

HAMMERMILL PAPER COMPANY
Erie, Pennsylvania 16512

March 12, 1965

Mr. John Lewis, Chairman
Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee
6 Raymond Street, N.W.
Atlanta 14, Georgia

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Thank you for your letter of March 12 giving us the opportunity to inform you of the facts in this matter.

Hammermill has for several years been deeply concerned with the problem of securing a southern based pulp mill to assure itself of a continuing supply of its essential raw material--pulp. Practically every major pulp and paper manufacturer in this country either has a southern pulp mill or is planning one. Hammermill is presently non-competitive with these major companies in the area of pulp supply and this situation will worsen with time unless corrected. Therefore, our responsibility to our stockholders and employees leaves us no other choice than to construct new pulp facilities in the South.

Ample wood supply now and for the future, abundant water and adequate transportation are essentials to the economics of a plant site. The huge growth of the paper industry in the South in recent years, particularly in Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas has reduced the number of attractive sites to a relatively low level. Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama now represent the best remaining available locations.

We first made public announcement of our consideration for the plant site in May of 1964. During that year this project was of the highest priority to us. All of the facts bearing on the decision were not available until early January of 1965. By this time it was imperative to make a decision on the site. The facts demonstrated conclusively that the Alabama site, which is ten miles from Selma, not in Selma, met the required economic criteria. Accordingly, our affirmative decision was announced at the earliest possible moment so that programing could be initiated.

Construction at the site will not begin for at least four to five months as considerable engineering work still has to be done. Operations are presently scheduled to start up in 1967, nearly two years from now. In effect, Hammermill will not be present in Alabama until 1967 as operators and employers.

The foregoing provides briefly the background of the project and how it came into being. I hope you will share our conviction that our responsibility to our stockholders necessitated the project.

We share your concern that the basic rights of Negroes in Alabama have been denied and even more particularly in the Selma community. Particularly, we deplore the violence which has permeated the area. We have publicly stated to Governor Wallace and his staff and to a large group of citizens of the Selma area that Hammermill's traditional policies are built on the principles of respect for the rights of others and the maintenance of law and order. We have stated in a public release and a private wire to Roy Wilkins of NAACP and to James Farmer of CORE--that "Hammermill's policy is and always has been to make no distinction among employees or job applicants other than on the basis of ability and specifically to make no distinction on account of not only race but also no distinction on account of color, creed, national origin or any other matters not relevant to ability." We are clearly on the public record as to our policies and intentions.

The mill which is now being designed will not have separate facilities for white and colored employees. We are now engaged in designing training programs which will be available for both white and colored employees. When we become employers in Alabama we will be an equal opportunity employer within the spirit as well as the letter of the law. I might add that long before civil rights legislation was enacted, Hammermill made no distinction between employees as to race, color, or creed or national origin. Negroes have been employed at Hammermill in Erie for over thirty years. There are many on our list of retired employees.

We do not support or condone the injustices which have occurred in Selma. However, a refusal by Hammermill to locate near Selma would not remove the problems which exist not only in Alabama but generally throughout the South. Nor would our absence from Alabama advance civil liberties or help to solve the problems. In contrast, it is our considered conviction that when Hammermill becomes an employer in Alabama that we will make a major and beneficial contribution towards improving the economic and civic health of the communities in which our activities are located, and provide new and important opportunities to all citizens of these areas. We are convinced, as are many other responsible leaders in the civil liberties movement, that our presence in Alabama will provide leadership and constructive action to helpful solutions to the problems of race relations in the South, and indeed perhaps to other parts of our nation.

I hope that I have been responsive in giving you an insight into Hammermill's motives and problems. I appreciate that correspondence cannot at times be an adequate vehicle for complete communication. Therefore, if you have any further questions or require clarification in any area, I would like to hear further from you. It is genuinely important to us to have the good will and sympathetic understanding of all individuals who, like we, are deeply concerned with this matter.

We would deeply regret action of the type referred to in your letter. In our view such action would be unfair in the light of the facts and our position in this matter. Nor would it advance the interests of those you are trying to help.

Sincerely,

John H. DeVitt
President