

From: Sheila Michaels

COMPLAINT TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

On: Dismissal from staff.

I was dismissed from the field staff because Marion Barry, using his influence as a member of the Executive Committee, told the Executive Secretary that if I did not work for him, I could not be allowed to work for anyone.

I believe that I should have some say as to whom I will work for, given the reasonable latitude that I worked on that project for six months, that there was not a reasonable amount of work to occupy a field secretary, and that I had, in fact, been dismissed from that project and was to be assigned to another.

EVENTS LEADING TO DISMISSAL

On March 10, I arrived in Atlanta for a trial in connection with Leb's sit-in. Marion claims he did not know that I was here, but, in fact, we'd had an argument about it the day before. Half-an-hour before my bus left for Atlanta, I called the office and was informed that the trial had not been postponed, and I was told to come, immediately. When I arrived, the trial had been postponed.

On March 10, I spoke with Worth Long. I told him that I had no work in Knoxville. In the two weeks between the trial and my return for the continued trial, I had spent one week entirely without work trying to find Marion, as no one knew where he was, and he did not answer his 'phone. The second week I had about a half-hours' work per day, mostly telephoning people, which did not require a field secretary, and twice distributing leaflets at housing projects at night. The rest of my time I spent brushing up on my studies and watching tv at the Y.

Worth said that I did not have to return to Knoxville, that he would reassign me to another project, and that if Marion still felt he needed a field secretary, he would send a man in my place, and that he would call Marion & tell him.

The next day, Worth was called out of town, and I spent a week in Atlanta finishing a fund-raising brochure on voter registration, working on speeches, and doing general office work.

The next week I called my mother to borrow some money, as SNCC hadn't met its payroll in several weeks, and Marion was (still is) holding three of my paychecks, as they were sent to him, and it was his habit not to give me my pay until he felt like it. My mother offered to send me fare home to get to see my brothers, as I'd spent Christmas in jail. I checked with Ruby Doris and she told me to go ahead.

I spoke with Marion at the conference. He asked me what I was going to do. I said I'd spoken with Forman and he was sending me to Hattiesburg, Selma or Savannah. Marion said nothing about returning to Knoxville, or any project in operation in Knoxville.

(over)

A few days later, Forman told me that he'd spoken with Marion, and Marion had said that I should return to Knoxville, and that if I did not want to work for him, I should not be allowed to work for anyone.

I told Forman that there was no work for me in Knoxville, and that I did not intend to return if it was going to mean the same waste of time. I said that Marion's projected "project" practically depended on the masses arising, and that as far as a present project went, he had been planning to give a dance for the high schoolers when I left, to get them interested in SNCC, so we would have a contingent to bring to the conference. Forman said that he would call Marion, and he wanted me to tell him that on the 'phone.

A few days later I spoke with Forman again, and he said he'd been unable to reach Marion.

I told Forman then that he was in the habit of transferring people from one project to another, that Knoxville was not considered a project, and there was work for me in other areas, and that I'd made several requests for transfer before, and had been presented with the same proposition. I maintained that the only reason I was not being transferred to another project was that Marion was on the Executive Committee.

Forman said that he was employed by the Executive Committee, and that made this an "extremely ticklish situation". And that I was to write up another report, and he would take it before the Personnel Committee.

On April 6, Marion was finally reached by 'phone. I told him that there was no work for me to do in Knoxville. Although the situation was unchanged, he said there was work, and if I did not return, I could not work elsewhere. He further said that he would "categorically deny any statements" I made to the Executive Committee. At that time I did not even know I could make an appeal to the Executive Committee.

Forman said that as far as he was concerned, that was that, and I could return to Knoxville, or be fired.

At 8:30 that night the Personnel Committee met. When I asked Ruby Doris later what had happened, she said she had been informed that the matter was already settled.

I believe that I have been unfairly dismissed, and I would like to be reinstated on the staff. The quality of my work has been unquestioned.

The Free Southern Theatre (where I would be most useful, due to my theatrical and television background) the Mississippi Congressional Campaigns, the White Student project, and Selma have all said that they can use me.

The question now, which puzzles me, is why this happened in the first place, and who is playing what game?

I was forced to go to work in Knoxville in the first place, as when I was sent I was still bruised from knee to hip from a previous encounter with Marion.

I asked to be sent somewhere else at Thanksgiving, as Marion had not been letting me know when the local SNCC affiliate or the newspaper board, or any other civic groups were meeting, and there was a great deal of gossip in Knoxville about the callin-off of demonstrations for city jobs & Marion's subsequent rise in the Democratic Party, and because Marion & I were constantly fighting because of his authoritarian attitude.

I asked to be relieved of my job again at Christmas because I believed Marion had sabotaged an Easter Boycott I was planning, and because I had been told that Marion planned to stop publishing the paper because he was "tired" of it, and I then found he had not been collecting on

on the advertising or distributing the paper. Three members of SET the SNCC affiliate, had offered to back me up if I needed it. And because after four months I was still sleeping in the living room of Marion's girls' family & living out of a suitcase because Marion would not give me the money to get a room, although the family wanted me to move. Forman then advised me that I had included no self-criticism. (shall we wear hair shirts over our foxes?)

The paper folded in January through lack of advertising, though I had collected enough to tide us over, and I was told that Forman sent Marion a memo saying that SNCC would help support the paper. I believe one reason the paper was abandoned was that I had taken control of it.

Each time I requested a change of project I was informed that I must work for Marion or leave the movement. That is why I applied to CORE & was told that there was, as there had always been, a position for me on the Task Force.

Now...why did this happen? Granted, Marion may just want a field secretary to maintain his status, but why ME? And if I am that competent, can't I judge whether or not there is enough work to do on a project? And is this dog-in-the-manger attitude one on which to establish the beloved community.

Marion is not one to take chances, and he knew that this would be brought before the Executive Committee. I can't think that he would want me off the staff that badly, and so I must conclude that he is trying to force an issue. What issue?

And why did Jim fire me? He is accustomed to moving staff about at his own whim, and he could easily have appeased Marion some other way without bringing the issue of staff before the Exec.. If he had wanted to use this as an excuse to get someone else to take over the Executive Secretarys' duties so he could become more active in the field, there must be easier ways.

And if this is to be some sort of cause celebre, reinstate me first, and then hash it out.

Yours for Freedom,

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