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to: Louisiana staff
from: Mike Lesser

We are sending the enclosed paper to you for your information and because it is very important that staff think about the kinds of things this paper discusses. Please do not simply read and file it. Read, evaluate, and criticize it. Put it in the context of what you are doing in your community and what you think needs to be done. Put it in the larger context of the state - what we are doing in the state, what kinds of changes in Louisiana we would like to see, and how these changes can best be achieved.

We hope that you will write down your responses to this paper and your own ideas on the direction our program should be taking. At the staff meetings in Waveland we want to discuss in this area and come to some decisions. Therefore it is most important that you take time this week in order to think about these things and come to Waveland with your ideas and suggestions.

ON THE QUESTION OF A THIRD PARTY

What should be the form of Negro political activity in Louisiana? Should a third party be started or should Negro political activity be carried on within the Democratic Party?

The following four questions must be dealt with:

I. Under the hypothesis that there exists a more or less disciplined Negro electorate responsive to a militant leadership, which form will maximize the power of this group?

II. Which form is more likely to lead to a Negro political leadership that is militant?

III. Which form is more likely to lead to political involvement and awareness among a substantial number of Negroes?

IV. What influence will CORE have on either type of Negro political activity and what influence will the possible forms have on CORE?

Question I is the only one that is easy to answer and will be left to the end. I will try to deal with questions II, III and IV together by making some predictions about what will happen if Negro political activity is confined to the Democratic Party and then seeing what effect a third party would have.

If Negro politics is confined to the Democratic Party the following factors will have some bearing on the questions that have been raised:

1. Whites will have a hand in determining Negro leadership.
2. Negroes with middle-class skills will have a strong advantage over those without (e.g. in committees, etc.). Generally, being able to meet with whites on their terms will be an important qualification for Negro leadership.
3. Public segregation as such is not essential to the maintenance of the social and economic status quo. This fact is recognized by the white professional and business classes (especially by the national corporations that control the major part of Louisiana industry). These classes also realize that a lack of skilled labor may hamper their program of attracting industrial investment to Louisiana, and so are prepared to spend more money on public education.

Summary on Question II: Negro leadership in the Democratic Party will be supplied by Negro professionals and businessmen. They will concentrate on the issues of ending public segregation and improving education. They will ally themselves with their white counterparts and have some success in realizing their goals. However the economic status quo will be maintained. The alliance will work as follows: the whites will make concessions (ostensibly to the Negro leadership in the Democratic Party) on the issues mentioned above; the job of the Negro leadership will be to keep down any protest movement by showing how their method gets results.

4. It is unreasonable to expect that Negro involvement in the Democratic Party will be greater than that of whites of comparable economic and educational background. That is, a few will become politicians and the others will vote in primaries and general elections.
5. If the Negro leadership (in the Democratic Party) is as described above they will have no desire to raise the political awareness of large numbers of Negroes. Even if they did have this desire they would not stress those issues which would contribute to this end.

6. The Civil Rights movement will be a more or less independent form of organized Negro protest activity. This movement will supply an alternative leadership and also raise the political awareness of a number of Negroes. This will put some pressure on the Negro leadership within the Democratic Party. However those issues that the civil rights movement is most capable of dramatizing are precisely those that will either be dead (voting) or among those the (Democratic) Negro leadership will deal with (public segregation, poor education). It is not clear how the civil rights movement will be able to translate its support into political power. Not is it clear how economic issues can be handled by the traditional methods of the civil rights groups. Undoubtedly a certain amount of transfer will take place: some Negro politicians will be influenced by the civil rights groups and their supporters (but they will try to hold these groups in check); and some civil rights leaders will move into Democratic Party politics (and they will rise to the extent that they are pliable).

I believe that these last three paragraphs provide some sort of answer to questions III and IV if no third party is formed. The picture is dismal. If a third party is formed there will still be many Negroes in the Democratic Party and what is said above (especially about the leadership) will still hold for them.

It is impossible to make predictions about the shape of Negro politics if a third party is formed. There are too many choices (e.g., when will it be formed? what issues will it stress?) and too many unknowns (e.g., what will be the response of the Voters Leagues? will a charismatic leader arise?). One can only talk about the possibilities.

I will outline a minimal program which would make the third party a meaningful alternative to the Democratic Party. I will deal with questions II, III, and IV above and also try to answer the following questions:

V. Will a third party which is initially a Negro party rule out the possibility of a Negro - poor white alliance in the long run?

VI. What if anything can be done to get a third party off the ground?

Another question that should be asked is: What is the future of the Voters Leagues?

1. It seems reasonable to expect that some (particularly those associated with CORE) will turn to issues other than voter registration. (If there is no third party voter registration work will be done for the National Democratic Party and for a wing of the state Democratic Party.)

2. The present program is to draw together the Voters Leagues in four congressional districts. This seems to me to be an essential step in the formation of a third party, but pointless unless it leads to a third party. This is because any kind of central apparatus will have no decision-making power -- it will neither allocate funds nor make decisions on the local level. In fact a structure with no real function can often exercise a conservatising influence.

The program of the third party should probably include the following goals:

1. An end to segregation in public facilities.
2. An end to discrimination in hiring.
3. Significant improvement in public education.
4. State minimum wage laws of wider coverage than present federal laws.
5. More generally the goal should be to give individuals some power to influence the events and conditions that shape their biographies. This may be taken as a definition of freedom. The four goals listed

above deal with changing the conditions. The key events in the lives of many people are often decisions made by private corporations (i.e., the decision to invest and on where to invest; the decision to automate, etc.). An overall goal could be to use the power of the state government to influence these decisions according to criteria determined by the people of the state. (State Investment Corporation - can be discussed in some detail.)

Questions II and III are relatively easy to answer. Assuming the program is something like what is suggested above the leadership and following (if either exists) will be more militant and aware than their counterparts in the Democratic Party. The following two points are important:

1. The political education carried on by the third party will not be confined to the people who will eventually vote for it. The third party can also influence Negroes in the Democratic Party.
2. Even if the third party should fold after a few years it will leave a number of people who have grown personally during those years and grown in their capacity to influence politics from within the traditional parties.

One thing should definitely not be done: there should be no attempt to challenge the regular Democratic delegation at the 1968 convention. In the first place the legal basis for such a challenge (denial of voting rights) will no longer exist, and also it would be very poor politics to vie for the honor of supporting Johnson.

Answer to question IV:

A third party will be formed in the near future only if CORE takes some initiative in this matter. This will mean a certain diversion of energies on the part of CORE. It will also mean that when this party is a more or less independent entity it will be in a position to make certain demands of CORE. These demands may conflict with CORE's traditional orientation toward direct action. On the other hand it may be true that direct action will be an important tool in rallying enthusiasm for the third party. Whatever the case CORE will be less independent than it is today. The amount of independence lost will reflect the strength of the third party. I believe that this is a price worth paying.

Answer to Question V:

I believe that race-baiting will decline as Negro political power increases. That is, a Negro political party will not cause a reaction of race-baiting - if it increases Negro political power it will cut down on race-baiting. (As this party is being formed there will be a strong adverse reaction on the part of white politicians and maybe some race-baiting but this won't be particularly harmful as it will be short-term and its principal effect will be to drive Negroes toward this party.)

In the long run a Negro party won't rule out a Negro-poor white alliance -- in fact it will make this more likely because only in a third party will Negroes be able to stress the economic issues that will attract poor whites.

Answer to question VI:

I believe that the formal initiative for this party must come out of an association of Voters Leagues. Then presumably most of the Voters Leagues will constitute themselves as local units of this party. Then energies should be directed toward organizing local units in areas where Voters Leagues do not yet exist. The best techniques for organizing the local units may be the ones CORE has been using in community organization - a focus on immediate grievances followed by direct action. There will no doubt be a period of trial and error. However one suggestion as to the structure of the party

can be made: candidates for office should be selected by convention and not by primaries. Because:

1. One can expect many more votes in the general election than there will be registered voters in the third party. In fact some active supporters of the third party may be registered Democrats and may choose to remain registered Democrats.
2. In this way the candidate selected will have to be a man active in the affairs of the party.
3. This will insure a large amount of politicking involving a large number of people rather than limiting one's participation to voting in a primary. The result will be a good deal of political education.
4. This will tend to strengthen the structure of the party rather than have it remain a loose coalition of independent units.

Answer to question I:

The hypothesis is that there exists a more or less disciplined Negro electorate responsive to a militant leadership.

The word "Negro" will mean a voter who will follow this leadership; the word "unit" will mean municipality, parish, congressional district, or state.

Case I : More than 50% of the voters in the unit are Negro.

Then with or without a third party the Negro candidate will win.

Case II : 35 - 50 % of the voters in the unit are Negro.

If there is no third party:

- A. It is conceivable that a Negro would win the Democratic nomination. (This could occur if the number of registered Republicans is more than twice as large as the difference between half the number of registered voters in the unit and the number of Negro voters.) But then in the General Election the white Republican candidate would win.
- B. The other possibility is that the Negroes would influence the choice of the Democratic candidate - a white "moderate" would be chosen and he would then win the general election.

If there is a third party :

- A. In the event that the Democrats and Republicans split the white vote it is conceivable that the Negro third party candidate could win the general election.
- B. To the extent that one of the white candidates in the general election shapes up the bait can be held out to him that the third party candidate will withdraw in his favor.

Case III : 15 - 35 % of the voters in the unit are Negro.

Then argument (B) of case II will hold.

Conclusion : Without a third party Negroes will have a slightly smaller chance of electoral success and apart from this will be in a weaker bargaining position. Generally both white candidates will know that the Negroes will have no choice but to vote for one of them (or stay home) and one candidate will only have to present himself as the lesser evil.

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Timing should also be discussed. For the following reasons I believe that the third party should be formed as soon as enough Voters Leagues agree to participate.

1. There are many Negroes who will register for the first time in the coming year. They will be most open to a new way of politics right now.
2. To the extent that Negroes do register, structures will be set up to draw them into the Democratic Party. These structures do not exist yet in many areas.
3. The rhetoric of the State Democratic Party will change as more Negroes register. Other things being equal the Negroes picture of the state Democratic Party is clearer now than it is likely to be in a couple of years.

I believe that CORE should commit itself now to attempt to form a third party and that this should be a conscious goal of the summer project.

- Benson Brown
May 1965