SNCC.

Black: SNCC should be pushed as the coordinating committee for the student movement. What happens to students anywhere happens as part of SNCC.

Foran: Some groups want more formal relation.

Mitchell: This would depend upon the need of that local group; some would profit by it much more than others. If a group advertised itself as part of SNCC, then persons may come to SNCC for negotiation rather than the local group.

Foran: if the negotiators came to us instead of the local group, we would not negotiate with them without destroying the whole meaning of the student movement.

(From this point the discussion moved into a discussion of SNCC-COAHF relations and tensions, about which no notes were kept.)