

Working paper for SNCC staff conference
From: Mike Miller, Bay Area Representative
Re: An internal education program in SNCC

If there is anything that one might single out as being the most impressive characteristic of SNCC it might be that SNCC has thus far avoided that fatal confusion which identifies the movement with the organization. And, I suppose, it is precisely because of this that SNCC best embodies the movement. No one^I/know who has been South has failed to remark upon the openness of SNCC and its close identification with the people with whom the organization works. Needless to say, there are many romanticized versions of this, especially in the North. Despite this, however, the open and grass roots character of SNCC remains a striking fact.

It was my experience in Mississippi and has been my observation since I have returned to California that some of the more "political" groups increasingly view SNCC as an arena for their own recruitment. From what I have seen and heard from others I think this applies to all the left sects-- that is, all those organizations that remain embroiled in the issues of the '30's as they work in the '60's.

Let me try to be specific by referring to some of my own experiences in the student movement at the University of California. In its early days, SLATE, the campus political party at U.C., had a similar style to SNCC's. Not that the issues were the same, but the mood was. Beneath the differences of style and opinion, we shared a sense of values and emotion that bound us to one another. Over the years this sense of community was eroded as youth branches of the adult left parties began increasingly to view SLATE as an arena in which to recruit new members. Again, I suppose this is natural. But from the point of view of our student movement and, I believe, from SNCC's point of view, this process only imposes upon new movements the conflicts and history of old ones. To tell the truth, we never solved the problems in Berkeley. Looking back, I think the major mistake of those of us who were radicals but not of the sects was that we failed to rely on the development of our own community education program and resorted to administrative manipulations which made us in fact if not in intent of the same ilk as those we disparagingly referred to as sectarians.

But to return to the present. We all know of the past efforts by various and sundry people to "educate" SNCC. What they generally mean is that they know THE TRUTH and will pass it on to us. When SNCC is viewed in this way, I think it presents us with problems of defining what we are. This is where I see the importance of an internal education program.

This is not place to make such arguments. What I want to argue is that we do need a place in which to make these arguments: a school, a journal, conferences, work-study programs, research programs, institutes, you name it.

I know there is an impatience on the front lines with "intellectuals." It is a justified impatience, for where have the intellectuals been who are needed for the kind of analysis and interpretation of the movement that we need. But this shouldn't make us disregard the need for thought as well as action. It is only when the two are tied together that lasting and significant change will really come about.

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