

STAFF MEETING, MADISON COUNTY COFO, MARCH 22, 1965

Participants: Dick Jewitt, George Raymond, Houston Howard, Finch Evans, George Johnson, Milton Pickett, Bill Hamblin, Sandy Watts, Bill Forsyth, Judy Hampton, Phil Sharp, JoAnn Coiman.

The leading topic on the agenda was the forthcoming county convention. JoAnn presented a partial program for the meeting which Rev. McRee had left with her, pointing out that it was not the final program. Everyone reacted to it in dismay; Phil Sharp, Bill Hamblin and Milton Pickett were most vocal in expressing the general objections to it: too many outside speakers, not sufficient time (indeed, the present form allows no time) for discussion among the local people, not at all in keeping with what the field workers have been preparing the local people for, too much like such meetings have always been in the past (speeches, freedom songs, vapid good will and no results). Phil called Rev. McRee on the phone to ask if the program committee could meet with some other local people before the convention to redo the program. Both Phil and Dick participated in the phone conversation, reiterating the vital importance of making this gathering truly one of the people in which they participate. McRee reminded us that the program was only a provisional one and argued that local people had made it up, not he.

The entire discussion resulted in a realization on the part of the staff that the people with whom they are working must be brought into closer contact with the established Madison County Movement. George Raymond suggested that we try to have the Movement hold meetings in various areas of the county, one Saturday near Flora, the next near Valley View, etc. George also mentioned that the program had been made up largely by copying from the program of the last convention (when Farmer was guest speaker); he said Charles Evers was included as a speaker because he promised Rev. McRee good publicity.

Dick Jewitt commented that this kind of problem is occurring in other parts of the state. Established, "old-line" leadership is stifling grass roots participation. He suggested that one reason this was happening here was because the local people of Madison County haven't been participants in any of the political workshops where they might have begun to get the skills by which they could prevent the old Movement leaders from engineering things, and by which they could develop their own voice.

Some time was also devoted to talk of public accommodations testing. Bill H. and Milton believe it should start before the announced time, April 3. Milton also believes that it should involve large numbers of people being jailed. Sandy disagreed with this on the grounds that only each individual can make the decision about going to jail and that plans for sending many people to jail for indefinite periods of time are unrealistic; people will be clamoring to get out after one night, even if they do say now that they'll say for 6 weeks. George R. pointed out that sending people to jail and then they're being bonded out often results in their being tied more closely to Mr. Charlie. N.B. Rev. Harris promise not to be involved anymore with the movement in exchange for getting his boys out of jail free. Nothing could be resolved in this discussion, since final decisions about public accommodations must be made with C.O. Chinn Jr.



A financial report was called for. JoAnn passed the ledger of contributions, income and expenses around for everyone to read.

Dick Jewitt set up a meeting for the coming Tuesday, March 30, and outlined what will be considered then: plans for spring and summer, new placement of staff, new organization of the 4th District, increasing need to find ways to develop an independent voice among the people of Mississippi (Jewitt mentioned that the FDP is now in danger of being sucked into the Democratic Party: in Greenville money has been given for a massive voter registration drive to the benefit of the Democrats; in Meridian a Democratic Club is gaining strength). He also mentioned that money is becoming available for staff-training but that it won't come fast enough to meet the tremendous pressures now on us with the voting bill. Nonetheless we should start putting to paper the things we want and need to learn so that training programs can eventually be developed.

Talk then turned to post-convention considerations. Phil suggested that people in each community should make a point of getting together right after the convention to talk about what happened there and about how to facilitate any proposals that may come out of it. The work-stoppage of the 29th was mentioned briefly and led into a discussion of how the field workers should keep up with the plans of the Madison County Movement. Phil suggested that a staff member be appointed to attend the movement meetings and carry back all plans and information to the rest of the staff.

Final discussion was devoted to the possibility of Martin Luther King's coming into Madison County. Two basic points were made: Milton, Bill H and Jack Melton (who joined the meeting late) argued that King has a right to come in here if he wants to; Jewitt, Sharp, Raymond and others kept pointing out certain pitfalls: King's forcing the local people to abdicate all decision-making powers, his ability to oust other civil rights groups (as he's tried to do with SNCC in Selma), his way of, to use Jewitt's phrase, "playing with people's lives," acting dishonestly (as he did with the second Selma march, telling the people they would surely march when he knew full well they would turn ground). Opinions on King remained pretty well polarized, though Milton Pickett did mention his objection to King's sleeping in a trailer while the marchers slept on the ground and Pickett asserted that if King comes here he will be forced to do so on the terms of the Madison County Movement. Raymond and others doubted that the Movement or any power could set terms for King.

At the close of the meeting announcements were made of a Freedom School Workshop in Knoxville next week and the beginning of training sessions for NCC's Freedom Corps. Field workers were asked to submit names of people who could be involved in these within the next day or so.