

SNCC Relationship and Responsibilities to the Southern Campus.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee owes its very existence to the college campuses and no matter how we may be organizing in communities, no matter how deep our roots may go into the people in the Black Belt, we started growing this little tree of protest in the college communities, we were supported by the Northern college communities, and in fact our name implies that we were intended primarily to be some coordinating body of students of the South. Moses has used the example of SNCC being like a tree, of its roots as its field secretaries in the soil of the people from whom the roots get nourished. All trees need certain things: they need water, they need sunshine. The little small tree which started growing in 1960 got its sunshine (which could be money) from the North, and its rain from the South, in the presence of Southern students who helped to develop these roots which are now in the communities. Any tree in order to grow has to be continually serviced, by rain and by sunshine.

Those of us who joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee tree in 1961 thought it would have roots both in the communities and on the college campuses. But we began developing only one side, the community. There were a lot of reasons for this. First of all, there were many people who objected to working in the communities. It was an uphill struggle within the ranks of those people very close and dear to SNCC to grant or concede that the staff should be organizing in the communities. There were many people saying we should only work on the campuses. They were partly right, we should have been on the campuses, and we should have been working in the communities. It is very difficult to assess where the responsibility rests for not developing the campuses. As the principal administrator of the organization I accept my part of the responsibility. I think it was a collective responsibility; personally, my allegiance, as well as the rest of the staff's, in the beginning was to organize in the community. We did make some abortive efforts to organize on campuses, but not any type of concentrated effort. There were many people during the first two years of SNCC, such as Marion Barry, who kept raising the question of college organizers. I recall in the fall of 1962 we sent two people out just to do that. Bill Hansen went to Arkansas, started the Arkansas Project, found a home, married and settled down. Bernard Lafayette was supposed to organize campuses, but he went back to school.

It was obviously a top-sided development in our program. A lot of college groups active in the spring of 1962 began to wither away because of the changing political climate, in part. They were supposed to be a base for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, but actually SNCC itself did very little servicing of those bases. Any creation has to be nourished in order to develop. The people who came from the college groups and were represented from time to time on the Executive Committee or the Coordinating Committee didn't actually go out and try to proselytize or try to organize other students in their own states.

It was not SNCC's fault, completely, that the student movements withered away. It was true that we didn't service them, that we didn't provide a program for them. A lack of planning on the part of the central body had something to do with it. Our lack of resources to carry out this kind of program had a lot to do with it. The fact that the limited staff itself was so deeply committed to the community projects and didn't want to withdraw from these projects to travel on the campus is another reason. But the basic reason is the general overworked condition in which all of the limited staff people found themselves and the lack of physical resources and personnel with which to implement the program.

People recognized that there were no programs for the college campuses. The work-study program was one example of an over-all attempt to deal with the problem. The money we obtained for the State Leadership Conferences is another example of some effort being exercised. And now we are in 1964: we do have 8 college travellers, we do have some transportation, we do have \$8,000 exclusively for state conferences, and the question is, what is our obligation?

We should have a college program because of the historical roots of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Whatever we are and whatever we shall be has its roots in the Southern Negro colleges. We can draw from the colleges many people to work in our programs. It has been proven that Negroes from Southern schools have helped tremendously in the execution of our program. For example, one of the things that helped the Mississippi Project last summer was that 30 or 40 students came from Howard University to work in the state. There are other students we can draw upon similar to the ones from Howard. I know some Southern students are looking forward to SNCC

as an organization. They feel that SNCC is a part of them and therefore shouldn't be isolated from it. I think that there are many students on these campuses whose lives, whose value systems need to be touched by the spirit and the philosophy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and this can only come about if, in fact, we are on the campuses. I think that there are programs which the college campus students are best fitted to carry out. For example, few of us on the staff, to my knowledge, are acquainted with all of the sections of the civil rights bill. This is indeed a tragedy. I have something to say later on about the necessity for us to really take whatever the weaknesses are in the civil rights bill after the election and begin to dramatically point out its weaknesses and to use whatever is good in it as an organizational technique. Part of the college program could be the holding of discussions and workshops on the civil rights bill, on its implications, and where students in particular areas can use the bill for the benefit of the movement. So, assuming that we have agreed we should work on the campuses, how should we organize?

THE STUDENT UNION

We could go to the college campuses, indicate we want to organize state conferences, where as many students from across the state as possible can come together. People can go around from college to college talking about this, can set up some sort of steering committee for the state conference. A desirable result from the state conference would be the formation of a Student Union. A Student Union could be organized in each state on congressional district lines. Every state, we know, has its own congressional district lines. That means, of course, that to the state conference one would have to get more than just students from the colleges. We must get students representing as many of the congressional districts as possible. These students then agree there is a need for another conference in their state and that they would go out and try to get more people to come back to a second state conference. At the first State Conference assign people responsibilities within their congressional district to organize, for instance, a third congressional district student union in Georgia.

The students in Georgia, for instance, become an important political force because everybody 18 years old can vote. The young people in Georgia could possibly form a solid block of voters. The

What is SNCC / Southern Campus / 4

same is true in Kentucky where 18 years and older vote.

We have to be realistic and recognize that in the United States this kind of organization cannot take place this year. We must establish a three-year plan for the organization of students across the South into Student Unions.

In the congressional districts you could have county student unions. Ultimately it could be broken down on the precinct level. This would be more inclusive than just the college students and it would be a more responsible body than just the college students. Membership into the Student Union could range from 17 to 25 or 30, arbitrary figures. The Union could have a state central committee composed of 2 delegates from each district, a district central committee composed of two delegates from each county, and a county central committee composed of two delegates from the various precincts or beats in that particular county.

Now to do all of this, though, means we must have at least 30 field secretaries assigned directly to work on what is called a youth program. Instead of a college campus program we would have a youth program.

NEW DEFINITION OF ROLE

If SNCC takes on the role of becoming just organizers of Freedom Democratic Parties, of Freedom Schools, of Community Centers, of Student Unions, in articulating the program of SNCC we say that SNCC itself has changed its role. It is now basically a set of organizers and that some of the things it is trying to organize are student unions in the South, Freedom Democratic Parties, Freedom Schools, voter registration campaigns, community centers, maids unions, women's organizations, the unemployed, the employed, the youth and the old people.