

Letter from Mike Miller to SNCC staff, December 21, 1964

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is a very difficult letter to begin -- let alone to write. For some time now, since the Summer of 1962, to be exact, I have been working in SNCC. First as a volunteer representative in the Bay Area, filling in for Betty Garman when she had to leave for the summer, then taking the job on through the year with what you all know to be Betty's very able assistance. Then, in the Summer of 1963, deciding that I had to come South, spending the summer in Greenwood, coming home only to turn around and spend another month in Mississippi. Finally, back here, a period of rest after the Mississippi accident, and back full-time, this time as representative in the Bay Area. By and large I have been doing a job that doesn't suit my temperament. I have been working in behalf of the action that was going on 2,000 miles away: fund-raising, recruiting, educating, working on political pressure. I think I've done a good job. Needless to say, there are many people in the Bay Area who together have built a pretty good Friends of SNCC operation out here.

Throughout this period, I have tried to be very responsible on which I presumed to be Atlanta (SNCC) policy regarding the involvement of SNCC in action on northern issues. At the same time, I have tried to persuade you in the South that the development of some kind of program in the North was essential for SNCC -- and I argued that this was the case both in the narrowest of organizational terms and because no one in the North was doing the equivalent of what SNCC is doing in the South. So I proposed the interne program -- which some of you have heard me talk about, others of you have read about. Now you and I know that this program has not really been considered in any very serious fashion. I know it was discussed in Executive Committee and that some people thought it was a good idea -- but that's not what I mean. I mean that the kind of thinking that is necessary by you if this is going to really be a SNCC program was not undertaken.

Then this past week a lot of things happened that made me really begin to ask some questions. Actually, it began a lot earlier. It begins with the early experience of Chicago SNCC and the school boycott -- and the question, if there, why not here? Then there's Hamlett's paper at the staff retreat. And the truth of what he said is born out in the very fact that no one every talked about what was in his paper. Then there's the fantastic discrepancy of Southern subsistence and some of what's going on in New York. And some of you will remember that I got mad in one meeting at the retreat, when Northern staff problems kept getting postponed -- someone said, "the North is only support"; I retorted, "if that's true, then pay us professional fund-raiser salaries". Now that's true, if we are only support, then you should pay professional fund-raiser salaries -- and I'd leave, because I don't want to be a professional fund-raiser. Then I came back and recently asked for another staff person here, and Betty asked me on the phone if he was very efficient. She reported that the personnel committee was dubious of someone else here, but that if he was very efficient, she could probably convince the committee. Now, just recently I get a release from Chicago SNCC where they talk about their community project, the "SNCC Freedom Center", and it's apparent that SNCC is moving in the North. So there's a whole lot of things that I don't understand. No one would ask, before taking a young Negro guy on in the South whether he was very efficient. That's true -- and everyone knows that. Yet in the North, that question is asked. And the reason is that we are really support groups, except where, for reasons I don't fully understand, someone decides we're not a support group -- like Chicago. Now I can understand that you'd want what was really just a support group. But I can't understand how it is that in some places there's a support group and in other places there's another kind of group. But that's not really what I want to say. I've made a decision, and I want you to decide. I am not satisfied being the Atlanta representative. My heart is really in a thing that we started here called Freedom House -- a thing that is, to all intents and purposes, just like the Chicago Freedom Center (SNCC). My feelings are really with the interne program, or at least with our one interne, Ed Wilson who is working in another section of the ghetto. And what I really want to do is to begin to develop here what you guys have developed in the South.

Some of you have heard me talk about the California Valley. It is our Delta. It is a land of immense richness and the deepest of poverty. It is different from Mississippi in two ways: (1) the violence is not

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as great; (2) the denial of equal rights and ballot rights is only slightly more subtle. Here residency requirements rather than literacy tests exclude the vast majority of rural poor from the life of the State and Nation.

I have enclosed a proposal that I have drafted regarding farm workers and the California Valley. I think it makes tremendous sense, especially with the Free Speech Movement at Cal. This, like the interne program -- which I see as the urban counterpart of a Mississippi style project in the Valley -- is what I want to do.

Now I am asking you to decide what you want to do. Do you want this to be SNCC in California? If so, this is what I want to do full-time. There are others who can take over the rest of the operation here. Maybe in some areas they will be weaker than I. But in other areas they will be stronger, and over the long-haul, little difference will be noticed. So you really have to decide. Not in an off-hand way, not by saying that you think the interne program is a good idea, but by freeing me to talk with local people here, to develop a full proposal for action here (and I'll raise separate money for it) and then to begin. This is what I think needs to be done in California. I think Jimmy and I could make a great team of a lot of these things -- it is, by the way, a waste of his talents too to keep him permanently in fund-raising.

So I come to a halting end. I don't want a hasty answer to this letter. I don't need to know right away what you want to do. I do want to know that these ideas are going to be considered. I want to know that they will be discussed as an integral part of the SNCC program.

Freedom,



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