

Who do we organize, where do we organize, what do we do with what we organize, and the relationship of these questions to structure and decision-making.

The Raleigh conference of April, 1960, out of which SNCC grew, brought together students of varying backgrounds and from different local situations but with a common need for mutually meaningful communication, and in some instances coordination. For the first time, students from Nashville met students from Atlanta or other parts of the South with the same goals. This contact was a crucial first step; for in August, 1961, an important new development took place when 16 persons decided to quit college and work full-time for SNCC. It is doubtful if such commitment would have evolved if, for example, Diane Nash had known and related only to Bernard Lafayette or other students in Tennessee rather than to students from all across the South.

Of those 16, all but two were students from Southern Negro colleges. Given the nature of the Southern Negro college, it is doubtful if the evolution described above would have taken place without the contacts between students from across the South. Most students at Southern Negro colleges are first-generation college students; economically, their parents are either from the poor or lower middle-class. Thus the student, who usually has three or four sisters and brothers in high school, is considered the brains of the family. Hopes for upward mobility rest on him. Many an uneducated Negro parent has boasted to friends and employers that he has a child in college. A formal education is respected and admired by people in the community and automatically gives the student a sense of status. He feels a great deal of middle-class ambition and enjoys the anticipation of being able to earn four times more than his parents, or being able to provide money for his brothers and sisters to go to college too.

The typical Southern Negro college (such as Fisk or Spellman, and including Howard University) was in most cases founded by northern white religious groups. They maintain a paternalistic attitude which creates an atmosphere for LEARNING rather than for THINKING.

They are parochial in spirit and have little contact with other colleges except through sports. They are narrow-minded in their insistence on chapel attendance, strict rules and regulations for personal conduct, etc. Their conservatism extends to politics and, in some cases, to civil rights activity. The state college are somewhat more liberal than the private ones, but generally the same in outlook.

Thus the status-hunger of the student and the conservatism of the college combine to produce a professional class (doctors, teachers, etc.) who do not provide militant community leadership. It takes a lot for a student to make the leap from the relative security of the fraternity world to working the back-roads of Tallahatchie County with SNCC. Only a few students have been able to do so.

This is one reason why only a handful of students from southern Negro colleges have joined the SNCC staff over the past year. The staff today mainly consists of early organizers who have stayed on plus Northern white students and a few Negroes who have joined recently.

SNCC's college program is not yet a program. It is still a "hit-and-run" or raiding policy. State conferences have been discussed but they have never materialized. The campus traveller system has not been effective in the past.

There are four basic reasons why this situation should be changed:

1. Staff needs. Whether we like it or not, SNCC needs "technocrats" (to use Henry Samstein's word)--people with specific functions who know how to perform them. We often complain about the inability of certain staff members to service specific needs. This lack of skills will continue to plague us unless a program is adopted to deal with it. In addition, we need good black people.

2. Negro student needs. The difficulty in making the leap from

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college life to field work for SNCC has been described above. Intermediate steps can make that leap easier. These steps could be provided by a good college program which in some way ties directly into SNCC. This program should not be an end in itself but a beginning. At the same time, such a program should encourage the radicalization of southern Negro colleges as they now exist. It should encourage academic freedom and an educational environment in which students learn to think. It should in some way relate to their community program.

3. Program needs. Historically, SNCC programs have developed from an interest by certain persons in specific kinds of programs and their ability to spell out probable ways and means. The Mississippi Summer Project is an example of this. PROGRAMS DO NOT DEVELOP IN SNCC WHEN THERE IS NO STAFF WITH THE ABILITY OR INTEREST TO DEVELOP THEM--OR WHEN THE WHOLE STAFF WILL NOT PUSH FOR A PARTICULAR PROGRAM. College students would have the interest and ability to help develop college programs, but the interest can come only with a broad and direct tie-in to SNCC.

4. Community Needs. This is a crucial point. We certainly should organize in local communities but Southern communities are becoming increasingly urbanized. Therefore, we must learn to organize urban as well as rural Negroes--which we have not done to a great extent in the past. The urban leadership (Atlanta, Greenville, Greenwood, etc.) is traditionally drawn from the professional groups. Those groups, in turn, come mainly from the Southern Negro college graduates. It would have been much easier to organize the teachers in Greenwood, Miss. if they had been oriented differently, or re-oriented before leaving campus. Moreover, our ability to organize the rest of the community would have been easier.

Thus we see how structure and program mesh. Students should therefore be included in the formal structure or otherwise we will never get a good college program of SNCC: i.e., on the coordinating committee and the executive committee. In addition, this helps SNCC and also helps the southern Negro student.

THE GOAL IS NOT CONTROL BUT DEVELOPMENT. COULD THIS COME THROUGH A STATE-WIDE TIE-IN ONLY? NO. THAT WOULD AMOUNT TO THE BLIND-LEADING-THE-BLIND.

SUMMARY:

1. The basic issue is not control but development. There are those who say that people should make the decisions which affect them. I agree. But these same spokesmen also say that the staff should be the only decision-makers because the decisions affect only them. This is not only inconsistent but also naive, because then SNCC decides (actively or by default) not to carry out a college program, then, this affects the college students as well as SNCC. Therefore, students should be included in the formal structure of SNCC and the decision-making.
2. A good college program must be developed. The kind of program to be developed must come out of discussion with college people as well as present SNCC staff.
3. We should organize southern communities. I am not sure whether these should tie into SNCC.
4. A broad tie-in with college affiliates would not harm our program of community development.

Marion Barry