

[20 March, 1965]

SNCC

From Tom Brown

THE STATE CONFERENCE REPORT  
ALABAMA

Student Nonviolent  
Coordinating Committee

Southern Campus Coordinator  
8½ Raymond Street  
Atlanta, Georgia

sorry I'm late  
been out of the  
city.

A Virginia Conference  
this weekend.

The Conference started approximately 7:15 p.m. Friday evening in Wilcox Annex of Tuskegee Institute. Some 85 students were present, with representation of the following colleges; Tuskegee Inst., Talladega College, Selma College, Alabama State College, Miles College, Daniel Payne College, and Stillman College and also Sncc staff representation from Hollysprings, Miss., Southwest, Ga., and Alabama. (7)

The theme for the conference was How Equality Lovers Participate.

The meeting first started off with Freedom songs led by Len Chanler, William Porter and Willie Peacock. This spirited Session went on for about 40 minutes and seemingly proved to be very fruitful. After the period of singing, George Ware gave the opening address. This young man is a graduate student at Tuskegee Inst. and is President of the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League, (TIAL), which is seemingly the radical or somewhat the more active group of Tuskegee Institute in relation to the Civil Rights movement and also social advancement of students of Tuskegee Inst. George Ware spoke to the facts of what the role of college students in Alabama are also what this particular conference must achieve in order to change the social and economic disenfranchisement of Negroes in the State of Alabama. He stated that, "this conference is the Spring Board for further advancement of Negroes students and for Alabama's success toward Freedom". And that this success will come about and that TIAL is prepared for a radical change not only in the State Of Alabama and the Nation but also a change in the Negro Educational Institutions of Alabama.

It was quite obvious the words Mr. Ware spoke had support of those attending the meeting at that time and that the freedom spirit was in the air.

The next guess was then Len Chanler, whom I felt was very effective in his abilities to relate the lyrics of his songs to the movement. Within his songs there was an educational period taking place. He also left challenging ideas in the minds of people from his songs and thusly brought out some of the shyness of people that were present at that time and they too began to express themselves in whatever musical abilities they had.

After Len Chanler finished, Jim Foreman (Executive Sec. for Sncc), was then introduced in the most eloquent way. Jim proceeded to explain the purpose of the Conference it could be summed in these few words; The conference geared to re-establish a student base in the South to develop leadership and more leadership among Negro students and to bring about Negro student in Alabama and all across the Nation. He then went on to summarize each days events of the protests in Montgomery starting from Friday Mar, 19, back to Sunday Mar 14, he gave his summary backwards in which he intended to do. He also explain in the time of his summarizing the incidents in Montgomery the many implications of what took place and also hid ideas of what this meant in relation to the local community, the laws of the State and also the laws of the country and what the pro and cons were in the past few days

Jim also made it quite plain to the students that people have a right to picket the State Capitol and that since this right has been denied to the Negro people that we must continue to protest for that right which is protesting for the right to protest in Alabama. Jim further made mention that we are concern with the legacy of 63 years and that however, we must move now. Also he made mention of more history of the Negro in our institutions and that we must get it some how. Jim then gave a brief synopsis of Negro history in Mississippi and how it effected white man and his reactions that brought the Negro back into a more modern slavery.



I must agree, that Jim speech was very good and that the students got a whole lot out of the information he presented to them.

After the speaking sessions a panel of six persons were brought forth, three college students and the three main participants of that evening of which I just gave a brief report on. Before the discussions took place we had a 10 minute break, it was then a few minutes before 11:00'clock p.m. In some few minutes we started again with the meeting, however; prior to the discussion, we acquired the energy to sing and march around inside the building singing freedom songs. When we finished singing it was then 11:25 p.m. and then proceeded with the panel discussions. I do not have a record of the questions asked however; I can describe in general what some of the questions were. Talladega students wanted to know how they could get a better news media on events of Alabama that were not close to the college. They wanted to know more about the movement in Montgomery and about Snee. This question was quickly solved by Jim Foreman by letting them know that the Southern Campus Coordinator would have more materials coming into the schools in Alabama. Also students directed questions on what must they do in order to break down the Administrations discipline on participation in the civil rights movement. Also Jim brought up the question of what is the responsibility of a student to himself when he is admitted to college on the bases that he is the responsibility of the school and that he then is hindered in making decisions for himself and for the governing of his life? This question was answered in many different ways, but I'll sum it up in saying that the general feeling was that students must start ascertaining individuality and to push for more academic and social freedom and let the administration know that students are ready for a change, also to let the parents who tend to coddle there sons and daughters to much, that it is time for them to make decisions for themselves before they get caught up in the hard Society. One young man also made the statement that this movement should not just stop after our college days but that it should continue in our lives and professions and this was taken in by a lot of people.

We closed the meeting for the night by singing We Shall Overcome for some 15 minutes and it was then much after 12:0'clock. This phase of the meeting was lovely, I don't feel as though it could have been any better any where for the first night.

Saturday Morning Session

3/20/65

The meeting was open by the William Porter with some Freedom Songs led by some of the members of the Freedom Singers. After this John Love was asked to open the discussion about Alabama. John asked the students one question which became the center of discussion and this question was What is the role of the so-called uneducated Negro, also one who cannot read or write in relation to him being able to vote and does this man have a place in society. This question was thrown around in many different ways, students first try to deal with what is the vote and then began to discuss what was a education, what was a formal education in relation to just plain old common sense. Some students express the opinion that a formal education is good in relation to specific fields of profession but that it lack any connection to what really life is and that as a student he has been kept away from the realities of life and that the vote was important after you got a education however; this is basically a lie for many students leave the South and never understand the vote and the political machine and its trickery and injustice to the Negro. It was basically felt that the vote had no strength for the Negro if he did not know the political machine. Also students didn't realize how wrong this political machine was and finally realize that their educational institution had not been teaching them basic truths about life and the government. There was basically no definite answers given but it was a consences that the white man was using its educational institutions for Negro to be more apathetic in relation to that educated Negro to be satisfied with a good job a nice home and a big car and not to worry about that uneducated Negro in the South.



The discussion then went into what is leadership and organizing. These question did not materialize to much because students began to deal with what they should do in relation to organizing their own schools and then going into the community, however some felt that by one going into the community and taking others into the communities it would then enhance the possibilities of bringing about organization in the schools if and when students began to see what the real life was outside the college community. Others felt that they should go into the communities and try to get people to register and vote and also explain to the people what the vote really was and how to use it for the betterment of the Negro people. Others brought up the question on the voting age and they felt that students should start voting at 18 years of age, seeing how they are eligible to be drafted into the Army. Some students felt that our whole social system in conjunction to our political should be changed and that this should be endorse through our educational institutional however; this idea was in the greatest of the minority and the basic feeling was that we must educate people to what the vote is, however there was definite way it should be done in relation to the discussion.

The discussion then drifted into the difference in the educational institution in the North and the South. After long discussion it was felt that Northern Schools were superior to Southern Schools and that this was an intentional act on the part of our American Society (Government) to make sure it stay this way in order that the Negro stays in his place. After long discussions we then went to work shops on the following topics: 1. WHO HAS POWER IN THIS COUNTRY? 2. HOW CAN BECOME QUALIFIED? 3. HOW TO HANDLE ADMINISTRATIVE AND PARENTAL OPPOSITION TO STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT? 4. METHODS OF ORGANIZING A STUDENT CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS? 5. WHAT CAN STUDENTS DO IN ALABAMA IN THE WEEKS TO COME? 6. METHODS OF DIRECT ACTION HOW EFFECTIVE ARE NONVIOLENT METHODS? 7. WHAT IS LEADERSHIP? 8. WHY MUST THERE BE CONFLICTS BETWEEN CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS.

This part of the conference I cannot report on due to the fact there was no reports given on each workshop that evening of the conference session. So I will report on the evening session.

#### Evening Session

3/20/65

This portion of the session proved to be very educational and it was a heated session, not a session of fighting verbally but a session of argumentative rebuttals that cause people to think. due to this good period of educational exchange it was very hard to keep detail facts, Briefly I will describe this period of the conference.

The topic of discussion was what is education and also what is the voting bill of Alabama. The tone of the meeting was set off by the Mr. Cortland Cox and of which he did a good job, because he challenge students in what they had learned about the American system and to a great extent made them see it had taught nothing but to be a good nigger and you will make it in the white man's society. It also, in discussion brought out to students as they began to wrestle with the question of education that they had really learned nothing but how to be puppets to the system and how America had been living a lie in relation to what a true Democracy really is and that if the Negro is going to live as an equal he must change the present American system. He must change also the educational system and see to it that schools speak the truth about life and the South. It was also brought out that the vote is really nothing in relation to our present way of government and that only when people in the true sense of speaking can draw up a voting bill will all the barriers of voting be somewhat broken down. Also attention to what a black man is in the United States was brought out by Cortland Cox in relation to the deaths of of Black people and the justices that were brought forth in relation white people that have died in the South who work in the movement and the Nation looked to it. And how many of our Black brothers looked toward the injustices of the South and then nothing was done about but yet something is done about the white man who dies in the South. Many many good things came out of this part of the discussion and I can't begin to describe it all, but I can say this it had alot of Negro students thinking about who they are and what they are in this country.



After the discussion we then went to a Social on the Campus and to our surprise the students who had been arrested a few days before had been released from the Montgomery jail and they all were greeted well.

Sunday Morning

3/21/65

This portion of the conference was opened by the Mr. Hall and the purpose for the morning meeting was considered as an organizational meeting. The student then decided after a long period of discussion to establish a time in April to remeet in a smaller group to discuss a State Student Union of Negro Colleges, However; they did decide to set a communication group across the State among the colleges. They decided to exchange news and also information concerning action in the community and the State. The following students representing each college:

Tuskegee, Ala.  
Tuskegee Inst.  
Ann Anthony /Box 46

Birmingham, Ala.  
Miles College  
Eddie Sanders

Talladega, Ala.  
Talladega College  
Botty Williams/ Foster Hall

Tuscaloosa, Ala.  
Stillman College  
Theresa Add/Winsborough Hall

Birmingham, Ala.  
Daniel Payne College  
Walter Phillips  
6415 Washington Blvd.

Selma, Ala.  
Selma University  
Charles Bonner

Selma, Ala.  
Lutheran Academy  
Theophilus Smith  
1804 Green St.

Alabama State  
Montgomery, Ala.  
Lorenzo Curry

Huntsville, Ala.  
Alabama A&M  
George Grayson/ Grayson Hall

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#### Evening Session

The evening session can be considered as an inspirational meeting and a good closing exercise for our conference which was presented by Mrs. Reeves, also she had a good deal of educational information in her presentation. Her presentation was from a very religious and real point of view, she dealt with Faith, Hope, and Love as we endeavor to obtain freedom, she also express in a poem of hers the poverty in America and its coldness to man and especially to the Negro. She went on to talk about a dream and that this dream is freedom and that only dedicated students with love for their brothers can achieve this victory. She also appealed to us to work to getting every student and teacher involved in this movement and made it a point that even though they don't know it that they are already involved. She said, "We must open avenues of expressions so people will know and act". She further



stated, "I plead for these United States of America and our Educational Institutions to listen to the Youth".

Mrs. Reeves went on to describe the American system as a Jungle to the Negro and that she we can reinterpret the church and bring in its true meaning. We must create new avenues of expression for man has short cut the resources of the World for the hungry. She then emphasized the following things; youth and the importance of its attention in Society if America is going to be better, emphasis the new creativity and that students must look deep inside ourselves and the way to release this creativity is by honesty.....set Montgomery and the class room together. Also the College student will bring to the movement the dimension of the rational in which you are trying to do. These and many other thoughts Mrs. Reeves left in our hearts and minds. We then closed our meeting with two songs,.....No Mans Land is an Island and We Shall Overcome, along with a prayer by the Rev. Thomas Brown.

#### Comments

I feel that the conference was very effective and educational to the students and to the staff and that it has open up new avenues of thought and creativity to me in relation to bringing Negro students out of their lithurgy. This conference can prove to be very fruitful if Snee has a effective program this summer for colleges and for following year. I feel that sometime in the next two months plans should be made for a conference in the South of all previous conference participants that means all the Southern States. This also means bringing Negro student from all over the South to discuss the role of the Negro and the role of a Negro student in the present system of the South and to discuss what they must do to change this corrupted system, it will serve as strong base for this movement.