

"Communications Section" means many things to different people in SNCC. To some it is a network of citizens band radios in Mississippi, to others the Student Voice, and to others it is the immediate dispatch of news to the national press, and the limited protection that results from publicity. Still others think propaganda is "70 per cent of the fight." Communications is all these things and more, and by next summer it will be different from what it is today.

Some of the plans for an enlarged Communications operation should be discussed by the staff since there are some basic questions posed. My position is that there are some jobs that have to be done well, and doing them well does not necessarily mean changing movement values.

Suggestion: There should be six distinct sections operating under "Communications."

1. NEWS DEPARTMENT. The job of gathering and dispatching news (that is, gathering information for public use, releasing news of incidents to the press, the mailing of releases and fact sheets, and pro-publicity) is the most important day to day activity of Communications at present. Very few people now do news work although it is very important. The Communications offices of Atlanta and Jackson have established a good reputation for reliable news reporting. It is not easy to achieve a level of documenting daily events so that stories are straight on the beam, and maintain it. It is 24 hours work. It requires scrupulous checking out of every incident. We should not have to do it ourselves because America and the American press should be interested enough in accurate reports of what is happening to maintain an adequate and honest press corps throughout the South. That is not the case as we all know. By next summer the news department should be separated from the other functions of Communications. And because the basic job is documenting, writing up in news "copy" and releasing, people who are committed to news as news can be used to help if they have the skills, and if they work closely with someone who has a strong movement orientation who can point out the issues involved.

A great deal of time spent by the people handling news is spent on the phone. Others, like the Northern Coordinator, spend much time on the phone getting the same news to support groups which help to get news placed in local press. At present neither the Communications offices in Atlanta or Jackson can handle more than one crisis at a time adequately because of the time required to dispatch one item. We should investigate a teletype system which would simultaneously dispatch news to maybe twenty points around the country (both Friends groups and newsrooms) so that in five minutes the wires would be cleared and ready for the next dispatch. To some people the complex system of WATS line calls and the citizens band radios (SNCC SIGNAL CORPS) is already technological. Because it is often inefficient, people do not always think of it that way, but it requires trained people to use such a network which has become the very nerve center of the operation in Mississippi. Teletypes are one step further toward fast communication with distant parts. Speed is often the difference between life and death in SNCC.

2. The second section could be called PUBLICATIONS. At present the people who prepare publications are often those who handle news. This happens less and less because those administering different programs (in Mississippi for example) often do their own reports. The haphazard result is that we have publications of sorts on some things and not on others. What gets published is not necessarily because of a predetermined need, but often because of the aggressiveness of a special interest group, or because one person has better access to the people who run the presses. We could have one person chiefly responsible for developing literature as the need arises; who sees that things get published according to a carefully thought out timetable; who determines what should get a fancy layout with pictures and what should get mimeographed; who develops a good mechanism so that materials reach those for whom they are destined. A separation is implied here between publications which we might call "propaganda", that is, interpretative pieces which tell our story to those outside the movement, which pinpoint the issues that our action is directed toward.

3. MOVEMENT MATERIALS. The flyers, political primers and literacy materials, etc. should go in a different section since again, materials for internal use ought to be shaped in accord with needs, rather than by other factors. Movement Materials and Publications should be shaped by people whose main job is to feel out those needs and develop materials to fit them.

4. PROMOTION. The same people who basically do news, do promotional work now, although if we were to carefully analyse the job of North Northern Coordinator we would see that most of that job is promotion and public relations. Under the umbrella Communications, there could be a section called "promotion." The job of the one or two people in that section would be to make personal appearances on TV shows, be available for interviews, set up interviews and develop news media contacts. As it is now, there is one person in Atlanta and one in Jackson who informally serve in this capacity, but they also do news, publications and other work interspersed with briefings of newsmen. If there is a Southwide project next summer, there will be a real need for a key person to travel and develop news contacts and do the hard job of talking issues with the press---which now gets done only incidentally.

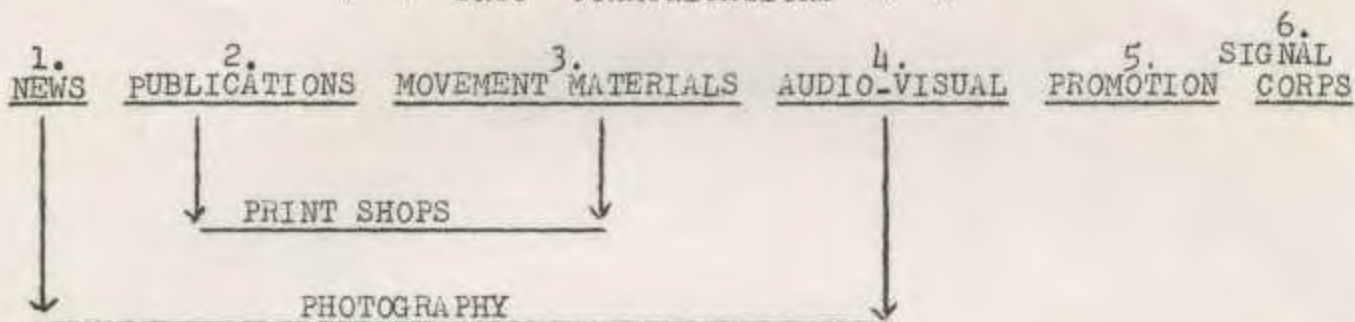
5. SIGNAL CORPS. There are at present sixty-two citizens band radio transceivers in the state of Mississippi. They must first be installed and then maintained by specially trained people, and they are. Some of these people came out of the movement or from the Jackson community. They too are technocrats now. Others were already trained when they came. Presumably, expansion into the black belt will mean more of the same.

6. AUDIO-VISUAL. We have a photography department with photographers and a dark room. Running a dark room is a skill, and taking useful pictures is a skill. There have been field secretaries taken out of the field to learn still and movie photography. More should be similarly trained. Other dark rooms should be set up. It is no accident that SNCC workers have learned that if our story is to be told, we will have to write it and photograph it and disseminate it ourselves.

In Mississippi, Freedom Schools are aided by circulating educational films. There is much more that can be done. We can develop film strips on different aspects of political organizing for local people to use in new areas, thereby lessening the burdens on field workers who are already stretched thin over several counties. A tape recording library with tapes that can be loaned to Friends groups is already being developed. We could make a real effort to develop audio materials, not only for spot radio news as is already done, but for tapes explaining programs, literacy and interviews with people like Mrs. Hamor, Mr. Agnew James, Mr. Steptoe and others. The photography department is now closely connected to news functions. The marketing of photos and placement of photos in newspapers through quantity mailings which are cheap, is already done though not so much as should be by next summer. Much more can be done to use pictures within the movement. Again, placement of persons in positions where their job is to work with their ear to the ground to fill movement needs is required. That may mean recruiting or training people to handle either the content or the technical end. But one travelling FDP worker with specially developed film strips may be able to do the job of five people.

The PRINT SHOPS fall under the direction of several of these areas and are not distinct in themselves. The chief job of the print shops in Atlanta and Jackson should be the technical work involved in getting things printed. It's a dirty word, but in order to run an offset or multilith press, you have to be a technician. When the print shops determine the ideological content of materials, as well as production, they can do neither job well.

* * SNCC COMMUNICATIONS * *



Some of the people needed to fill the positions described above are already in SNCC. Training or relocation may be involved, but they are here. For some of the others, recruitment of people who already have the skills may be needed. This does not mean we have to enlarge our staff with professionals who care nothing about the movement, do not understand SNCC thinking, or require large salaries. However, it may mean we should experiment with special recruitment.

We should be ready to admit that in the course of daily field work, in the course of giving up school or professional career, and developing ways of working that have never been tried before in areas that have never been tried before, we are ourselves highly skilled, and we may have to develop more efficiency in some areas in order to do our total job well.

Fear of bureaucracy is valid. We all shun organizations and civil rights groups which seem intent on building the organization and which spend their time image-building and fund raising. We even pride ourselves that the other groups do the talking while we do the hard dirty work.

Yet SNCC has grown larger and larger and has created its own needs -- needs for its own internal communications system, and needs within its specially developed programs. Organized and unorganized Friends of SNCC groups (international now) depend on us for up to date information. (It was almost embarrassing this past summer to pick up newspapers from across the country and read line for line the news reports that were written in the Jackson communications office.)

There are some things that need reorganizing, retraining and recruitment before next summer if Communications is to do the job it must. We can use skills and organization in some areas without letting it use us.

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