

Paper on the salary structure of the Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee.

In the early days before 1961 the spirit of the student revolt led to a prevailing view that too much organizational structure was not necessary and the loose organizational form with only one or two people working full time did not necessitate vigorous fund raising, although that problem is always with an organization. Then too, the various local units comprising the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were often well financed. For instance, the Nashville Student Movement and the Atlanta Student Movement had few financial problems in the first two years of their existence.

When the SNCC decided it wanted a staff, it also agreed that money has the tendency to corrupt people, that those of us working in SNCC should not attempt to view our work as a job but rather as a dedication to a worthy cause, that it was better to work for this cause without a large pay scale, that in fact we should begin working for forty (\$40) dollars a week. We were sixteen at that point and only two of those sixteen were married. It was agreed by all, that married people should receive sixty dollars a week. I was asked to administer this payroll, without knowing if in fact we would have money from week to week to meet the payroll. We did some weeks and we did not other weeks. The lack of funds in the spring of 1962 became so acute that at a meeting in June 1962, it was decided to suspend the \$40 a week rule and what money could be sent to the field should be sent. At that time we were in a \$13,000 deficit which seemed like an awful lot of money to us, especially since we did not have the type of fundraising machinery we now have. We hobbled along during the summer with a summer project of some four or five brave volunteers who were the pioneers and showed us, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, that it was possible to use white people in the deep south. They laid the foundation for the Mississippi Summer Project along with many other bricklayers.

At the June, 1962 meeting of the Coordinating Committee it was decided that SNCC would send Field Secretaries to some five major northern cities: Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Cleveland. These cities were suggested because they have a high concentration of Negroes. Since a lot of what we do often goes

unnoticed, we felt that development of offices in these cities would act as a propaganda base as well as a fund raising source. They would also be able to put pressure on the news media, resulting in more and better coverage. Also the existence of these Northern Offices would create, we hoped, some pressure on the administration in Washington. These projections turned out to be correct and we now have (8) staffed Friends of SNCC groups in Northern cities. They have been of inestimable help in providing financial, material and political support for our work.

By the fall of 1962 we were getting some money in Mississippi from the Voter Education Project. Theoretically all the staff was suppose to get \$25 a week. In reality the money was pooled and spent where needed. We were struggling simply to survive in those days and we were forced to pinch pennies. In Mississippi there existed among the band of brothers a spirit of trust in the administrative ability of Moses and a willingness on the part of all the brothers and(sisters) to sacrifice in order to try to get the programs off the ground. (I remember in the late winter of 1962 we bought two new cars, the first new cars SNCC had ever owned and we bought them on time.) The emergence of the Voter Education Project led to a new problem in SNCC. We could make the money go further if we all chipped in. We had to face the problem we could not all get the \$40 a week. It was then decided at the Executive Meeting that we should still try to work on the basis of needs, but that we should fix some limits. We decided that everyone in the organization should receive at least ten dollars a week and if he were single should not receive more than \$45 a week. Married people should receive a maximum of \$65 a week with ten dollars for each child.

(It should be pointed out that a critical time in the history of the organization--the summer of 1962--we lost the services of Julian Bond because he was married and his wife was expecting a baby. He had to quit working for us and go to work for the Atlanta Inquirer to make enough money to have his baby. I frankly felt this was terrible and a problem the organization must deal with. We passed the fall of 1962 the provision about the extra money for children. We were able to get Julian back and he has gone on and produced another future Snicker.)

Within the limits set by the Executive Committee, I was asked to administer the variations of salaries. However, as we increased our fund raising operations in the north it became quite apparent the base figure we had set for expenditures in the south, the \$45 a week was inoperative. People were saying they simply could not raise funds and live off \$45 a week in places especially like New York. The variations about the limits were permitted because it is obvious the organization needs money and if we must pay people to raise money then we must do that.

There has been much discussion among the staff based upon sad rumors about the salaries of the New York office. We have the figures before us and we should look at them with the understanding the cost of living in New York is not the same as in Ruleville, Miss. There are two payroll figures in the New York office which especially need explaining. They deal with the salaries of Carita Bernsohn and Theodora Peck. In New York since the summer of 1963 we have been cultivating the most talented fund raisers in this country. They are top notch and have indicated and proven time after time they are willing to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as a group of volunteers. Not only are they helping to raise large sums of money but they are training some of our people, including myself. Now these fund raisers last year were about to dissolve if SNCC would not get them someone who would be totally responsible to them. They agreed to agreed to raise money for the salary of the person they had selected, Carita Bernsohn. Bob Moses and I listened to their story. It was reported to an Executive Committee and the decision was confirmed they should get this person. Now for Miss Peck. During the summer of 1964 they wanted to put on another person, a person with considerable experience. Most of them would be away for the summer and felt a need to have fundraising on the special gift level during those months. Julia Prettyman the Administrator of the New York office, agreed to their hiring Miss Peck, conferred with me later and I substantiated this decision. This was a temporary appointment and in terms of parties which she initiated and followed through on it was worth the investment. In the fall the fund raisers requested that Miss Peck continue on the staff since she had proven to be an excellent fund raiser.

Concerning the rest of the staff in New York, we formed an emergency personnell committee in New York consisting of Julia Prettyman, Courtland Cox, Marion Berry, Joanne Grant of the New York Steering Committee and myself and reviewed applications for jobs for that office. It was in a state of crisis in that people had to be found to handle certain decisions. This Committee agreed to hire those people you see listed at the salary level indicated. A special word should be said about Elizabeth Sutherland who was formerly an editor with the Nation and with Simon Schuster. She comes highly recommended for the job as Administrator of the New York office. That office is basically a fund raising office and has payed its dues to this organization. However, she accepts a drastic cut in her present income to work with us, just as many of us have done. It was felt that since she stated this was the minimum for which she could work the committee should hire her.

In general I think the concept of subsistence wages is an important concept. It is very difficult to administer if we are not willing to recognize that from plaae to place the need for higher or lower subsistence wages will vary. It is also impossible to administer if we are not prepared to accept the premise that for certain things or particular skills we may have to pay people wages which they will ordinarily earn in the labor market. This is the case with our accountant and bookkeeper, the former earns less with us than she could otherwise. The latter said she had to earn her present salary or otherwise she would have to go back to teaching. We simply could not afford to loose her at that time.

I have tried to present for your information what I think are notable exceptions to our concept of subsistence. Also I have tried to present some history of how the pay scale developed.

Conclusion

My recommendation for the entire report for all the material in my "historical and analytical War & Peace", is that we review it, discuss it, criticize it, close ranks and move forward, the band of brothers we are!