WASHINGTON OFFICE REPORT
SNCC

SUBMITTED: SNCC Coordinating Committee Meeting, December 28, 1963

BACKGROUND

In October of this year, following discussion s between the Executive Secretary and members of the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG) of Washington, D. C., it was decided that a Washington office of SNCC would be set up. There was at that time and has been since no definition within any established framework, of that office's function in relation to a clearly defined SNCC program.

At the time of its inception the primary function of the office was the arranging and coordination of the CONFERENCE ON JOBS AND FOOD (a report on which is available) and in broad general terms to:

a) do fund raising,
b) to promote and project SNCC activities and programs to the attention of the general Washington community, and more especially to the attention of the administration and legislature of the country.
c) to research new and existing legislation and to send reports of the ways in which this legislation affects what SNCC is doing in the field to various projects.
d) to support and aid the local protest activities of NAG
e) to represent SNCC in making various contacts and alliances within various social agencies like the International Unions and on Capitol Hill.

The Staff of the office was at that time Bill Mahoney, who came from the New York SNCC office, and Mike Thelwell who was temporarily hired to organize the office.

Office space was obtained at:

3418 11th Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

and some furniture and equipment obtained (complete inventory attached).

FUNCTIONING TO DATE

In the short time that the office has been in existence certain facts about its possibilities and usefulness have become evident. It is clear that its function of research and representation must be kept fairly separate from the direct action protest activities of NAG. Through the sheer physical presence of the office and its facilities have greatly facilitated NAG action, and it has become an operational center from which NAG can carry out its programs. This has long been needed, and working out of the office NAG has initiated a number of projects which include mobilization for a Voter Registration campaign, educational programs instructing youth and adult groups in techniques of nonviolent protest, and for a projected program of mobilizing the poor of Washington to protest vindictive welfare rules, unfair evictions, police brutality, and systematic exclusion from employment.

These programs are in the formative stages, and fuller reports should come from the NAG executive. This group has already heard the program for the planned employment demonstration early next year. NAG and the SNCC office have just completed a campaign to collect food and clothing for Mississippi, and a total of between 10 and 15 tons of food, clothes and books have been collected, with over $2,000.

From the foregoing it can be seen that Washington, with its huge Negro ghetto, and overwhelming black poverty can become a protest area, and this could take the full efforts of the Washington SNCC office. But even if Washington should become a protest area, and the political implications of massive direct action and vocal black political discontent in the Nation's capital are great, there will still be a need for another kind of office in Washington.

RESEARCH, LOBBYING AND REPRESENTATION

In terms of representing SNCC and its programs in the nation's capital the situation is not so clear cut as action or fund raising activities.

It is impossible for the office to negotiate support from groups and organizations if it does not know what kind of support SNCC needs and is willing to accept.

In one example, the Washington office understood that one of its duties was to communicate with Labor and to attempt to get organized labor to support the Negro struggle for freedom. This contact was made, and the AFL - CIO was persuaded to absorb the major part expenses for the Washington conference. They also offered advice and help on getting the program together.

Representatives of the AFL - CIO indicated they were becoming increasingly conscious of the South, and labor's responsibility in the present struggle. They wanted a meeting with the SNCC executive to discuss what areas of cooperation existed between SNCC and themselves. The Washington office though this suggestion important because of the influence and potential for action that labor offered, and the many clarion calls that have come out of the movement for "labor to do its part."

No members of SNCC found it possible to be at that meeting, and it proved less than successful. Those members of SNCC that did attend indicated to the union representatives that they could see little basis for any kind of cooperation between SNCC and the AFL - CIO. It may very well be that SNCC has all the material and organizational resources that it needs, and can afford to reject even consideration of such a venture, in which case the Washington office should have been informed.

In a similar manner there have been cases of contacts with unions and government officials being duplicated, and different and contradicting versions of SNCC policy expressed to these people.

Bill Mahoney has had numerous meetings with congressmen and senators on thegeneral subject of econimic and political issues in the South. He has seen, for example, legislators who are advocating cuts in the defense budget. In these meetings he has urged that these funds be used for employment programs to provide relief to depressed areas in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. But without meaningful dialogue between the Washington office and the various local projects, he cannot pretend to be expressing the real situation or the needs and wishes of these communities. This indicates that in the absence of well-defined programs which we can represent as being SNCC's needs, there can be no effective lobbying done in Washington.

It is also clear that without clearly defined programs of economic pressure and agitation, the office's function of resaarch and exposure of federal programs is impossible.

Two examples will indicate this. Outlines of federal programs which operated in the South for the benefit of whites were prepared and distributed at the Washington Conference. We pointed out that all of these programs were vulnerable to pressure if discrimination could be proved, and that if SNCC field staff were to investigate the programs and send reports to Washington, much public pressure could be brought on the Federal Government, and through them on local officials. There has been no real response to this. At present the research department of the Teamsters is obtaining for us the complete list of all companies and businesses holding federal contracts in the South. This list represents the businesses which are prohibited by law from racial discrimination in their hiring policies. It is also true that many local segregated communities derive most of their cash income from just such Federal contracts. The listtof the contractors will be distributed to all projects, with the idea that if discrimination can be proved, pressure can be brought on the Federal government to cut off the contracts. The threat of loss of income to these communities can have significant effects on their social practices.

The Teamsters are also preparing a research outline, detailing how information concerning the corporate structure, ownership, and the

relationship to fair labor laws and minumum wage laws, can be obtained against specific firms. This information is useful in situations like the Dobbs House situation in Atlanta or the Dan River Mills situation in Danville, in terms of providing SNCC with insights about how to bring pressure on these companies. But without some precise ideas of the kinds of action that SNCC will be doing, this information will be useless.

Congressman William Ryan (D-NY) of the space and Aeronautics committee has made information available to us on the Mississippi Space Project. He has indicated his willingness to help us bring pressure on NASA and the federal retraining agency to ensure that local Negroes are trained and employed on this project. However we will have to know that Mississippi SNCC is interested in this project and will actively support it in the local communities. Jesse Morris has done a great deal of work in this area and we are working with him to set up a conference on Jobs in Mississippi.

We are also working with Mrs. Gloria Richardson on getting retraining programs into Cambridge.

This report indicates some of the services that a Washington SNCC office can offer. We do not, in this report, wish to indicate the direction or policies that SNCC must take. That is a decision that SNCC executive and coordinating committeess must make. What we wish to emphasize is that if a Washington office is to be effective, it must be organized to act along lines that represent SNCC's policies and activities, so that its actions can be coordinated with action in the field

Submitted by:
Bill Mahoney
Mike Thelwell