

To: Friends of SNCC
From: Betty Garman

March 17, 1965

This will be a kind of off the top of my head memo because I'm writing it right on the stencil and as well am fairly rushed for time. But I want to put a few thoughts on paper and share with you some information.

First, SNCC is not asking people, students, etc. to go anywhere at the moment. About 300-400 Northern students did participate in the Montgomery demonstrations over the last three days and other Northern students have already made plans to come for the weekend (definitely rented buses, etc). We want now to ask that people turn their attention to several things:

1. Education about the movement, Alabama, FDP challenge, voting legislation and so forth in their own communities. It is really important at this point to build an informed public that understands better what a speech like the one Johnson made Monday means, or that understands what the voting bill will mean or will not mean once passed AND understands what the impact and effect of the Mississippi Challenge is and why it is still important and cannot be forgotten in the shuffle of the lobbying and compromise on voting legislation.
2. We want all of you to send IMMEDIATELY the names of college students in your area who are a) active b) may become key organizers for activity around the challenge and home town educational and organizing efforts. Specifically we want at least one name from every college in your area so that we can begin sending interpretive material to those students.
3. We need funds. Need I say more? There were many areas which raised larger sums as a result of the Alabama activity but that money was quickly spent because of stepped up activity. Several cities have come up with good fund projects -- such as an Iowa City fast (by several people) until \$5,000 is raised; a "Freedom Pot" in the downtown or campus area for which a goal is set, ie. \$2,000 -- and people are asked to put money in each day, etc. Try to write up your own fund brochures on Alabama for the time being. We will supply pictures if you let us know in writing what kind of shots you want. The press is over loaded and we don't even have a way of reprinting alot of the reprints we presently have
4. Washington activity has taken a new turn -- a vigil will continue in front of the White House until the Selma-Montgomery March is officially over (next Thursday since it begins on Sunday); lobbying Congressmen will continue; and, committee hearings, etc. will be attended (the House Judiciary hearing was packed today by students from out of town). Then, students (and others) return to the church (Lincoln Memorial Congregational, 1701 11th St., NW) to discuss the significance of the lobbying, the vigil, the hearings, the issues, etc. So, we are holding FREEDOM SCHOOLS in Washington. People should be encouraged to go to Washington between now and next Thursday although we are not asking for any large mobilization, etc.
5. We want to encourage all of you to study the voting bill and write out your thoughts. We will be doing the same from here and will be having local people write about what the bill (as well as the Mississippi challenge) means to them. Also send us your thoughts on organizing in your area for the Washington action later this spring and summer. We'll be sending out the proposals from which we are working in a few days and want to get things moving in other areas.

On the back of this page I have typed a memo sent us by Howard Zinn which discusses federal action and SNCC demands, etc.

ps: Answers to letters will be coming soon. Bear with us.

March 16, 1965

Memo to SNCC From Howard Zinn

Here in Boston SNCC is preparing to renew demonstrations on behalf of Selma and for more presidential action; in Washington a large demonstration is about to take place. I fear that in these actions we may fail to make exactly clear to the American public what we are asking for. The reason we may fail is that since President Johnson's statement of last Saturday, and his speech of Monday night, most Americans concerned with civil rights feel that he is now meeting the demands of the movement, so that any further actions directed at Johnson seem like empty grandstanding. I think we need to get clear ourselves, and to make clear to the public (in our releases, our picket signs, our leaflets, our public statements, etc.) exactly why Johnson's statements, though they represent progress, and are very eloquent, still do not meet the problem which Selma has brought to the fore.

In Johnson's statement of Saturday, March 13th, he declared an intention to use federal force to back up a court order, if and when issued, granting the right of peaceful assembly. And in his speech of Monday, March 15, he proposed a fairly strong voting bill. Let me outline why I think all of this is insufficient:

1. Selma is only another in a long chain of atrocities reaching far back into our history. There are a thousand potential Selma's in the deep South. Therefore, even the strongest action, for this time, in Selma, is no guarantee against more outbreaks of violence elsewhere.

2. Troops or marshalls to back up a court order is exactly what Eisenhower and Kennedy did on several occasions (Little Rock, the Freedom Rides, Oxford, Birmingham). It is no departure in policy. It means that troops go in to quell a particular disturbance, and when things are calm again, they leave, and we are all back exactly where we were before. Court orders are issued only when violence has already taken place, but what is needed is federal force to be on hand before violence occurs.

3. The use of troops or marshalls, as in those past instances, is a temporary device. What we are asking is continuing protection (or rather, what we should be asking, for our slogans about "troops" don't make this clear). This means for the President, using the authority of Section 333, Title 10, to create a special force of plainclothes agents -- many hundreds of them -- who will be stationed at key points throughout the hard core areas of the South and who will be available, on call, whenever anyone exercising his constitutional rights (to register to vote, to canvass for registration, to picket peaceably, to hand out leaflets, to hold a peaceable assembly, to march peaceably anywhere) can ask for protection. Such agents would be able often to use persuasion in advance to stop sheriffs and police from interference; but behind the powers of persuasion would be the force of arms and the power of on-the-spot arrest. Such a force, equipped with radio cars and a few helicopters, would be able to ensure protection all organized civil rights activity. One auto with a few agents, accompanying those three fellows into Neshoba County last summer, would have prevented that murder.

4. No voting bill, no matter how strong, will work so long as local police can use brutality against Negroes or can intimidate them (so that they may even be reluctant to file complaints under the law). And no matter how effective, it always involves delay before it works. In the interim, unless protection exists, Negroes will still be at the mercy of local violence. Remember, this is the fourth voting bill in eight years. Each one was supposed to do the trick.