

March 14, 1966

To: SNCC Executive Committee and SNCC Staff

From: Marion Barry, Jr. - Washington Staff

Re: FREE D.C. MOVEMENT (FDCM)

- Background -

Washington, D.C. has a population greater than that of 11 states (Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming). Each of these states has a governor and an elected state legislature to administer local affairs. Each is represented in Congress by two Senators and at least one representative. Washington has neither representatives in Congress nor local self government. The nation's capital is administered by an appointed three man board of commissioners; its laws are passed by the entire U.S. Congress. The results of this practice have been as chaotic and immoral as one could expect:

-- School buildings are so dilapidated that whole floors cannot be used for fear they will collapse under the weight of the children. In some schools hundreds of kids must share a single wash basin. The superintendent of schools freely admits that more money is spent per child in schools in white sections than in Negro. Half day sessions and crowded classrooms are commonplace. (The school population is 90% Negro, 10% white.)

-- Housing is inadequate. Families of eight are living in a single, shabby basement room, without electricity, just blocks from the Capitol building. Over 50,000 persons are in urgent need of low and middle income housing by the most conservative estimates. Most new housing is high rise so-called "middle income" housing, priced well out of reach of the budget of all but the wealthiest Negroes. Garbage goes uncollected for months, except in the "better" sections of the city, where collections are made on a regular schedule.

-- Welfare is inadequate. Thousands of kids were forced to stay home from school during cold weather because they didn't have adequate clothing. When children are seen barefoot in summer, it is often because they have no shoes, even for Sunday School.

-- Medical facilities for the poor are almost non-existent. More serious cases are sometimes treated only after 8-12 hours of waiting in a crowded clinic.

-- The jails are barbaric "human stockyards" where up to 500 people are kept in a single room, 150x180, sometimes for months, awaiting trial -- with no work, no recreation.

-- Cops are known for their brutality. In the most recent publicized incident, they broke up a private wedding reception and beat the bride's brother with a black-jack while he was held on the ground in front of the guests. Cops recently broke into 1702 Kilbourne, where some SNCC people live, too, and beat and arrested Herman Kitchens, Eddie Brown, Clint Hobson and a young lady. All four were charged with assault of police officers and now await grand jury action. Thousands of similar unpublicized incidents occur weekly.

Washington needs self government. It has so-far been denied because opposition has been centered in a small group of bigoted and influential men and selfish business interests, who have controlled the necessary votes which could grant "Home Rule" in Congress. They are afraid of higher local liquor prices and increased taxi fares. They are afraid of the Negro majority in the District of Columbia and of the likelihood of election of a Negro mayor if "Home Rule" should be granted. And they have launched a \$100,000 campaign around the country to see that their view prevails.

So local citizens have been subjected to indifferent local bureaucrats who are secure in the knowledge that there is nothing the citizen can do about his indifference. The citizen is, like a criminal, disenfranchised. And the government of the city continues to be controlled by Southern racists, such as Congressman John McMillan of South Carolina, chairman of the House District Committee, who recently admitted he only spends "about one full day a month" on District Affairs, and who has called the fight for "Home Rule" a "Communist plot".

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- The Free D.C. Movement -

After watching the frustrated efforts of local "Home Rule" committees and civic organizations against the powerful coalition of part of the business community and southern, racist congressmen, Washington SNCC became determined to enter the struggle for self government in the nation's capital and to try to give it new impetus by introducing methods that have been at least partially successful elsewhere - education and mobilization of the people, economic pressure on businessmen by withholding our buying power from those who did not support the right to vote and, when necessary, demonstration.

A successful bus boycott, organized by SNCC in January to protest a nickel increase in bus fares, gave the people of Washington some faith in their own power and provided the needed momentum for an action organization dedicated to self government for the District. After a couple of organizational meetings in early February, a press conference was called on February 21 to announce the formation of the Free D.C. Movement in Washington. Besides SNCC, support for the new movement was pledged by Rev. Walter Fauntroy, Suffragen Bishop Paul Moore (Co-chairman of the D.C. Coalition of Conscience, a group of 30 religious and civil rights organizations that have worked on welfare cases and made some previous effort on behalf of "Home Rule") and the Rev. Ed Hales, Executive Director of the Washington NAACP.

At that time, we announced plans to counter the Washington Board of Trade's \$100,000 nationwide campaign (which has been claiming local residents don't really want the right of self government) by garnering our own support from the business community. A Washington barber, John Diggs, had agreed to head up a "Merchant's and Businessmen's Committee to Free D.C." and to contact merchants with several requests: to sign a petition for the right to vote; send telegrams in support to President Johnson and certain Members of Congress; display a 5x7" orange and black Free D.C. sticker in his window; and to make a contribution to the movement. Within two days the Free D.C. Movement had been branded as "extortionists", "the new Al Capones", "blackmailers" and a couple of other prize phrases, by the opponents of self government and "Home Rule" in Congress. Mr. Diggs, suffering from a heart condition which we had been unaware of, received more than 70 phone calls, including one from the Chief of Police. He resigned, necessitating a restructure of the organization, but we knew we were on the right track -- we had touched a sore nerve.

In the days following, the press has followed the Free D.C. Movement everywhere. Some of the coverage has been honest and good, some has been slanted, and some has been so rewritten as to make some of us in the movement wonder if the reporter was at the same meeting we were. As a result, some who had originally expressed interest in the movement, such as the NAACP (who never did any work, anyway) pulled out, while several church groups, civic organizations and (Sterling Tucker of) the Urban League came in with strong expressions of support. This has caused several changes in day-to-day strategy.

The Free D.C. Movement's first target area for local community support was H Street N.E., between 2nd and 15th, a shopping area comprised of nearly 400 businesses. Canvassers visited the merchants in pairs, requesting their support in any one (or more) of a number of ways -- from agreeing to allow literature to be passed out in their store, or putting a sticker in the window, to voluntary contributions to the cause of self government.

Two successful educational rallies were held in the area being canvassed and, on Saturday, with all but about 25 of the 400 merchants indicating support for local self government in a short 10 day period, we held an afternoon victory march which drew about 400 people and announced plans to move to another part of the city.

- A Proposal for Washington -

The Washington staff has, in the past, concentrated primarily on fund raising for the support of SNCC's southern projects. Based on the experience we in the D.C. office have had, I feel this status should be changed and would propose that the Washington office be looked upon as having a three-fold purpose:

1. To continue to raise funds for both local and southern projects.
2. To work on national SNCC business, i.e. testimony before congressional committees, conferences, meetings and programs that affect SNCC nationally; Federal programming, appointments for visiting southern delegations, the gathering of in-

3. To engage in local action programs aimed at erasing local problems, particularly discrimination and poverty.

The philosophy we have been using in Washington is somewhat different from SNCC philosophy used in the rural South. We view ourselves as a catalytic agent in which a few of us think of the programs and actions which will catalyze the community to begin to build a base, rather than the base building, then action philosophy. In my opinion the base building then action philosophy will not work in a city the size of Washington, not only because the city is too large and it would take too much time, but also because each neighborhood has different problems and it is therefore difficult to build a city-wide base on a single problem.

The ultimate aim and goal of the Free D.C. Movement (which is now largely SNCC) is to bring a number of people and organizations together, so as to become a vehicle for massive social change in Washington. The Free D.C. Movement differs fundamentally from Southern SNCC philosophy in that it is not run entirely by local people (I am considered the chairman and organizer of the movement), and most of the work must primarily be done by SNCC people.

For these reasons we must have an increase in the size of the Washington SNCC staff, and I propose the following office structure for the future:

Director: to coordinate the various programs of the Washington office and act as general administrator. (Marion Barry)

Two fund raisers: to raise funds principally for Southern SNCC projects. (Tina Smith and Yvonne Williams)

Federal Programs Coordinator: to coordinate Federal programs with the field. (Betty Garman)

Communications Officer: to handle press, write brochures, edit and coordinate Washington office publications (a weekly staff report from Washington, a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter to contributors and friends in the Washington area), and to be responsible for receiving and sending messages on the data phone.

Four field people for community organization: @ \$40 per week. (Currently have Herman Kitchen and Lester McKinnie. Once FDCM gets off the ground there is possibility they could pay 2).

Secretary: for typing and stenographic work.

Office Manager: to coordinate the office staff, handle volunteers and assist the director in activities he does not have time to handle.

High School and College Organizer: to organize and mobilize high school and college students in the metropolitan Washington area.

Right now we have no one to fill the vacancies approval of this plan would create, but I would like the Executive Committee to authorize the above so that when qualified people are found, I will not have to hassle and fight with the Personnel and Finance Committees.

A verbal justification will be given at our meeting for the above plan.

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