

*Extra*

Report of Ella Baker's comments in conversation with Robb Burlage, Jan. 12, concerning the proposed leadership training--voter registration project for summer, 1963:

"During the approximately 45 minutes in which Miss Baker and I conversed, I brought her up to date on the general plans for the Seminar and Voter Registration Project, described some of the curriculum ideas developed so far in tentative chronology, and then asked Miss Baker for her response and suggestions.

Miss Baker expressed strong interest in the project, tendered a number of suggestions, and said she would be available to "teach" the opening few days on "Negro History, Negro movements, and Goals of the Present Movement." She also said she would be "in the South" this summer with no "definite plans" (other than an abiding desire to "do some thinking and writing") and would be available, if needed, to assist the project, to "chaperone" for it perhaps, or whatever. This was left indefinite pending discussions between Dorothy and Miss Baker.

Miss Baker said she would be involved in the arrangements for the SNCC Benefit Concern in New York City until about Feb. 7 and was therefore not planning to attend the NSA Advisory Board meeting on Jan. 23 in Atlanta--although she said that if she were "absolutely needed" she might be able to fly down--although she is without funds for this.

I told Miss Baker of your (Dorothy's) recent discussions with Bob Moses and Jim Forman and your presentation to the "Summer Projects" meeting, especially to VEP-SRC people Les Dunbar and Wiley Branton. She agreed that perhaps Atlanta would be a better place for teaching because of available library and because it would give Deep South kids, especially Mississippi ones, a new "image" of society--where registration doesn't have to involve getting beaten over the head. She also understood the "political situation: the desire of VEP-SRC to focus more on urban areas (and thus better chance for SRC approval of the Seminar and VEP approval and possible support for the Voter Registration stage of the project). I mentioned the "teachers" being considered: herself, Staughton Lynd, Howard Zinn, Jack Minnis, Tom Kahn, Vivian Henderson, Vincent Harding, Tim Jenkins, and others such as Bill Higgs and Bayard Rustin. She generally approved of this list and had no particular additional suggestions. Bill Mahoney and Penny Patch of SNCC, who were in the office during the interview, suggested Len Holt on the legal environment, Norm Hill of CORE on unions, employment, etc. I mentioned the staff being considered: Bob Moses, Paul Potter, yourself (DD), Ruby Magee, Frank Smith, and Casey, and perhaps Julian Bond. Prathia Hall's name was suggested and Bill Mahoney also mentioned Dave Dennis of CORE, although he doesn't know him personally. Miss Baker was in general agreement with the staff people being considered as well. Penny and Bill raised the question of whether Bob Moses would be available the full two months considering his responsibilities in Mississippi--it was agreed that this is still an open question--I was attempting at that time to locate Bob Moses for an interview in New York City and I have still not been able to do so.

As for general considerations, Miss Baker sympathizes with the emphasis on Deep South kids who "need ~~the~~ such a Seminar most." She also believes that "discipline" will be enhanced if the Seminar is not mixed in with direct voter registration work--the month should be set aside for Study, she believes. To keep kids' spirits up, however, she suggested some inspirational speakers, music and singing, occasional weekend parties or free nights and free weekends (noting that Atlanta's big city allurements might be something of a problem as competition with the seminar). As for keeping study discipline, she believes the staff "repeat teaching" approach will help along with as many personal participation devices as possible; rotating discussion leaders, giving reports, personal conferences, keeping diaries, having frequent "evaluation" sessions, special research projects, "field surveys" (she likes the occasional sampling project idea for weekends or whenever--and thinks that people should discover that Atlanta

isn't as pro-ressive and un-ghetto-ized as it is reputed to be), etc. Bill Mahoney suggested that the students write papers to be evaluated by the staff people with personal attention--but Miss Baker thought that such written work should be postponed until at least the middle of the month and should be used sparingly because many of the kids will probably not feel very confident at written work and might despair of the work in general if they were pushed too much on this.

Focusing again on the social problem of the diversions of Atlanta, Miss Baker thought that perhaps the staff people would have to decide on a rather monastic life for themselves as an example -- and to generally (except for special party nights or something) establish a code for the kids which will keep them at their work and in the good graces of the community at large. This would have to be worked out in the group itself, of course.

Another way to get the students involved even before they come, she suggested, is to send advance materials to read--and also ask each participant to write an extensive autobiography and to answer particular questions about his own experiences and goals and values (this would be valuable for comparisons at the end of the program, as well as starting the kids on the track of serious thinking). Miss Baker emphasized, in responding to the curriculum ideas, that the questions about aims and motivations be raised time and again--in her presentation at the first--in the discussion of "social change" and at the end. She wondered if perhaps it might be wise to have Vincent Harding or someone earlier in the month raise these issues of ends and means and personal motivation--not just the last 10 days.

As for a subject matter, Miss Baker felt that the most important "misconception" of kids in the Movement is that the "sit-ins are the answer"--there is need for more understanding of the long-run goals and problems of the Movement--a need to see the political goals--a need to see the white man as more than one "type"--a need to see the mutuality of white and Negro problems, particularly civil liberties ("They must understand that there just isn't time to solve civil rights and then to get around to civil liberties."). Miss Baker believes that Southern white students may be able to make a breakthrough for civil liberties just as Southern Negro students have been doing in civil rights. She hopes that the Seminar will stress to the kids that the white community is now using and abusing civil liberties, not only civil rights, to destroy people--and that everybody's rights must be protected and not allow the Red Scare to destroy everyone's rights and freedoms. She agreed that perhaps a lawyer like Marion Wright would be a good addition to the program to talk about the trampling of civil liberties in the South.

Otherwise, Miss Baker was in general agreement with the curriculum outline I presented.

Bill Mahoney and Penny Patch suggested, further, that good general films such as "Operation Abolition" and "Operation Correction" in tandem or movies on Africa might be shown as part entertainment--part education. They also thought that good musical talent should be brought in to sing songs of the Movement and other movements in the world--perhaps as part of the discussion of the Negro's history or in the discussion of movements in general. Guy Carawan, Pete Seeger, etc. Bill also noted that since VEP is demanding better reports from SNCC and kids need to know report-writing anyway, this should be stressed in the training.



I told Miss Baker that I would send her a copy of this write-up and she said she would write you a note this week and perhaps would call you sometime this week (week of January 13-20, that is).

--Robb Burlage

((Note: Copyx send by Robb Burlage to Miss Ella Baker ... D.D.))