

From Sherrod

First of all, let us thank God for the wisdom of the pinched toe and the empty belly. Most of the people with whom we work, along with us, have not been able to get a formal education. But look around at those

blacks among us and see that the staff, the SNCC staff is hardly an "educated-trained" one. A man may be so ignorant to make a pair of shoes, but not so ignorant that he doesn't know when a pair of shoes pinches him or that the roof leaks or that white folks have power over that his belly is empty. And we must demand that the new society of Democracy for which we strive be based on the wisdom of the pinched toe and the empty belly. But that is not the problem or is it?

We are here to determine the direction of SNCC. I would suggest that we first consider who we are, where we are and what we are doing. For the past few years we have been using the symbols of what hundreds of bodies mean together with signs and blood in a common appeal on T.V., Radio, in newspaper, etc., on one side and the white man's guilt on the other. This has been effective. It has led to degrees of desegregation and levels of integration, probably more toward the north than to the South. But there is a "backlash" of the white man's conscience. There is a point at which the whites in our country are saying outside the NO's that have been present inside of them all the time, so you get this white boycott in Brooklyn and other places, you get the fight against housing codes in California, you get the organizing of white citizens councils in Michigan, Phila., Chicago, Calif., Washington DC, Ind., and finally you get Goldwater funneling all the frustrations of racists and rightists and all kinds of psychopaths into a common unit of respectability. The rightists have captured a major expression of power in our country in the form of the Republican party with apparent unity. What difference does this make? Just the little point that after the election, win or lose, the forces behind Goldwater will gain strength not lose it.

Now, what the hell does all this say to us? We are the sons of farmers and maids, janitors and preachers, teachers and doctors and all of us are prejudiced and insecure in our own identity and aspirations, black and white. In fact, we are more prejudiced and bitter, frustrated and impatient and hateful than our parents because we have had more and seen more and think we can get more than they did and we think we can get it now because we have done miracles; we have most of the time suprised ourselves.

Now we are about to go about the task of organizing power. We have been flexing our muscles like any young boy who is just finding out how strong he is. Our muscles are beginning to scare even us. And if they are scaring us there are those in this country who are probably terrified of us as we are and as we can be, and probably will be the one who will act accordingly in the future.


The dollar will increasingly become hard to get not easier. The past has had blood and morality and emotion as leverage but the future will call morality and reason. Who we are and who we will be should determine what we want, what direction we go in. The problems we are facing are not problems of organization but ideology. We have not as yet set down and bore the pain of wrestling with the issues which have made slaves of us all in this country and no way of organizing will deal effectively with them.

Let me try to be clear ! The real question is whether SNCC is born to die or to live in the new society or to be the new society. This is no easy question. And who we are now will determine its answer. Are we a group of guys creative, all of us, but when the vital decisions are made -- I'm a Forman man or I'm a Moses man or I'm my own man alone because there is nothing that all of us agree upon as short range or long range goals besides -- "Freedom." I hope some questions have been raised in your mind by now. Let me say a few final things now maybe half way summary and half way proposing:

1. We should first produce an ideology ( a description of what we die for, what we want, principles of action) of action or for action before we draw up a constitution or compromise and include it in a constitution which to me is confusing.
2. We should concentrate geographically our efforts in action.
3. We should implement within our staff the principles or ideology for which we are working so far as obviously it is not ineffective.
- \*\*4. We should organize along more rigid lines for the sake of communication and discipline, but we should "build in" machinery for the mobility of authority at every level.
5. We should enlist the "support" of more professional personnel in the struggle.
6. The PEOPLE-their concern and aspirations and what they are willing to suffer to get what they want, being careful to be sure that the PEOPLE really want what we want.



7. There can be no place for race hatred among us, SNCC that is, we blacks must recognize the needs of the whites are not so different from our own as regards recognition, fulfillment, status in our group, and so forth.

There is a great need to be honest during this conference. There is a great need to curse and swear and fight and tear away at the masks which each of us wears. There are no giants among us; we are all grasshoppers fighting the sleeping giant. When the giant awakens and puts on a unified armor, we're going to have hell to pay. We were kids; now we're grown-up -- almost. We still have a little time before the giant awakes.   
This may be the last time; I don't know.