

WHAT IS THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

" " A BAND OF BROTHERS, "
" " "
" A CIRCLE OF TRUST " "
"*-----* *-----*
BY
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jim Forman

WHAT IS SNCC

I have been constantly thinking of my own answer to this question even from before the last staff meeting. I have discovered that to answer this question satisfactorily for me the answer has to begin in 1957 and '58 before SNCC even existed.

I was in graduate school at Boston University and had completed a novel which has never been published. One of the minor themes in the novel was the formulation of a movement of young people of both races which would use non-violent techniques to usher in social change. Much of the concern of the novel was the larger matter of the human frustration, especially of the young Negro in the big cities and this movement was one of the alternatives they explored.

There were certain characteristics of this organization as it was formulated in the novel that appeared to me to be unique:

- a. It would attempt to be a mass organization with some degree of coordination of the various elements within the group, yet would be decentralized. If in specific cities or even areas within cities large numbers of people were needed in the street the organization would be able to have those people out quickly because of a block by block organization.
- b. The second distinctive feature was that the organizers would work on a sacrificial basis. This was deliberate. They would work for only what they needed because of the corruptive effect of money in this society. If people were working out of dedication not for material gain I felt that the group would be strong and incorruptable and it would be almost impossible for people to come in and steal them away from certain ideals by offers of large sums of money.

The third characteristic was that the nucleus of the organization was composed mainly of young black intellectuals from North and South. And emphasis on the South, because the feeling was that too many young Negroes were migrating north and losing themselves in the labor markets in the cities when their skills could be better utilized in the Southern situation.

The fourth characteristic is one of technique. The organizer would teach in a school in the south, get a group of people around him and expand this group to more and more people. The reasoning for this was that the opposition was better defined in the south. This did not mean that we were rejecting the real necessity for work in the north but were confining the effort to the South since the organization work was easier in a situation where the enemy was more visible.

The program of the organization would be broadly socialistic and humanitarian as opposed to a religious oriented group --- working for the needs of the people as they themselves recognized these needs. This novel was finished in the summer of 1959, sent to two publishers who were not interested in publishing it.

The student sit-in movement had begun in 1960. One of the central characters of the novel had gone south to teach and had been writing back to the north describing the social situation there. This was, I admit it, an ego wish extension on my part. This was what felt was needed and what I wanted to do.

There was in the book some criticism of the NAACP as being too middle-class in its orientation. There was little mention of either SCLC or CORE, mainly because they were relatively recent groups, but the book stated the new organization would be Negro led if only because the masses of Negro youth needed symbols of leadership with whom they could identify and respect. The long years of frustration inherent in the segregated system had made it impossible for Negro youth to look up to generally accepted "Negro Leaders" and I use the term advisedly, knowing the ambivalencies and ambiguity surrounding the word "leader". The feeling was, and is, that Negro youth needed some viable and valid symbols, some identity anchor, and what could best fill this need than some militant, incorruptable organization fighting for their rights, and led not by whites however sympathetic they might be, but by Negroes.

There you have a capsule of my ideas and attitudes in 1958. In 1960 I found a chance for action by working in Tent City with the Emergency Fayette County Committee in Tennessee. Most of you will recall that incident where an entire Negro community was evicted from their farms for registering to vote and the story of the tent city they defiantly established. There were some distasteful incidents within the committee itself but these belong to history, and to my memories. They are reminders to me of the baleful effects that dissention can have on even the most idealistic group. The people who suffer are usually the ones the organizers are supposed to serve and not the organizers themselves.

In 1961 I met a number of you who were involved in the birth stages of the student movement. I can remember talking to Jim Bevel, Diane Nash, Paul Brooks, Bernard Lafayette about the necessity of creating an organization of the kind I had written about where people would take time out from school to organize. We all agreed at least to the extent that people had to take time out and do something. Exactly what? There were as many ideas as people. Simultaneous to this thinking, there was a seminar held in Nashville by the National Student Organization which was being led by Tim Jenkins. The major topic of discussion was people dropping out of school to work. A third factor, and a very important one was the decision of a New York school teacher named Bob Moses to go into Mississippi to work on voter registration. (And the story of those first days, alone and isolated in the most violent and most mysteriously sinister of the Southern states really needs to be told.)

Leaving Nashville a number of us were thinking of some group that would go round to various communities organizing indigenous community organizations like the original Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, which would speak out of the people's needs. Some people in Nashville thought the ideal group to do this would be the infant SNCC. But at that time SNCC in Nashville in 1961 was not too well understood and highly regarded. Diane was working but even she had difficulty explaining to people in Nashville how SNCC was organized. But she did have faith.

I went from Chicago to Monroe, N. C. and the story of Monroe should be

known to most of you. I left Monroe with a broken head and measureless enthusiasm. I had seen there what a group of young agitators, willing to work with local people could do. The experience in Monroe showed what could be done by a group willing to make certain sacrifices in terms of dramatizing and protesting certain issues. I was now certain of the critical need for such an organization.

I returned to Chicago and to teaching in the fall of 1961, but I simply could not devote to the students the necessary time and energy that they deserved. This worried me because I took teaching seriously and had been a good teacher, but I was now completely hung-up on making the attempt to fulfill the dream I had outlined in the book.

It is important to realize that the kind of movement I was thinking about was based on the need in the United States for constant agitation -- for people to agitate, agitate, and agitate -- for their rights. Also, that the answers did not necessarily have to lie with the agitators, but that if they made the society sufficiently uncomfortable and jittery, then the total society would itself move to ameliorate the basic injustices. I remember reviewing the history of the Negro protest here, and remarking on the almost complete absence of MASS agitation. With the exception of A. Phillip Randolph's march on Washington for jobs there wasn't much mass agitation until the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This was in my life experience a very important example of mass community cooperation. Accustomed as I was to seeing Negroes fighting each other in the Chicago streets and hearing "Niggers can't stick together, Niggers can't do nuthin together", I was bothered every time I heard that and was not convinced that it was true. So the Montgomery Bus Boycott seemed to disprove by example that street cliché, and I still maintain that the real effectiveness of that boycott was not primarily in Montgomery but its effect on the psychology of Negroes across the entire country.

Considering these things I felt a need for this group of organizers and agitators. I thought of them as technicians bringing to the people the tools and techniques which would allow them to move forward, because my experiences in Monroe and Fayette County left no doubt at all in my mind that Negroes in the South were ready to move. All they needed were the skills and tools that the organizers could bring.

Then I received a call from Paul Brooks in St. Louis.

"You remember that group we have been talking about organizing?"

"Yes" I said.

"Well SNCC is gonna do that."

"Yes?" I asked.

"Yeah", he said. "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is going to take on a group of people. There's going to be a meeting in McComb."

"McComb?"

"Yeah man, McComb, Mississippi. Some people are going to work on voter registration. Some on direct action. Diane asked me to call you, she wants you to work with us on direct action. Will you do it?"

"Well", I said. "Man just wait a minute now. This requires just a slight degree of thought. You don't just say am I willing to leave my job and so forth just like that." So then there was some talk about subsistence pay and the need to have a meeting and so on. There were in fact some meetings. The direct action people met in Chicago and after many conversations with friends and with Mildred I decided to do it.

I resigned my teaching job and went on substitute basis which I presume I still have in Chicago. I was due to go to McComb and while waiting I sat there in Chicago through the first McComb crisis extremely frustrated because I had no information which I could use to help publicize the situation there.

I was supposed to be waiting on some money from Diane. While I had some money of my own I felt that this organization that I was to work with was to meet certain tests. One of these, to be serious, was either to follow up on the commitment to send the money or at least explain why it was not forthcoming. The waiting became unbearable after a few days and I made some calls myself. I managed to speak to Chuck Jones at the Buyland Supermarket in McComb and he informed me that there was no one in the Atlanta office and suggested I go there to handle it.

I caught a plane to Atlanta. I had been informed by Chuck Jones that the key to the SNCC office would be at the SCLC office. No one there had ever heard of any key, naturally. I ended up jimmying open the door with the help of a sympathetic gentleman called Mr Mangrum who worked with an insurance company in the same building.

There it was -- the national offices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. One room. Greasy walls. A faint light from a dusty plastic skylight overhead. The mustiness, the smell, the mail scattered all over the floor. While I stood looking at the mail on the floor I realized that the phone was ringing.

Newsweek wanting news from McComb. "Sorry I cannot give out any information at this time. Can I take your number?" I didn't have any information to divulge but I figured that the national office of a group engaged in what was then the hottest protest going couldn't afford to appear totally ignorant. The phone again. More news on McComb. Sorry. I'll take your number and our communications department will be in touch.

Whatever else I knew I at least knew that the organization was alive. The phone never stopped ringing but it was always newsmen, no one from SNCC who could give me any information. I asked myself "What time does the next plane leave for Chicago?" How in Hell could an organization be involved with such a massive protest in McComb and not have anyone in its office all week? Couldn't understand it. The mail all over the floor? Didn't understand it. Papers all scattered over desks? Didn't understand it. The room was so large that five people couldn't enter at the same time. Actually there have been cases of people coming to work for us and being so discouraged by the first days experience that they have left. I can understand and sympathize.

Then I began to realize what was really in store for me. I couldn't leave cause if I locked the office I'd have to jimmy it open to get back in. It was clear I'd have to sleep there. I'd have to make arrangements with the people downstairs. But I was in the office. I was in charge. Where were the rest of the group? Was there anyone to answer the phone if I went out? What was my assignment, what was I supposed to be doing? I thought to orient myself somewhat by looking through the files. What files? There weren't any to speak of. Utter

The first person to come in from the group was Charlie Sherrod, coming from MCombs. That Saturday every one came straggling in with tales of violence and fierce civil strife. We had a long meeting trying to figure what our organizational future was and where we were going. Does that sound familiar?

It is important, to me, to explain how I came to SNCC. I thought that the need was for writers to publicize the situation from the inside. So the agreement was that I was coming South to go into Mississippi and record the history as it happened. Something, incidentally, that is still not being done enough by SNCC.

In the Chicago meetings the Direct Action faction had divided the South into areas -- six or seven states with four or five field secretaries. I had taken the states of Mississippi and Tennessee. When McComb erupted everyone was put into Mississippi. This weekend we drafted a plan called Move on Mississippi (MOM) which we tried to get support for and I discuss that later on.

In Atlanta that weekend the staff tried to evolve a structure that would be workable for all members and answer our needs. There was a division between the voter registration people and the direct action folks, a rift so deep that if it were not healed the organization was finished before it had well begun. The direct action people felt that voter registration was an establishment red herring to stop the disruptive effects of our sit-ins, freedom rides and street demonstrations. Chuck Jones was Voter registration director and chaired the meeting. The question arose who would stay in Atlanta in the office? A compromise was reached -- both wings would be in the field but would function within the administration of an Exec. Secretary who would serve both wings. Then the question of who would be the Executive Secretary. Then as now everyone wanted to get back on the firing lines. Since I was sort of neutral in the Action/vote controversy people began to ask me to serve. I recall Sandra Hayden asking and Dora Wiescoff also. All I wanted was to help out in the movement and to record the activities. The people in Direct Action said that if I didn't take the post they simply weren't returning to the field.

I had to really examine my own sincerity. I asked myself. " So you go to Mississippi and write and if the movement falls apart because of your refusal to serve who have you helped? What have you done?

here precisely does the difference between your wishes and the organization's needs begin and end? It was obvious that you have some organizational experience, and regardless for your own dislike of administration, if that's what the need is at this time you will have to do it. I needed to see the organizations conflicts resolved and the group survive.

But living in Atlanta, I told myself, you can't administrate and write too. I was really hung up I really had been planning to write for so long, and specifically to write about the things I had seen in the South. I finally to accept the challenge of staying in Atlanta and sublimating my writing aspirations into the SNCC dream.

This decision bears directly to the idea I had developed in the novel. There was just such a group, young people, young educated "negroes willing to work for no money willing to struggle to make real this dream of a group of militant organizers working out of faith and trust.

This touched deeply on my intellectual integrity. I had been pushing for such a group, knowing that it couldn't happen in a vacuum or in somebody's mind. It needed time and people with similar attitudes. How then could I leave, go to Mississippi or back to Chicago? Or would I really be honest to the things that we had all be saying and stay to work at creating this kind of organization.

Then too there was the problem of money. People resisted the idea of taking part in fund raising, there was this faith that Harry Bellefonte would be the person to provide any money that was needed. There were other hangups too which I wasn't sure would be resolved. Personality conflicts and the ideological dispute of direct action vs voter registration. Someone was needed to mediate between the two groups if this was to be resolved. I decided to accept. But I figured on working myself out of a job as soon as possible so that I could go to the field to write. As soon as we were established and on our feet organizationally, I promised myself....

THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICES

We are at present making preparations to purchase a building to house the Atlanta operation and there is to be discussion of this at the retreat. Thinking about this building I am reminded of the various offices and the people who played different roles in them which are a parts of our history as much as the violence and terror.

Our first office, after we found it no longer possible to work out of the SCLC office space was at 197 Auburn Avenue, from there we moved to 135 Auburn and from there to 6 Raymond Street where research and photography are now. We sort of expanded into 8½ Raymond where the offices currently are located. But these addresses mean more than just street references -- they represent stages of our development, working conditions, events and people; people working on staff and people from the community who helped keep us going.

Let's start with 197½ Auburn. It was here that Mr Mangrum helped me jimmy open the door to enter into the chaos I have already described. It was essentially a one room cubicle. Four walls, a desk, a ceiling and a little plastic dome which was ostensibly to let in light. The room was allegedly airconditioned in the summer and heated in the winter, but being without ventilation it became unbearably hot in winter and we had to clamber up on the desk to unscrew the dome so that air might come in. We were lucky not to lose any staff to suffocation.

I was joined by Norma Collins who came from Baltimore to work. She was an excellent typist and calculating machine operator and very efficient but her coming brought the problem of a second desk. First we had to figure out how to get one, then how to fit it into the office and still have space to move.

We just can't talk about this office without talking about certain people in the community who really helped out. The office was in the building where the Southeastern Fidelity Insurance Company had its offices and Mr. Mangrum was their office manager. There was Mrs Turner who ran a health therapy center. She opened her office to us and soon one or the other of the staff was sleeping back on her bed. Eventually we began to use her massaging room for storage. Then there were the girls who worked for the insurance company. They worked downstairs but had a room accross from us where they ate their lunches and came to relax. When they saw our crowded conditions they kinda felt sorry for us and relinquished

their lunch room for our use. We struck up a very early acquaintance with the office manager Mr Mangrum who became our staunch ally and supporter. He had at first believed that SNCC was a part of SCLC and was being aided financially by them. This was understandable because of our worked for a time out of SCLC's offices and the fact that SCLC never did anything to tell people otherwise.

Mr. Mangrum became very concerned about conditions in the office and began bringing people from the community committee for human rights to see conditions there. One morning he brought up a gentleman. He was saying how terrible conditions were because when people came in from the field they were sleeping in the office and the staff was sleeping sometimes in Mrs Turners physical therapy office. He really was horrified and tried to get Mr Cochran at the YMCA to put us up. That didn't work out because of a previous misunderstanding that we had had with the "Y". See, that first weekend we had all stayed there. I sort of assumed that we had an agreement with the "Y" for staff to stay there and I had, in fact, stayed there for some 20 or 25 days. Suddenly Mr. Cochran presents a bill for \$129.00 which there was no money to pay. I explained that eventually it would be paid but in the meantime I had to leave. Mr Mangrum, our protector, was most indignant because we had been evicted from the "Y" and wanted me to go on local radio to denounce Mr Cochran and the YMCA which I would not want to do. He also suggested that we put out a fact sheet proclaiming: "DO YOU KNOW THAT SNCC HAS NO MONEY FOR ITSELF: DO YOU KNOW THAT SCLC IS NOT SUPPORTING SNCC?" and generally publicize our bad financial situation. His office was on the same floor as ours and seeing our need for space -- if two people came in to help out the office couldn't accommodate the crowd. So we were gradually creeping all over the building. We used three rooms ours, the lunch-room, Mr Mangrums and by this time we had infiltrated into poor Mrs Turner's massaging room too.

Mr Mangrum went around the neighborhood and lined up some services for us. I recall that he found some beauty shops that would do the girls hair. He persuaded a laundry on Hunter street to take our clothes free. Now we don't take advantage of these offers but when we were on Hunter that tailor did all my shirts and was very friendly, always willing to do anything that he could. Generally people in the community were very sympathetic about what we were trying to do and the difficult time we were having. They knew that we were borrowing from Peter to

to pay Paul, and literally matching pennies to skimp along. There was Mr Beaman who had a restaurant which he let us use for meetings whenever we needed it. Some weeks we monopolized the rear of his restaurant for two or three days. He never ever raised any objection whatsoever.

Very important to our being able to function at all during this period was Mr Kasuth Hill the owner of Hill's Office and Church Supply Co. He sold us all our office supplies and even gave us credit. By August of 1962 we owed Mr Hill \$500 for supplies. It just didn't seem as though we would ever catch up to this debt. As soon as we paid him a little we'd run down and get the two reams of paper and a box of carbon that we just had to have, so the debt continued on.

Then, too, although he gave us every discount he could it was very expensive buying in small quantities but we had neither the money or storage space that we would need to buy in bulk.

Once I came back from a trip. I may have been put in jail then or something and Mr Hill came over. "Look Jim", he said, "I'm worried. I'd like you to try to pay up this bill as soon as possible. If something did happen to you I'd never be able to collect." We felt very badly about not being able to pay him but it was just too large an amount for us at that time. When we moved from 197 $\frac{1}{2}$ it was also because of Mr Hill.

Sometime later he told us that he was leasing his office to the state and moving next door to a warehouse. There was lots of space and we could move in rent free if we wished. We leaped at this not only for economic reasons but because we were really cramped. We had stolen just about all the space that we could from the people in the building and needed more. We were gonna move downstairs, but Mr Hill showed us a huge upstairs loft. We could have it but it needed paint. After our painting party -- I remember Bill Hansen came down from Cambridge Md. just in time to have a paint brush stuck in his hand -- we had this huge office, about three times the size of the present one. We had four desks and four telephones and room to operate. We just couldn't believe that we were moving up in the world so rapidly. This was at 135 Auburn. We stayed there that summer when we had what was in fact our first summer project sending 3 or 4 white kids into South west Georgia. There was Penny Patch, Peggy Damon, Kathleen Conwel

and Ralph Allen who brought some books down on our first book drive, and idea Julian thought up. So we stayed at 135 all that summer, through the Albany situation. (Incidentally it was this summer that we lost Julian Bond who had begun setting up the very necessary communications section to tell people that we did in fact exist as a seperate organization and needed funds. Julian was expecting an addition to the family and needed some money. We didn't have it and the Atlanta Inquirer which he had helped found was offering him 85 bucks a week. We wrestled with that one and the only thing we could come up with was that Julian should take the job -- we just had no money. That experience led us to revise our pay scales as regard married couples as soon as we could sfford it. And Julian didn't stay out long.)

But as it began to get cold we began to know that we would ultimately have to move from 135. See it was a warehouse and Mr. Hill was not sure whether he would buy it and go to the expense of reconverting it. In October we realized that we had to get out before it got too cold. WE started looking and saw this place it was on Hunter right above Nukie Baby's. It was three small rooms which we knew would be too small but we didn't have any alternative. It was agettin cold. So we had stationery printed up with that address because we were sure that we were going to move. Then we discovered that the lady next door to it was moving, this was at 6 Raymond. The rent was \$5 less and we figured it would be better to convert the house into an office. So we did that moved into 6 Raymond Street. We were all elated. I had an office, Dotty Miller-Zellner had an office, Ruby Doris had an office and Norma had the front office, for the first time. Julian , who was still over at the Inquirer was elated. He was predicting that we had started a new era for SNCC, that SNCC was here to stay, thatb there was no questio any longer but we would survive. Its kind of interesting though because that same winter at one point we didn't have any heat at 6 Raymond and the people had to burn up wood to keep warm in the new office. That January I got sick and had to go to the hospital. I remember Dottie coming to see me and I started to cry. Later in 1963 when the Atlanta School for Sales education which had the offices over 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ Raymond folded we were able to move up to the present offices. This year we will be moving again, I hope.

SECTION FOUR: The Early Struggle For Organizational Independence.

It appears to me to be extremely important that we all come to some understanding of the real struggle that took place for our survival and independence as a separate and equal organization, free to make and carry our own policies to completion. If we understand this it will give us insights into our real position in the whole spectrum of the Civil Rights Movement and the things that we will have to do. My chief purpose in recording it in brief here is so that we may all know something of the long tortuous path that has brought us to this place where we now stand organizationally.

We faced at the outset two very real public relations problems here in Atlanta. The first was simply to establish in the minds of the public who we were and what we were about. The second was related; it was having to correct the illusion in the minds of those few people who knew that we existed, that we were an arm of SCLC and was being run and supported financially by them. This grew out of the close relationship we had had at the time when we worked out of their office. It got strenght when Louis Lomax(but thats another story) wrote in The Negro Revolt that the students got %10 percent of all SCLC's income. Thus any supporters we had, and then they must have been many cause the student revolution was the thing, saw no need to send us contributions direct. So for this reason alone we needed to establish that we were independent, needing support, could in fact recieve our own money, had our own programs, and it was necessary to do this without getting into a public fight with SCLC.

After that first weekend in Atlanta when SNCC was reorganized, we met with Dr M L King and Rev. Abernathy to discuss our recently formulated plan for Mississippi (MOM). We wanted them to go in with one of the waves of volunteers we were planning to send in during the coming spring. Both gentlemen thought it was very creative planning. We mentioned that we thought that we needed \$25,000 to realize it and that we thought it could be raised in New York. He then told us that they had received \$11,000 from District 65 in New York, of which a third had been earmarked by the union for the Student Movement. He would check his books and the matter and let us know. Other important subjects were discussed at some length. These centered around the problems facing the new student group. I recall a feeling of nervousness when one of us said,

" Well, you know, let us recognize Martin, that you have a platform and a forum from which to speak to the Country. We have an action program and organizers to put it over. It seems to me that these two need to come together. If you can do certain things then we might be prepared to lend our programs and workers to your platform..."

I don't recall the answer, but clearly that never happened.

Mrs ^Baker, our advisor and friend, was in that meeting. She was formerly executive director of SCLC. She began in her principled and very gently direct manner began raising a series of questions. She reopened the question of other organizations having allegedly received funds marked by the donors for the student movement. He asked for specific examples and one was raised but the circumstances were truly complicated and vague so we were unable to clarify the situation much. Mrs ^Baker was also critical of certain Public relations techniques of SCLC, suggesting that their techniques could be sharpened up so as not to suggest that ther were really more involved in certain situations t than ther really were. Like for example the very common habit of sending and publicizing telegrams protesting conditions in a certain area in which students were working, which created the impression that the sender of the protest telegram was also the agent of the mass protest. But this is a very common if not quite right technique in Civil Rights public relations.

After the meeting we worked on a leaflet on McComb with the help of a young volunteer named Julian Bond. McDew and Chuck Jones also went over to SCLC and picked up a check for \$1000.00 which came from the District 65 funds.

During this period the people in the field were establishing the history of fortitude and courage in the face of hardship and danger that you all know, and in which many of you shared. Not just the everpresent danger but the hardship; not eating for extended periods, riding a mule (a razor backed mean old mule I understand too), trudging 15 miles a day along highways to get to the people, going into new and dangerous areas and sleeping in cars parked in alleys, this kind of harship is what I mean.

Back in the office there were difficulties too. It was during this period that I developed an ulcer, and experienced the lowest levels of depression and real dispair at our chances of survival that I have ever had.

Organizationally we were infants. Administratively we were in very poor shape with our books in a bad way. It was hard to discover how much money, if any at all, we did have.

So just surviving became a challenge which I saw in those terms:

SNCC was an idea. A group of young people banding together in a circle of mutual trust to work for social change. We were not then acceptable to many groups, even to other Civil Rights groups. There were those that called us communist, called me personally a communist, and tried in many ways to drive wedges between the members of the group and between the group and its supporters. This became my challenge to make the idea a reality, and a vigorous viable one, in the face of a great many forces around us which were trying to destroy us.

The question of money was critical. We did have a payroll to meet. When we were broke in Atlanta it meant people in the field didn't eat and

this was depressing to me. We needed certain things desperately. Once it was a car and a movie projector for Mississippi. Those things were unbelievably hard to come by.

We opened the office at 8.30 and closed anytime after midnight.

There were at first only Norma and myself working there full-time.

Occasionally field people would come in, Charles Jones would be there from time to time. Then Dorothy Zellner and Julian Bond started coming in from time to time to help us. In the early days the critical weakness was in communications. I had some experience in the area of getting news releases to news papers but it was physically impossible. At first it was so long and complicated process getting out a mailing everything -- return address, stamps, receivers address had to be done separately. We had to go to Connie Curry's office to use her mimeo and for some time we had to postpone getting a mimeo even though we knew that eventually we would have to have one. We tried to get Julian to come work in communications. He came worked for two days then we didn't see him for a month. Then finally in the latter part of December he agreed to come work for SNCC.

(I remember during the freedom walk which was much later Dottie Miller then being courted by Bob Zellner was doing communications.

Bob was on the March and the press began asking why the first name in every release was Bob Zellner's and why all his activities were so scrupulously and carefully recorded. The answer of course was that his own true love was doing the releases)

WHAT IS SNCC/ PAGE16 THE EARLY STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE.

But to get back to where we were-- we had realized that it was necessary to begin sending out material which said "SNCC IS AN INDEPENDENT STUDENT ORGANIZATION" and to keep sending this out until it made an impression on people from whom we needed support. We were doing this and I can recall one civil rights leader to whom I went when we needed something desperately. His reply to my request was " Well if you are an independent organization you better start acting like one." This I thought really saddening because I remember that whatever I was asking him to do was not for myself or even for SNCC but really for the total struggle.

There was a meeting at the Phyllis Wheatley "Y" here in Atlanta that I shall not easily forget. I was there talking to Jim Woods of SCLC for whom I have the greatest respect, and someone in the meeting raised the question of how SCLC got its funds. Woods replied that this was done mainly on MLK's image. "That image is worth \$250,000 to us annually" he said.

" How does SNCC raise its money?" I was asked.

I replied that we weren't raising any to speak of, but that we wanted to do so on the basis of public contribution around our program, rather than on the basis of any single image of a leader personality. Not only did we not have such an image, I explained, but I was sure that we would never have one or want to develop one. We discussed what SNCC felt were certain weaknesses in the Big Leader principle of organization.

This was a position SNCC took then when it was hard and difficult to do. We have stuck to it and have reaped great strength from it. I don't think we have any reason to doubt the validity of it. Too many times have we seen masses of people in the streets, aroused and willing to stay there in the face of brutality until some real progress was won from the power structure, only to see the big leaders off somewhere in some cosy negotiating room make decisions in which the wishes of the people were not really represented. Contrast this to MFDP at Atlantic City where because of the policies we have insisted on and adhered to the decisions reached there was the decision of the people themselves, despite the long procession of "leaders" who came to advise. Here at least it was the people who spoke for themselves. But then back in 1961 and 62 this was a hard position to take and maintain.

Then, at the meeting, I told the group about the need for a car and movie projector in Mississippi, how in this country with all of its affluence and wealth it seemed impossible for us to get just \$400 to buy a projector to send to Mississippi.

I remember that so vividly, I think, because I was almost crying -- I was actually crying inwardly. I talked about this ironical situation in this affluent country, where a group of young people could come together in brotherhood and trust, to work not for themselves, in fact to renounce comfortable jobs and career prospects, to reject opportunities to amass money, especially in this society, and to devote themselves on a basis of real personal sacrifice to doing the work that the society had declined responsibility for-- the work of creating a society of decency here, and yet it did not seem that we were to be permitted to survive.

But I told them that it was O.K. we were going to make it. We would get some money and it would only be a matter of time. I predicted that when we did people would be willing to help and associate with us who were not willing to do so when we really needed them. I said that we would not forget.

Part of the reason that I was so disturbed at that particular meeting was that I had, in a sense, humiliated myself a few days before. I had gone over to Dr. King's house to ask him for \$500 for the organization. Not as a gift, but that he should merely fulfill his commitment on the money that District 65 had sent. He had said then in that meeting that a third was ours. Of this third (\$3000) we had received the \$1000 and the balance was due. I was asking for \$500 of this. Before I approached this subject we had had a long discussion parts of which had to do with personalities of people we knew and which made me extremely uncomfortable. Then I approached the question of funds asking for the money so that the payroll could go out for a few weeks. He said that he would have to check with the organization. I said that if they couldn't give us the money at least to loan it to us. We would get some money and pay them back. He said he would check and let me know on Monday. There the matter ended.

How... we are here, so we did make it. We borrowed a great deal that year. We survived on a series of calculated risks, borrowing here, then borrowing from somewhere else to pay the first, buying things --

from somewhere else to pay the first debt, buying things on credit. Chuck McDew did an excellent job combing the college campuses, struggling here and there for a few coins to keep us afloat. By June of 1962 we were \$13,000 in debt. (This was not to be the last time by any means in the Spring of 1964 when we were planning the Mississippi Summer project we were \$30,000 in debt.)

Jim Dombrosky of SCEF came into Atlanta that June and talked to me at length. I guess he was preparing me for the fold-up. He said " Jim don't be disheartened. If SNCC goes under you shouldn't feel bad. You kids have done all you could and there are many bigger organizations that have folded for lack of funds. I don't see how you can possibly come out from those debts you are under.

Even though organizations had failed for financial reasons I couldn't accept that this was inevitable for us. I couldn't accept that in a country where lots of money can be raised for all kinds of programs, and for civil rights on the basis of action and program, the student movement, at the time the most active, could not survive and raise as much money as the other groups.

The critical thing I felt was that our story was not being adequately told, secondly, that we did not have the northern organization to capitalize of sources that existed there, and third and most important we ourselves were to blame for allowing the first two situations to exist.

There was in fact money being contributed to the student movement. I knew this from my personal experience in trying to raise money for the tent city in Fayette county. Many people I spoke to were saying then, " Now we are giving all the support we can to the Student Movement." Yet here was the student movement broke, indebt, not having any money, and never ever having any money.

Objectively there were things working against us raising funds. We were based in the South and few staff people were willing to leave the field to go north and get money. Then too, we had been depending on NSA and NSM to raise funds for us. The Southern Freedom Fund of NSA had sounded like a good idea and were willing to get funds for us. Somehow it just never worked out that way in practice. It was clear that somehow we would have to develop our own fund raising machinery

Our meeting in June 1962 was something of a turning point for us. soon after we were to start our own northern fund programs. We had the beginnings of an office in Chicago. Mrs ^Baker and Bill Mahoney were in New York putting together an organization there. Our first Carnegie Hall affair was in the works. That winter we were to move to 6 Raymond Street. We even got two new cars that winter, the first in our history. They were two 63 Valiants one of which went to Frank Smith, the other to Sam Block. The SNCC motor fleet had begun. This winter marked the change in the big question hanging over us. It was not will SNCC survive, but rather it was becoming " what will the form, content, structure and relevance of our survival be?

That June too the Voter Education Project enters the picture. They wanted to work for social change, would give money for voter registration, but needed to protect their non-political tax-exempt status. What we were faced with was a source of much needed funds but there was the real possibility that these funds would limit our freedom of activity. We did manage to operate on VEP funds for a while.

All of this was very intensely discussed at our first staff meeting at Dorchester in June 1962. Just what were the implications of the VEP program and were we in fact selling our hard won independence? And how long could the marriage between NSM and SNCC be expected to last.

The NSM which had begun with a principal purpose of raising money for SNCC was beginning its own tutorial and action programs. As they developed into more and more of a separate entity it became clear that they could'nt raise enough funds for us and their own needs at the same time. This was understandable and there has always been the most friendly relationship between both groups.

The other memorable thing about this pivotal meeting is that Bob

Moses spent most of it in the hospital. It was the first time that we had all been together in our history so we let our hair down and all got a little high at a party on the first night. I was driving towards the camp and Bob and Dorie Ladner were also going towards camp. Bob hopped onto the rear of the car. I was driving very slowly and he holding very firmly when BLAM he hit the highway. He hit his head pretty hard, but Moses always had a pretty tough head. We should have all known better, but I guess you can chalk it up to the fact that we were all a little dilerious at being together and we were a little high. But that was a real cloud over that meeting and we all were pretty worried.

I want to make some assessments of what our survival during this period meant. We survived and were growing. It was obvious that we were becoming a vital force in the Civil Rights movement and that this was now inevitable. Why? It was inevitable because we were no longer merely an idea, we were, to use Bob's image, a tree with its roots in the people. Not only were we a tree but the roots of that tree were made up of action oriented intellectuals who were in a real sense more free than their counterparts in older groups. Besides we had more creative freedom and more intellectual dynamism within our organization than in any other group that I was aware of. Much of our strength came too from those people in the group who were not intellectuals in the academic sense but who represented in their ideas and approach a balance to the university trained people within SNCC.

Then too, our role of agitators, rabble-rousers who were always forcing the issue brought a new dynamism to the movement in the south. There was a time when a certain stillness was hovering over the movement but the creative competition that existed between the Civil Rights groups broke this open. For example, when in 1961 we had 16 people on staff in the South this was the largest staff of any group working in the Deep South. Other groups have taken their cue from us and increased their staffs and broadened their programs. This has helped the movement immensely.

Last week, I was on the Joe Pinney show in Los Angeles. Pinney kept trying to open me up by leading, picking kinds of questions. "Well, Jim Foreman", he said, "I and many white folks are concerned about SNCC but I understand many Negroes are not?" My answer to that was that in our opinion not enough people of our race were sufficiently and deeply concerned about the issues. But that we would continue to agitate them, so that they would join with us in embarrassing the entire country over race relations and other social evils. That we would do this to the point where the country couldn't ignore all the internal agitation. The example of the Civil Rights bill is illustrative. Despite its obvious short-comings and inadequacies it is basically due to the kind of creative social disruption that was lead by a handful of students who were also agitators and disturbers of the peace. This was our role.