

April 17, 1964

SNCC file

MEMO FROM: Anne Braden

TO: Continuations Committee of SSOE

IN RE: Relationship To SNCC

Some of you have asked that I write a memo on my suggestions for organizational structure of the SSOE-SNCC relationship. With full knowledge that it is not exactly my business (except insofar as whatever you do affects me profoundly as a white Southerner and a human being), I am happy to present my ideas and appreciate your giving me the opportunity to do so.

Let me also express my appreciation to your secretary for inviting me to be with you at the meeting this week end. I wanted very much to do so, but a long-standing commitment elsewhere made it impossible for either Carl or me to attend.

I should add, of course, that the ideas I present are based on the situation as it looks to me now. It is entirely possible that were I there to listen to the discussion I would change my opinions on some points.

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As some of you know, when the discussions that led to SSOE first started I was among those who hoped that this would not develop into an organization separate from SNCC. Some of you have accused me of being "sentimental about SNCC," but I really don't think that was it. I think that what I saw was the specter of segregated student organizations in the South in this late hour of 1964. It just did not make any sense. And no matter how you dressed it up, it seemed to me that such an organizational division was going to mean just that.

After being with some of you at the February 22 meeting in Atlanta and then in Nashville for part of the April 3-5 meeting, I began to modify my position. I realized that I had underestimated or had been ignorant of some of the factors that were making you feel a need to organize on your own---and also some factors that might make a more autonomous setup more acceptable to SNCC.

Therefore the question that occurs to me is: Why can't you have your cake and eat it too? Why can't you be autonomous and at the same time a part of SNCC?

S.O.

The structure that occurs to me seems obvious and simple that I think I must be overlooking some dreadful shortcoming in it---else everybody would have settled on this long ago. I suggest the following for your consideration and for your discussion with the SNCC Executive Committee:

Why don't you go ahead and organize SSOE, establish a framework, elect your leadership, set up an office, and issue a statement of purpose. This

statement should be made very clear to your own inner constituency and to the public, and from what you have been discussing I assume it would be, stated briefly, to organize students on predominantly white campuses and mobilize them for both campus and community action, working not only for racial integration but for a broad program of human rights for all in the South.

Then, once you have your inner set-up complete, affiliate or associate SSOC with SNCC as an autonomous wing---this, of course, assuming that SNCC had given prior approval to this arrangement.

This affiliation or association would mean that any literature you issue, and such things as letterheads, would say that you are the Southern Student Organizing Committee, an affiliate (or "associate", if you prefer that word) of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The details of this actual liason would then have to be worked out; for example, I would think that you would want to ask SNCC to let you have one or two persons on its governing body, and you would want to have one or more from the SNCC top leadership on yours. You would want some procedure for keeping each other informed regularly, but all of this seems not too hard to work out once you have agreed on the basic principle of an autonomous-affiliate relationship.

It seems to me that this relationship answers several problems that have been raised by both SSOC and SNCC people in recent discussions.

The autonomous nature of the relationship answers these possible problems:

1. It removes the possibility, or lessens it, of leadership problems between SNCC and SSOC people, since SSOC would be free to develop its own leaders. Perhaps it evades a real settlement of this issue, but if a real settlement is impossible right now it is best to face this honestly and to set up a framework in which it can be worked out in the future. The Southern student movement thus far has been remarkably free of clashes for leadership, and it would seem important to keep it that way.
2. It removes the possibility that the present dreams of SSOC for a broad program for the South will be thwarted. As I understand it, these dreams include plans for your own war on poverty, against thought-control, for organization of the white unemployed, etc. I know there is some feeling that, although SNCC might favor this broader program in principle, in practice it cannot and will not develop it at this moment without slowing down its own life-and-death struggle for simple civil rights for Negroes; I know that even some people in SSOC don't feel that SNCC should take this chance. But if SSOC is free to develop its own program along these lines, SNCC also can have its cake and eat it too; it can continue to concentrate on its present pressing work while at the same time expanding its program (through the work of its associate SSOC) into the broader areas of human concern.

The affiliate or associate nature of the relationship will answer another problem:

It removes the possibility some have feared: completely separate white and Negro student organizations at this moment in history. The image you present to yourselves and to the world will be that of a joint movement, and I think this is crucially important. I am fully aware that the tensions

created by centuries of separation have not yet been resolved even among those of us who are active in the movement. I do not ask that your generation be free of those tensions. I ask only that you work at resolving them and not pass them on untouched to the next generation. And I think that we work toward a solution of them only in the live experience of daily struggle; I do not think they will be helped by white and Negro students retreating from a confrontation with each other--and that is what I think would happen, whether you meant for it to or not, if you set up entirely separate organizations.

There is one problem raised in recent weeks that this autonomous-affiliate relationship does not solve. This is the question of whether you can reach the moderate white Southern students if you have the name of SNCC attached to you. My own feeling, however, is that the problem is not worth solving. Let me explain.

I think that your job is to challenge the moderate white student. History is camping on his doorstep and you must help him see it. I do not think you help him by slipping up on him with an organization that looks as if it won't demand too much of him and might be "easy" to associate with. I think you help him meet the demands of history by being just what most of you are; fully committed young people who yourselves understand and identify with the militancy of SNCC. You must certainly try to interpret this militancy to the more moderate white students, but I think you do this best from the vantage point of one who identifies with SNCC but still does not look down on the student who does not yet see or understand.

As a matter of fact, I think you might really harm the moderate white student if you provide him, under the leadership of truly committed people such as yourselves, an organization that is too "easy." Perhaps you merely provide him with an excuse to postpone the day of true confrontation with his conscience and with the problems of the South.

Let me hasten to add that I am not saying there is no place for moderate organizations. I certainly think there is and that they serve an important function. I just do not think it is the job of people such as you all seem to be (as I saw you in Nashville) to organize such groups. Don't worry; they will get organized by somebody. You be the challengers.

Let me add also that within this general perspective one can be adaptable. You don't need to write off or be hostile to people who don't follow you right now. Your representatives, campus-travelers or whatever, can attempt to work with and keep in communication with many and varied groups. My guess is that many campus groups who are more moderate than you will be glad to see and meet with your representatives when they come around, and will be moved further toward a strong position from this sort of association than if you had watered down your position to their present understanding to beg in with.

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I have not touched on the root of many arguments---money. My own suggestion is that SSCC and SNCC fund-raising should be combined in the same autonomous-affiliate relationship, that is, SSCC should ask SNCC for a budget from its current funds (and I've been told by people in the SNCC

leadership that they would support this); and also SSCC should be free to engage in and encouraged to engage in its own fund-raising efforts, seeking money which would be contributed to SNCC s earmarked for the SSCC program.

Along with this, SNCC should be free to make use of the impact of SSCC's work in its own fund-raising, that is, it should have the right to take "credit" for having a broader program and benefit from any bigger contributions that this inspires people to give. It seems to me that, working in this way, both SNCC and SSCC are going to get more money. I have an idea that SSCC may be initially tempted to be completely independent in its fund-raising, figuring it can raise more money and new money in this way.

I think this will be an illusion and valid at most only in the short range. All of us who have been involved in fund-raising for civil-rights groups know how confused people get now from the multiplicity of drives for funds. For there to be two Southern student organizations raising money will compound the confusion. SSCC might latch on to some new money temporarily by "going it alone," but in the long run it would benefit most by fitting into the fund-raising structure SNCC has already built and helping to expand this on a joint basis.

One more word of caution on fund-raising:--above all things, start off with the rock-bottom principle that you will not take money from anybody with any strings attached. Tell everybody from other organizations who want to help you that you'll be glad to listen to their advice and consider it, but that your decisions must be your own.

That, incidentally, is what I expect you to always say to me, and so this memo is presented for what it is worth---for you to consider or ignore.

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Note by Carl Braden:---I concur generally with the above but would like to stress these points which I raised at Nashville:

1. The tendency to cater to white students who are afraid of SNCC because they say it is "radical" or "militant" must be combated. Those who fear the "radicalism" are victims of the Red scare and the witch hunt, and to give in to them on that basis is unprincipled and dangerous. Those who fear SNCC's militance can be brought along gradually, as outlined above.

2. The name Southern Student Organizing Committee was suggested deliberately. It shows that the group's purpose is to organize now and decide later where its permanent berth will be. It follows the pattern of the labor upsurge of a generation ago, when we had such groups as the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, which later became the United Steelworkers of America. During and after the organizing drive it was a part of the Committee for Industrial Organization, which became the Congress of Industrial Organizations, first as an organizing committee and later as an integral part of the CIO. Such can be the relationship of SSCC and SNCC, now and later. This leaves great flexibility in dealing with those you seek to organize.