

What is SNCC? What should it be to accomplish its goals?

In order to adequately discuss what kind of organization SNCC should be, we must first look at what it is right now. Even though the latest draft of our constitution mentioned nowhere that we are a civil rights group, if we consider what SNCC does in the majority of its day-to-day activities, it is an organization working to end injustice to Negroes in the South, its methods a combination of direct action and political organization in Negro communities, many of its staff members local people drawn from these communities.

SNCC has other projects which at first glance seem unrelated to the organization as we have just described it. Why, for example, does it have a white community project? The development of the white community project represents our learning from years of field experience. When SNCC first began, it was a lunch counter sit-in movement. Soon we realized that a more effective way of ending lunch counter--as well as other forms of discrimination was by giving Negroes political power, so SNCC engaged in voter registration. As it became apparent that it would be hard to get even willing voters onto the registrars' books, we turned to the building of a new political organization, the Freedom Democratic Party. With the FDP's going to the convention and demanding to be seated, we showed that we realized the future of the Negro in the South is fully tied in with the influence he can have upon national politics. And the white community project represents another lesson we have learned through our years in the Struggle, which is that the Negro is in many cases oppressed not because he is black, but because he is a source of cheap labor, and his liberation is dependent upon the awakening and political organization of the poor whites in the South, as well.

So the experience of SNCC through the years has shown that we really cannot bring about the desired local changes unless local people make themselves heard at the national level. To help accomplish this, I think we should continue doing what we are doing--going into towns and counties, attempting to educate adults and children as to their political rights and how they can attain them, trying to get people registered, formed into their own organization, and eventually being able to educate and organize themselves. What we as organizers must keep in mind is that we are actually working at two levels: by developing local people and local organization, we bring about some local change--at the very least, a change in the hopes and goals of the people we are working with. But by developing local political organizations in counties all over the South, we are also building a force which will have significance on the national level, which will have some effect as these various local groups are made aware of each other and begin to work together.

(A word about the role of "SNCC" in all this: I think its role should be to bring people and supplies together, and set them up in selected communities ((how these are chosen will be discussed later)). Once contacts have been made and programs begun, the main job of the central office--one which till now it has not done at all, as far as I have seen--should be to let local projects know what is happening in other areas, so as to help give them new ideas for activities and also serve eventually as a means for bringing the different local organizations together. It would also be nice for the central office to keep supplying the projects with money, paper, cars, legal aid, more personnel when needed, etc. etc., but it sort of forgets every once in a while--even in Mississippi!--and individual projects find their own sources for some of these things, which is good in that it helps give the local project some degree of independence, although this is not to say that the central office should not service the field projects better than it has.)

One of the main problems which has faced and will continue to plague our organization, is a conflict between the field staff and the overall policy makers--office staff (unfortunately there are all too many reasons to lump the last two groups together). One reason for this is that the field staff tends to be closer in background to the people it is out there working with, while those making the broad policy decisions are further removed physically, if not also in terms of backgrounds and experiences from the people out in the local communities. Now even though I am convinced of the necessity for building organized political pressure reaching the national level in order to bring about the desired local changes, I think that our work in the field, awakening, educating, and organizing local people, is the most significant thing we are doing, even if we did not have a broader political plan in the back of our minds. This is because here we are developing grassroots democracy--literally government of the people, by the people, and for the people--which is a valuable goal in itself. If we all do agree that local change will really not be brought about until the local people's influence begins to reach the level of national politics and power, I see a role for the SNCC "brain trust".

that is, those who are more educated, politically sophisticated, and further removed from the field,--to suggest where it might be most politically advantageous to expand--because we certainly must and will expand (For example, since the Mississippi legislators have the absolutely worst record of all the Southern legislators, it makes most sense to work on developing a political movement in that state to kick them out; if it also happens that local conditions overall are worse in Mississippi than in any other state, all the more reason for developing a field program there. I think it will turn out that other areas where it would make most sense to bring about a political change with regard to Washington are also the places where local conditions are most oppressive.)

But our field operations must be seen as the main point of SNCC's activity; the office people, for example, must realize that they exist to service the field. One way to keep the field projects most important is to require that periodically all SNCC staff--executives, secretaries, research, Northern coordinators, and anyone else who is given the right to make decisions for the organization--work out in the field among the people as an ordinary freedom school teacher or VR worker, for example. Not only will this improve servicing of the field, but I think it will also help to prevent those who make large policy decisions from trying to push grand intellectual schemes about what we will do with the local people. Because the job of SNCC staff members, as organizers of grassroots people, is to awaken their hope, give them courage and support and political education, with the expectation and eventual goal that it is they who will form the FDP, they who will join together with each other and bring pressure and vote, they who, awakened to the facts about social change and their own power, can be the force behind the changes and upheavals in this country which will lead finally to their own liberation.