



# Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

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Dear Friend:

*This letter brings a simple but heartfelt message: thank you.*

*As the holiday season draws near, we want to express our gratitude for your past support of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.*

*In one emergency after another, we asked for help and received it—sometimes without having the time or resources to convey our appreciation. Aid was needed for the Mississippi Summer Project of 1964, for the Selma crisis of 1965—and it was forthcoming. Thanks to individuals like yourself, it has been possible for SNCC to continue the struggle for justice in the South.*

*But you may be less aware of our work as it goes on behind the scenes. We would like to offer you, as a supporter, this up-to-date report on some aspects of that work:*

## SNCC PROGRAMS: A REPORT FOR 1965

*"When, in calmer times, men come to write the history of our raucous era; when they seek the cry that called a New Left, the rasp that twitched the nerves of Negro youths and the image that convulsed American campuses; when they try to set down in words once and for all the forces that pushed America to a desperate confrontation with herself, it seems likely that they will devote a considerable amount of attention to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee which has emerged within the last year as a major force of the Freedom movement, to the dismay of many persons of power—not all of them white."*

*Lerone Bennet, in Ebony*

### Background

SNCC was founded in 1960 as a loose network of militant Southern Negro students who sought to find a new dignity by ending Jim Crow, primarily in public accommodations. Out of the sit-in struggle came an awareness that in many of the Black Belt counties of the Deep South, where Negroes often outnumber whites, the basic political structure must be changed. The right to vote was basic to this. By October, 1961, SNCC had taken on staff for a voter registration campaign; it had more full-time workers in the South than any other civil rights organization. Two years later, voter registration and direct action were SNCC's two main weapons in a frontal attack on segregation.

It may seem easy to say "register to vote." But before a Negro can take that walk to the courthouse,

he must conquer a century of fear and oppression. Therefore, the first task of a SNCC worker is to live in the community in which he works for as long as necessary; to listen and talk and persuade and gradually help that community achieve the confidence to begin creating its own organizations and programs. SNCC workers bring people ideas, information, and tools; they seek not to lead but to bring forth leadership. In turn, they receive information, ideas, and renewed commitment.

This, of course, is the job of an organizer and that is what SNCC has become: a band of organizers, of catalysts for the release of human energy and strength. On the national level, that energy has become pressure upon the federal government. It is no exaggeration to say that without such pressure as SNCC has mustered, there would not have been a Civil Rights Act in 1964 nor a Voting Act in 1965.

### Political Organization

On the final night of the Selma-Montgomery march, Mrs. Viola Liuzzo was murdered by Klansmen in Lowndes County. SNCC's answer to her murder was to send Field Secretaries into that terror-ridden area, to organize people for political action. The murder of the young Episcopal seminarian, John Daniels, did not stop the newborn freedom movement.

A few months ago, not a single Negro was registered to vote in Lowndes County. Today, as a result of the Voting Act and SNCC's presence, 2000

have registered out of an eligible 5000 and Negroes have their own action group: the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights. Its activities include work on economic, social and educational problems as well as political participation.

This brief history of SNCC "shock-troops" at work has been repeated many times in Alabama, Mississippi, and Southwest Georgia— another Klan-infested area, where SNCC has been working for the vote since the fall of 1961. Across the South, SNCC has helped thousands to register. But there is no point in getting the right to vote—for racist candidates. More and more, SNCC has been urging Negroes to run for office while at the same time working to avoid the creation of black machines which would be as unresponsive to people's needs as the whites in power.



In Georgia, SNCC was active in the 1964 campaign to elect C. B. King of Albany to Congress. This year, Julian Bond—a SNCC staff member—ran successfully in Atlanta for the State Legislature.

In Alabama, local law provides that a group of registered voters in a particular county can select and run its own candidates for both county and state offices. By winning a certain number of votes, the group can become a political party of the county and eventually of the state. SNCC workers are therefore helping to

establish freedom parties in a number of the poorest counties with a view to creating a new Alabama political party from the ground up.

In September, 1965, SNCC workers in Arkansas helped 30 Negroes to run for seats on School Boards across the state. All but one were defeated. Contrary to popular impression, Arkansas has proven to be as dangerously racist as any area in which SNCC operates. SNCC workers believe that the Negroes would have won many of the contests if it had not been for intimidation and fraud, and they have submitted a special report on this to Washington. Meanwhile, Arkansas continues to be one of SNCC's most active and growing projects, with workers in 31 counties.

For the Southern farmer and share-cropper, the elections which affect his life most directly are those for the county committees of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (a branch of the Dept. of Agriculture). The ASCS committees strongly influence how much land a man may plant with certain crops, who gets loans, etc. In 1965, SNCC workers helped get Negroes on the ballot in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina and Arkansas. In Green County, Alabama, for example, Negroes were nominated this fall for 36 out of 40 available committee seats. As in the Arkansas School Board elections, Negro ASCS candidates have been frustrated by suspected fraud. But the experience of organizing for such elections can be the beginning of political participation.

The most concrete result of SNCC's organizing work has been the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The MFDP was set up April, 1964, when it seemed clear that the total denial of Negro participation in Mississippi politics called for creation of a special organism—a "parallel structure." SNCC, whose roots in the state go back to 1961, threw its resources behind the new party and has continued to do so.

At the 1964 national Democratic convention in Atlantic City, the MFDP challenged the regular Mississippi delegation and in 1965 went on to challenge the seating of the five Congressmen. Although both efforts failed, they focussed national attention on Negro disenfranchisement as never before. And in late 1965, the MFDP drew up a new program which includes a crash voter registration drive—now under way in the 9 counties where there are federal registrars—and campaigns in the 1966 primaries for all five Congressional seats.

Primaries for state and national offices are also coming up in 1966 in Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina. SNCC is drawing up a 4-year political program for these states and has also demanded that the Democratic National Committee carry out the mandate of the Atlantic City Convention to end exclusion of Negroes from party activity and elections in the South.

#### **Jobs and Income**

By 1965, the right to organize had been sufficiently established and enough restrictions on voting removed to free SNCC energy for dealing with the economic problems of the Southern Negro.

A crucial development was the birth of the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union. It began in the Delta last January when a number of tractor drivers and cotton choppers decided they had had enough of a plantation system which kept men perpetually hungry and in debt. The choppers were tired of working a 10 or 12 hour day for \$2.50 to \$3.00; the drivers, skilled workers, knew they should get more than \$6.00 per day. They simply stopped, and soon were joined by others.

By late spring over 1000 men had quit. Some were evicted and are still living in tents. Union members have been arrested. But small increases were won in some cases and the MFLU grew until today it has chapters in some 10 communities. The union now seeks to strengthen its organization and legal status, with a massive strike planned for the spring.

The idea of saying NO to economic slavery proved contagious. In McComb, maids at the Holiday Inn walked out. Cooks in a Cleveland cafe, some of them working 77 hours a week at 42¢ an hour, walked out. Bus drivers in Marshall City struck. The idea spread to Tennessee, where a Freedom Labor Union was born consisting mainly of tractor drivers and skilled workers in cotton gins; by October, it had 300 members.

SNCC worked closely with community people to build the FLU. In more urban areas, it has helped mount protest against job discrimination. In Natchez recently, SNCC helped to create a boycott of white-owned stores which devastated business in that city. Albany and Americus, Georgia have seen large demonstrations and boycotts this year against several white-owned stores in the Negro neighborhood to get Negroes hired. Negro women, who work as domestics for \$10 a week throughout the Black Belt, have also

been organizing; in Americus, 40 of them formed a maids' union and at least one got an increase. At a lingerie plant in North Carolina, SNCC workers are pressing for better working conditions. And on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, SNCC worked this past year with Negro employees of a crab canning factory as well as with migrant workers.

SNCC has not only sought to improve existing job conditions; it has also helped to create work that pays. In 1965, the Poor People's Corporation—an idea of SNCC staffer Jesse Morris—was set up in Mississippi to create and assist new light industry as well as independent farming. At its first membership meeting on Aug. 29, the Corporation made small loans to a new sewing firm created by women who were tired of working as maids; to an okra cooperative; to several new leather-working shops for which young people had been trained during the summer.

In Alabama and Georgia, SNCC has worked this year on such new enterprises as a quilting co-op, a credit union, a retail food market. Like the labor union and the Corporation, these could not be considered "SNCC projects" but they are almost always the result of SNCC presence.



## Schools

Across the Black Belt, school integration has been little more than token. Facilities in the Negro schools usually range from bad to terrible. The schools fail to give black children either decent academic training or any knowledge of their own heritage; they are prepared only for the cotton field and the kitchen. SNCC has worked on all these aspects of the education problem.

In Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee, SNCC workers have helped people find the courage merely to apply for transfer of their children to white schools last fall. Parents who did apply have been evicted, had their homes shot into, and had crosses burned outside. In Tennessee, children were sprayed with disinfectant when they went to the white school and in Greensboro, Alabama, Negro pupils were turned back by whites with guns.

SNCC has helped people to pressure school boards for integration plans and in some cases succeeded. It has organized many boycotts of Negro schools to protest bad facilities—from books to bathrooms—and tuition fees, split sessions, failure to integrate.

The most dramatic of these took place last September in Forrest City, Arkansas, when a group of Lincoln High School students demonstrated against conditions and demanded total integration of the school system. A boycott began which was 90% effective. Over 200 students and SNCC workers were arrested. Some later went to Washington to petition the Office of Education but no action followed. They then set up a Freedom Center where they have been attending regular classes and plan to do so until conditions are improved probably by some form of federal pressure.

Workers in Arkansas maintain half a dozen other Freedom Schools which were established primarily to teach Negro history and other subjects not offered in the black schools. In Lowndes County, Alabama, a tutorial program is being set up which will emphasize academic needs but also include Freedom School techniques and material.

Schools have not been the only target for integration by SNCC this year. Restaurants and movie theaters have been tested; hospitals have been integrated. In Americus, Georgia, twenty of us were

arrested when we sought to attend services at "white churches." In Arkansas, SNCC workers who tried to integrate the cafeteria in the State Capitol were beaten.

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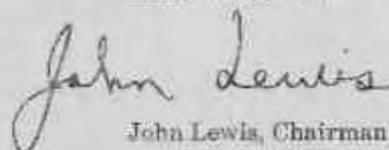
*Violence and police brutality continue to be daily realities in SNCC's work. The unpublicized and mysterious deaths of local Negroes continue. The beatings and shootings, the bombings and church burnings, have not let up.*

To inform the nation of these events and their causes, to maintain contact with the field, to service the needs of workers—all this calls for resources which often do not exist or are very expensive. SNCC has therefore created its own photo unit, research department, printing plant, and communication system. It maintains a central administrative staff in Atlanta as well as seven Northern offices to mobilize support and raise funds. Space does not permit description of SNCC's educational program for its own staff, nor its campus program, but these too are vital.

SNCC now has 150 full-time staff workers, and a program for 1966 which includes intensified political action, economic self-help projects, and school integration. Though many people here and abroad believe the problem of racism has been resolved by federal legislation, those working in the South know that it is only the beginning. Many months of struggle lie ahead.

A long winter has begun, and it is a cold one in the South. We are deeply grateful for your past support; we hope you may help us through this winter. Meanwhile, please accept our thanks and best wishes for 1966 as a year of progress, justice, and peace.

Yours in freedom,



John Lewis, Chairman