

SNCC Western Regional Conference...November 14, 15.....Workshop Report
Workshop on Relating Activities of Other Groups to the Southern
Movement: Businessmen

This workshop centered on a discussion of goals for businessmen and how to implement these goals. Its main considerations were:

1. Money. Businessmen generally have money to donate, and many will give. The best way to reach them is through other businessmen, those already involved. Personal contact is the key.
2. Commitments--people involved to the extent that they will press for equality in employment, etc. This is very touchy...many businessmen are sympathetic to some degree, but are unwilling to commit themselves. Here SNCC may have a decided advantage over other civil rights groups because of its non-membership organization. A business or professional man can be a "Friend of SNCC" and work on his own, through his own channels, without joining and identifying with a loud, local group and being tied to a rigid program. This also brought in the problem of reaching Negro businessmen and the middle-class Negro. Many of these people are reluctant to identify with the civil rights movement. There was some feeling that they might show more interest in SNCC than in local groups, simply because SNCC does not rock the local boat.
3. Liason groups of Chambers of Commerce, Kiwanis, Jaycees, etc. with some similar group or groups in the South. This can aid the organization and effectiveness of southern groups, and will in addition create interest in the Northern business community.
4. Communicating and Articulating the structure and purpose of SNCC. Most people, even those who are friendly to SNCC, do not understand that SNCC is southern-based group, working in the South, and that northern workers are support groups for the Southern movement. SNCC does not participate in local direct action or demonstrations. If this is clarified, we may get much more support from the business community. The feeling was that detachment and distance from the South leads to more rational thinking on the part of the Northern businessman. Part of our job is to relate SNCC to Mississippi in the public mind--the "place where the three civil rights workers were killed."
5. Economic Pressures: a definite amount of pressure can be exerted by individual businessmen with the courage to do so. Much work needs to be done in the area of pressure from the northern business community on the business-industrial complexes of the South. The workshop agreed that SNCC should formulate some policy dealing with boycotts of products produced by industries in the black belt who exploit southern Negroes and poor whites. The question was also raised of how sympathetic southern businessmen can work "under the table" without jeopardizing themselves to the community. Some sort of organization should possibly be set up, for moral support if nothing else.

The workshop's conclusion was that SNCC's biggest problem in this area is in making SNCC acceptable to the business community. Once this breakthrough is made, the field will be clear for a great deal of work. A nucleus of businessmen who are proud to say "I donated to SNCC" to their associates would be an invaluable asset to the Southern Movement.