

read
on structure & administration

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SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE STAFF-RETREAT

This meeting is crucial. Our basic strength has always been a unique unanimity of purpose and mutual confidence in ourselves and the organizational structure within which we worked. In order to restore this we need to make and implement several important and basic decisions at Bay St. Louis. We cannot afford the luxury of rambling and inconclusive discussion which will leave us all spiritually purged but still in organizational chaos.

For this reason it is imperative that we , all of us, come to some agreement very early in the meeting about what the real problems are and just which decisions must come out of the meeting if we are to have some basis for moving forward as an organization.

It may well be that some of us looking over our unprecedented and rather sudden affluence may tend to take the existence and continued relevance of the organization for granted. This would be a serious and critical error; Our size, while it increases our potential to stimulate more radical changes in the society, is attended by much more critical responsibilities and greater dangers. It means that we can expect greater and more vicious opposition. It means also that much of our energy and vitality can be absorbed and dissipated internally by organizational inertia of a kind that we were never faced with when there were only 14 half-starved and idealistic people on staff. We must not forget that the history of social movements in this country is strewn with the remains and skeletons of groups which were once no less vital, no less dedicated no less positive than SNCC, which have either not survived, or surviving, have done so in a manner bearing little relationship to their original purposes and goals.

It would be ironic and tragic if SNCC were able to survive outside pressures -- beatings, killings terrorism -- and choke and strangle on its own size and affluence. So basically what we are going to have to do in Bay St. Louis is to begin to begin to take ourselves seriously, take our organizational responsibilities seriously, and to take the rules we set down for ourselves seriously.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

You have all seen the terribly long list of questions burning in the hearts of the staff. It is not realistic to expect that all of these can be practically or fruitfully discussed in general session. Even if it were possible, it is not certain that there would be much gain in discussing them all. What we need to be clear about is just what are the basic questions at the root of all the other problems on the list. We need to differentiate very clearly between those real and fundamental questions and the problems which merely derive from them and the general confusion. The few basic questions are I think:

1. What are the limits and identity of the SNCC staff?
2. How is the organization structured so that the staff actually makes decisions? This will probably writing and approving a constitution
3. How do administrative decisions which have to do with services and resources get made in a fair and representative way.
4. Certain basic decisions about the future programs and policies of SNCC such as the Black Belt Project and our relationship to locally organized groups.
5. The whole question of staff discipline, efficiency and responsibility. How do we ensure that important jobs get done with more communication and cooperation between the various parts of the organization.

It also apparent that these "basic" questions are all interdependent. How we solve the problem of decision making in SNCC will depend on how large our staff is and how large we intend it to become. How we determine the size of our staff will depend on what kinds of programs we project for the next year or two years. The way we write our constitution will depend on certain political and philosophical decisions we reach about how we organize and the way in which we define our relationship to the people we organize i.e. do local groups affiliate with us or with each other. What are the implications of each of these questions? We feel that these are the kinds of decisions that need to be made before we can think of moving on the longer list of derived problems.

It is difficult to decide which of these questions is the logical starting point to move into the others. Here let us begin with the question of --

WHAT IS SNCC STAFF

In the Bible we read " For many are called but few are chosen ... not everyone who saith Lord, Lord shall enter..." If we say that people receiving pay-checks are on staff, then say that paychecks are issued on the basis of need one reaches the inevitable conclusion that SNCC's staff is the needy, wherever they may be. Clearly we need other objective criteria for determining the type of person we recruit as opposed to the myriad types we attract. This criteria for recruitment must be based on the job we decide to do and the type of person in terms of attitudes, temperament and skills to do this job. This leads directly to what in the way of discipline and responsibility to SNCC can we demand from the staff. This is not as cold as it sounds cause it means responsibility to each other and our goals. This must come before any discussion of decision making because who makes decisions and what decisions are made are irrelevant if nobody abides by the decision after its made. There are now over 200 persons on paid staff. How much larger can we afford to become? Any person really working fulltime in a SNCC office or project cannot be considered as other than a SNCC staff person, because that's all we are people working for the same goals. So what does this mean for the expansion of the program throughout the South? Can a working staff of some three hundred people be expected to meet and make decisions? Especially if they are spread out throughout the entire lower South? If we intend to expand our programs it seems clear that we need to structure the organization democratically so that even if all staff is not present and voting it is at least represented through clear and fair channels. The alternative is to say all staff must participate in all decision making, which must result in limiting the area in which we work.

DECISION MAKING (policy)

We are all agreed that the entire organization must participate in deciding policy. This affects things like a black belt project or do we maintain nonviolence or do we buy guns and declare the revolution? This can be solved in meetings which don't have to be more

policy decisions — *includes who gets \$, doesn't it?*

questions there is the whole area of interpretation and implementation of the general policy, threshing out details and dealing with crises. Since a huge staff that can't agree to come to a meeting at a specific time then get there at that time can hardly be expected to iron out little details, or meet whenever there is a crisis, what most organizations do is elect a smaller body to meet regularly to handle such matters. SFCC will have to do the same; elect a representative executive and coordinating committee, define their function and authority then make the decision to have confidence in these groups to do the job. It would be great if everyone could be on these bodies but it is impractical, unworkable and too expensive. So we structure these committees in a way that meets our approval, elect people we have confidence in to them and that's it.

ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS.

Apart from those questions bearing on the nature and content of what we as an organization do, there is the question of who are the people who administer the organization's business day to day. These people will have power to make important decisions too. These will have to be made and it is childish and simplistic to expect that each and every one of us can be consulted every-time such a decision has to be made. This is a responsibility and power that we are just going to have to delegate to a few persons. Some of these decisions can and are made by consensus of office and project staff, others are going to have to be done by the officer who is responsible for that part of our business. Here there are two problems. One is creating a structure and procedure so that we, the staff, can have a real voice in these person's appointments and defining the responsibilities and authority of the appointee.

We feel that these are the basic questions. Maybe to approach them we need to first reach agreement of precisely what our goals for the next few years are and what kind of an organization we are going to be. There may be a difference between what we would ideally like to be and what we are going to have to be in order to survive. But we feel that if some resolution of these questions raised here come out of the retreat we will all be a little clearer about our identity and a little more confident in our ability to carry out our program