

August 20, 1965

TO: John Lewis, Jim Forman, Cleve Sellers
and Executive Committee of SNCC

FROM: Monroe Sharp

After much deliberation, I have physically closed the Freedom Center at the 4212 S. Cottage Grove location because I felt that under the circumstances to try to continue operations would only confuse local people and possibly destroy the opportunity for future organizing. I fully intend to continue the educational aspect of the Center's program from my home at present, and out of the Chicago office as soon as certain questions regarding difficulties there are resolved, for the idea and work of the Freedom Center in this community must go on.

Some of the main reasons for closing the Center concerned a lack of proper time to spend on the Center's planned programs. Chief among the distractions was the manner in which the Chicago office has been run, which needed my constant attention. One example was receiving a phone call at 7 p.m., in the midst of a meeting, asking me to drive 110 miles to Milwaukee for an 8 p.m. speaking engagement that had not been properly covered in advance, and then arriving in Milwaukee with an incorrect address. Another problem was the physical insecurity of the Center which has been burglarized no less than six times causing loss of irreplaceable office equipment, and large scale vandalism of files and records. The automobiles that have been placed at the disposal of the Chicago Center, were all in such poor physical condition that hours of time had to be spent weekly trying to keep them in a running condition and then they always broke down at a time of crisis anyhow. In a large city such as Chicago non-community direct-action, which involves weeks of full-time commitment such as the HUAC demonstrations, school boycotts, etc. plus demonstrations in support of the South took a major part of the time that should have been spent on Center programs, to say nothing of community problems often of a quasi-social-service type that could not be put off such as teen-age gang wars, four families totally dependent upon the Center for food, clothing and even shelter for months at a time, and four teenagers who were placed in the custody of the Center to prevent them from being sent to reformatories for terms of up to three years.

All of the Center's programs showed bright promise but lack of the necessary time to recruit community people to work on them plus the eager but untrained local college people who constantly wanted to "help" but took up valuable time trying to orient them to community problems did not allow sufficient time to be spent on organizing.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that I could admit defeat at this physical location without feeling that SNCC or myself had deserted the community and its immeasurable problems, and I take full responsibility for this action. One cannot become hung up and torn between "internal problems of the community" and "external problems of society" and make a success of the operation. While continuing the educational program, I shall keep constantly in mind the reopening of the Community Center at some more auspicious time.