

[1964, Nov. 23]

Dear Staff:

There has been much criticism of the "Jackson office" recently. 10 days ago there was a meeting in Jackson called for the purpose of "re-organizing" the office. The minutes of this meeting are under this cover letter. Unfortunately, the minutes were not well taken and the spirit of the meeting, as well as a considerable amount of the discussion that took place during the meeting, are missing.

The Jackson office will no doubt and should be discussed at this staff meeting. It would be helpful if the discussion were guided along constructive lines rather than having the entire staff hurl all their brick-brats at the Jackson office.

As it is presently staffed, this is what the Jackson office is supposed to be doing:

1. Communications
 - A. informing field of what is taking place on other projects
 - B. keeping Northern contacts informed
 - C. dealing with the press
 - D. files and records
2. Financial Distribution
 - A. money for budgets
 - B. money for leasing of houses
 - C. money for emergencies
3. Transportation
 - A. assigning of cars
 - B. money for repairing of cars
4. Food and Clothing (no staff person)
 - A. procuring of food and clothing from the North
 - B. distributing food and clothing throughout the projects
5. Legal Assistance (Henry Aronson)

this has been moved to the legal office
6. Program Coordination
 - A. Freedom Schools (Liz Fusco)
 - B. Community Centers (Lois Chaffee, Lorne Cress)
 - C. FDP (Lawrence Guyot)
 - D. Federal Programs (Jane Adams)
 - E. Voter Registration (?)
7. WATS Line
 - A. taking information from projects
 - B. relaying messages for projects
8. Personnel
 - A. soliciting for new people
 - B. orienting new people
 - C. assigning new people
 - D. handling complaints about "volunteers"

To discuss the Jackson office meaningfully and constructively, the staff will have to make suggestions as to how the above areas can be made to function better than they have. To use Jackson as a scapegoat for all the field's shortcomings is rather dishonest and will get us nowhere.

Jesse Morris

STAFF MEETING, JACKSON COFO
23 November 1964

First order of business are the reasons for the recent closing of the Jackson office; these might be listed out as:

- the staff's inability to come to a decision
- the situation in the office just didn't respond to mere talk
- the "local people" problem
- personality conflicts which go unresolved
- the actual taking over of the office by the FDP, Jackson project
- in general, the noise and confusion which make work difficult

Discussion of this list. Jesse Morris views the office this way: it is a center for: communications, supply distribution, finances, WATS line communication, legal matters, personnel, and program co-ordination.

Discussion on Jackson project Margaret Burnham has left for good; the question is 'does the Jackson project serve as a means of removing local kids from the office?

Martin Nicklaus: Attempts have been made in the three weeks I've been here to find a center for the local project; we have Freedom Schools going; we are planning small community centers all over Jackson, in the Virden Addition where I live, for instance. The entire Jackson project consists only of 4 or 5 people, the Nicklauses, the Browns, and Fred Heinze.

Brown: more Freedom School teachers needed.

Heinze: the involvement with the FDP--John Klein's work--might be divorced from the Jackson project itself.

Brown: Fred Heinze was assigned to work with the local kids. There are Schools now at: Mount Nebo, St. John's AME, and Institutional at Virden Addition; school is taught two nights a week in each church and a library is projected for Mount Nebo.

Nicklaus: Is money available for light, and heating bills?

Jesse: Some "good will" money was given during the summer for breakage, etc. The kids of the Freedom School themselves could solicit the needed money by sales of buttons, etc. Otherwise, COFO will have to take it under consideration when a big bill arises. An office will be available for the Jackson project: the old supply house on Short St.; there are books which need to be moved to Valley.

Nicklaus: Who is the new Jackson project director?

Jesse: Has to be worked out among the staff (To Gerry Wilson:) Short St. could be used as a Community Center.

Nicklaus: The problems existent in the Jackson office now will be transferred to the Short St. office which is being proposed. The absence of a movement in Jackson is the real problem; these kids who hang around the office are expressing a desire to be part of things.

Gerry Wilson: The problems go deeper than kids' desire to be part of the Movement in Jackson; there are more basic things than that involved; anyway, some kids have been given the chance to be involved.

Lorne Kress: There is confusion as to what the responsibilities of a project office are if they are not the local people's problems; it seems to me that certain problems are inherited and will have to be worked out. The old office was not--nor should have been--equipped to handle these problems as it was not the office of the Jackson project per se.

Jesse: NAACP had the responsibility for a Jackson Movement, but it has not involved any kids. There has not been any person available to meet this need.

Hunter: It's clear from the discussion that it's up to the Jackson Movement staff to develop the necessary tools to solve its problem

Charlie Horwitz: Let's discuss what the Jackson movement is supposed to be doing. There's a small scale siege in the office every day and this undoubtedly will continue.

Lorne: Perhaps a re-evaluation is needed in the case of the Freedom Schools; maybe fewer Schools are needed.

Vickie Nicklaus: Some of the things we are doing in the Jackson project are: MSU, Freedom Schools, "Blair St." girls, and there are only 4 people to do this.

Flukey: Jackson project should become familiar with every aspect of COFO activity; maybe Freedom Schools are all you can accomplish. Find out what's going on in Jackson and what 4 people can handle.

James Mays: It appears that you wouldn't try to do everything yourselves; local people properly involved will involve other local people. Get them to do their job and don't do it for them.

Jesse: The topic of Jackson seems exhausted. Let's meet at 10:30 tonight in the office and launch the Jackson movement. As an afterthought, once the Jackson movement is a going thing, there will be no need for running in and out of the office except for mail and gas slips.

Discussion of FDP take-over of the Jackson office

Guyot: Right I say that no other space is available for FDP.

Theresa: To return to the Jackson movement for a moment, why have they gotten the Short St. office when FDP has been asking for it for 3 months?

Guyot: We need to be near a WATS line, so we request using the Jackson Office yet. Would anyone here suggest that the FDP stop its functions entirely?

Flukey: FDP had taken over the office from front to back.

Theresa: Because during the Convention our stuff was spread from the compact pile it had been to places all over the office.

Jesse: Let's make it clear that no one objects to FDP being in the office, but the general messiness impairs anybody's work. FDP is just another program--like Freedom Schools--despite the fact that the people involved in FDP may think otherwise.

Guyot: Jesse, what do you suggest we begin to think of ourselves as?

Jesse: Consider that one person's attitude can affect all other people in the organization. Be a little more broad-minded; think of other people's work too.

Guyot: I'll work on that, Jesse.

Jesse: ...which brings me to the third topic for consideration--Personality Hang-ups. Jackson is almost unique in this; Canton has a similar problem, but Canton also has maybe the most successful programs going in the state.

Lorne: Suggest we meet once a week and talk over our problems.

Liz: Confusion in the office because people are searching for ways to relate to each other.

Suggestion from some source: The girls' Freedom House hold an open house on Sundays at 7:00.

Discussion of Communications

Jesse: As office staff, we should consider the comments the field staff has made; our Communications section fails, they feel, in informing Project A about Project B; they also fail to handle the mailings which need to go out. They do send our press releases out.

Charlie: We're hoping to go to the projects for feature stories; we're hoping to get Incident Summaries out. We're understaffed too.

Jesse: What about a daily memo?

Lorne: I for one never know what's going on around the state; it would be helpful if things other than bombings and shootings were posted daily.

Sally: There is too little communication between the WATS and the Communications staff; a training program for the WATS operator in knowing what things to ask for, in writing up a news story would be useful. Training them to look for certain things in writing down details of incidents would be good.

Gerry: Important that we develop a procedure for operation for the Dec. 4,5,6 staff meeting; since the staff in the field gave him such an overwhelming vote of confidence at Cleveland, it is important that we have specific recommendations for them to consider at that time.

Liz: This session is to make recommendations.

Jesse: A suggestion which was once made to the Communications staff was a "Depth Study" on one particular project...

Susan: Press people are very dissatisfied with COFO Communications; I worked for Newsweek in New York and, when I stopped in at their office in Atlanta on my down here, they expressed great displeasure with COFO's Communications. The biggest thing is to have better, more complete body of information.

Lorne: I suggest Susan and the Communications people get together and iron things out.

Sally: WATS people should be trained to write stories.

Stu: That's why WATS and Communications shouldn't be separate.

Susan: For instance, there is no complete system for getting out the mailings; and no labels are printed up in advance.

Stu: Maybe the postage meter and the mimeo machine should be put over in the Print Shop; I don't think Mike would mind that.

Liz: It's not a question of his mind; he's considered it before.

Guyot: You know what we're doing here; we're re-locating a problem because the problem is people and not programs. Decisions will still go unmade because this human factor cannot be ignored.

Theresa: Listening to all this talk gives me a smothering feeling; I feel so guilty just sitting here listening to all these plans knowing that the FDP in the next month--with the mechanics of the Challenge coming up--is going to upset all this schedule.

Jesse: How about a 3-man board to make all these decisions? Say, Dick Jewett, or Hunter Morey and someone else.

Lorne: Let's admit that not all these so-called "emergencies" are really emergencies and that some things can be planned out ahead too.

(Question of the amount of lobbying for favors will take place if the office is in the hands of an office manager; wither plan will leave the person who makes the final decisions subject to considerable pressures from the person wanting favors done.)

Theresa: I'd like to present a plan of priorities for the next month; since this is going to be a staff decision...

Hunter: No. I'd like to suggest that a state-wide COFO staff meeting in December consider this problem in its meeting; maybe there should be an interim executive Committee.

Jesse: Alright, to summarize for the Communications people; we want a Daily Memo, Press Releases, a Once Monthly Mailing to Northern Support Groups, and the mimeo is being removed to the Print Shop. We needed a man for Supply Distribution and William Porter has said he'll take the job; he's coming from Atlanta; now I suppose there'll be a long discussion over this... (ensuing long discussion ...)
In keeping with our policy of involving local people, I've

asked Houston Howard to act as our Bookkeeper.

Gerry: I think we ought to give serious considerations to who does this job.

Jesse: Well, to go into what the job means: it entails taking money to the bank, giving out money for expenses and thanking people for contributions. And the office still needs someone to be responsible for Files and Records

Sue: Well, I still think this is a Communications area and as long as we're doing things we ought to handle it too.

Jesse: So, we can count on you to take care of the clippings, etc.? Wendy, will you be responsible for the WATS line from 8 to 5?

Wendy: Yes.

Jesse: So we have Wendy from 8 to 5 and Jimmie Blalock has said she will work from 5 to 8 six days a week; Wendy can work five; from 8 to 11 we'll use whoever is in charge of the office to work the WATS. Then, Theresa can make the calls she has to make for FDP.

Theresa: I've just worked out a schedule I'd like to present, so I can use the phone earlier...

(Gap in the secretary's notes here; Theresa said to strike her proposed plan for the WATS line; discussion continued as below)

Discussion on suggestion for a Jackson Office Manager

Liz: We ought to make it clear that who takes over the job of Office Manager is to be responsible for the office only and not the field.

Lorne: The Office Manager's job is not so simple that he'll just be someone to order toilet paper for the job and Magic Markers and tape. It's not clear to me what the Office Manager's duties will be.

Fluke: The discussion here is proving one thing and that is that the decision cannot be made in this room.

Theresa: I suggest we appoint Hunter to be the temporary chairman to get mail and to order supplies until the Staff Meeting.

Jesse: What does anyone in this room suggest?

(Confusion and discussion at random)

Guyot: I'm suggesting, Jesse, that not anyone in this room carries your same decision-making weight and that no one can make that decision but you. Who is it you suggest?

Jesse: You want me to decide? Hunter will take over until the Staff Meeting.

Hunter: Well, give me some idea for running the office; how many hours a day is it going to be kept open?

Jesse: I'll talk to you after the meeting.

Stu: I don't mean to put you on a spot, Jesse, but could you tell us exactly what some of your duties are?

Jesse: Well, you have to decide if some one turns up missing if you call the FBI or wait another half hour, you give money or refuse to give it to the projects, you settle a fight if they're fighting on a project, or tell them to forget it, you spend a lot of time checking up on people who are supposed to be doing their work...

Liz: Just a minute, Jesse, I have a question: why do you go around assuming no one is doing their job? It's my belief that if you mistrust people you encourage them to be untrustworthy. And you have attempted several times to destroy my own confidence in myself this way.

Jesse: Liz, no one is attempting to destroy you; I have checked up on people because it's been my experience that 60% of the time they

are not doing what they're supposed to have done.

Liz: And another thing, Jesse, why did the office situation deteriorate to the point of having to close down the Office? Why did our system fail?

Jesse: I always said I didn't want to be the manager of that office; no one ever took the responsibility, so I had to take it, even though I never wanted to. No one argued, so I was forced into it; all summer we talked about it and did nothing until I shut down the office.

Liz: I still want to know, Jesse, while we're discussing it; why do you insist that people cannot do their job without your checking up on them?

Jesse: Do you want to be specific, Liz?

Liz: Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. Just the other day, you gave me a letter to answer and said I had to show you a carbon copy of the answer before I mailed it.

Jesse: Well, in that case, I had been given that letter by Bob who told me to check the answer before it was mailed out.

Liz: That wasn't the first time either, Jesse, that I ran into this with you; that was the third or fourth letter you had to see and as far as personnel placement goes, it took me three attempts to place Freedom School teacher around this state to discover that you had a system figured out to place them and you didn't tell me about it.

Jesse: Dick Jewett told you that.

Liz: Why do you insist I don't know things, Jesse? I may not be from Mississippi and I may not be Negro, but I do know Freedom Schools and what they can do.

Jan: Can I interrupt here? You may not like systems, but it was because somebody failed to check up on a carbon copy that Sue and I nearly missed our Orientation session....

Liz: That was Jesse's personal little secretary and she was doing what he said to do.

(Flukey entered the discussion)

Liz: I think we ought to talk about it later, Jesse.

(Discussion on relative merits of what cleaning up the office meant if things got thrown out; inquiries into who was responsible for throwing out some Freedom School paintings. Two culprits owned up to it, boldly.)

Jesse: To review what we've done here: the Jackson Project office, the cleaning out of the Short St. storage place, the moving of books, FDP still remains if they clean up their stuff, Communications gets out a daily memo, etc. Hunter will be in charge of the office...

Question arose as to how long Hunter would remain in this position.

Jesse: Until the Staff Meeting, unless you know a project who will be willing to send me someone at once.

What if Hunter were asked to remain in that position permanently?

Jesse: Come now, you know they're never going to ask Hunter to stay in that job.

Meeting dissolved.