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A REVIEW OF THE DIRECTION  
OF SNCC--PAST AND FUTER

by IVANHOE DONALDSON

(This is a transcript of a speech prepared and delivered by Mr. Donaldson at the May SNCC staff conference. There have been many misconceptions abroad about what occurred at the staff conference, largely perpetrated by a hostile press. Unfortunately, many of the friends of SNCC have been confused and misinformed by articles appearing in the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Herald Dispatch, Atlanta Inquirer etc. We hope that this transcript of one of the major presentations at the staff conference will clarify the position of SNCC on the questions of "nationalism", "integration", "independent politics", and "community action". This paper is not an extensive discussion of SNCC history or program; it is not meant to be. It is, rather, a discussion of the political thrust and direction of SNCC in the past and future.)

I wrote out sort of a prepared statement. I'm not going to talk about urban organizing as just an independent extancy. I can come back, if after what I've said, people are interested in talking about that. One is I think that kind of bag (inaudible) I want the presentation to act as a review. The organization needs a review of its own motion and all I've done in this paper is that I've gone over what in fact I think we are and what I think that direction is.

I think it's important that we begin to revolve around some kind of program that represents SNCC itself even though people work in independent things and not that the organization talks about social change that its got to begin to visualize some concept of a direction.

It's important that Marion\* be here since he's operation inside that Free D.C. movement and that Bill Hall has some ideas...

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Other people who are working in cities. I think it's important in terms of Julian's campaign, what happens to Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Greenwood, Jackson, in the cities because I think they represent, you know, the basis for some kind of dramatic change in this country.

I'll throw out ideas in this paper. I think that urban organizing programs have to be brought up in that other context because I raise serious question about all the organizing SNCC is doing.

What I'm talking about is just my own attitude and I'm talking about it because I'm trying to find out (inaudible) I think we all have to begin to find out where we relate to what we call SNCC. You know, we're doing a lot of different things and I think it's an important period, given the situation of the world and the situation of this country. (At this point, Donaldson begins reading from a prepared text.)

The movement has entered a new phase and perhaps a critical period. With the passage of the Civil Right Bill, the Voting Bill, the Economic Opportunity Act, the Supreme Court Ruling on Reapportionment, our system has begun to muddle and make hazy issues we fought so hard to clarify. So though we understand the proposition that man is born free and yet everywhere he is in chains, how we begin to defend and act on that is the main issue we have to deal with at this conference.

The first thing I need to say is that SNCC is very important--its relationship to raising questions and acting on issues in this country. I think that SNCC is an odd type of animal. Although almost invisible to the American public it stands probably as the only true



independent force in this country at this time and this place in history. However, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying SNCC is the force that's to bring about freedom. I don't think that at all. But on the basis of its radical mystique, other large institutions go into motion around the issues we raise and I think that's adequately true in our history. I think it's important we understand our history. I'll just give points of my interpretation.

Although CORE initiated the Freedom Rides, if the students from Nashville and Atlanta hadn't come down the rides would have ended and I think we have to understand that. Given the motion of the early days in the south--I remember that SDS with Tom Hayden did come down and produce that pamphlet. SDS gets a lot of its motion on the fact that there is motion, but they get more visibility. And I think all of the present motion in this country can find its roots within the energy of students and I think that SNCC has defined the energy of students--not that I'm saying SNCC has defined that motion. I don't deal with the Montgomery boycott, so I think that they're all relative in the development of motion. For that matter even going on back to Garvey and Douglas, etc. But I'm talking about the 60s and the main thing I'm talking about is changing the establishment.

We feel we're an independent political force. We need to talk about that afterward that we need to define the problems and develop radical actions around issues. In the past we established sort of vague concepts of goals: the development of an interracial democracy in this country, of the right of people to participate.

in decisions that effect their lives, the development of black leadership, pockets of power--particular'y in the deep south, /the development of people/ who are able to move toward these goals with well defined programs /such as/ the demand for integrated public accommodations, particularly the right to vote, one man one vote. But recent court actions have all but phased these particular problems out, even though they're visible to us. I mean the handwriting's on the wall in terms of the right to vote. In terms of the issues we moved around to particularly dramatize the over-all goals. We may understand these things may never really come about. In these times it is impossible to raise these particular issues in this country.

So we have some specific success, but the overall brutal nature of the American community still exists. So I think in this new phase we have to zero in on the problem, to coin a new space age term. In zeroing in on the problem I would like to suggest that we act on three levels: one, through nationalism, two, community wide action, and three through internationalism.

I recognize that historically we've always acted on these levels. All I'm doing is redefining our history and redefining what I think is our present action. Although I'm going to talk about these levels as defined entities, in reality they overlap. For example: nationalism helps organize in the black community.

It is important that this group reviews what we are and defines its future action. We have to understand nationalism in its positive forms and its importance and its reality in this community and the world community and what people do with it, namely the white press.

Community wide action, I think, politically is our most important area and its various parts, as I said before.



/Speaking of/ independent or 3rd party politics, I think that the black panther party in Alabama and Julian Bond's campaign in Atlanta are healthy methods to begin to crack open the system. We understand the MFDP and its context of driving of wedges within the establishment we talk about.

I think the whole question of independent politics and what it means needs to be defined within this organization and we need to go out and build whatever that definition becomes. That we agree that this motion which we've always done--Smith's campaign in Mississippi in '62 was independent politics, the King campaign in Albany was independent politics, even the A. A. Rander campaign in Chicago was independent politics given the context in which these independent things took place. Given another context they can be defined other ways.

Having white organizers to go into the white community to work, I think is very important but I think the context in which they go in to work is also important. I think the white organizers should go into the white community to teach Afro-American history. The white organizers have to go into the white community to organize the white community around black needs, a round black history, the relative importance of blackness in the world today. That's a level--not an entire thing in itself.

There should also be community action with black (inaudible) such as welfare demands and supporting of independent candidates. I think that all these levels--they overlap, but inside the overlapping people do different kinds of things.

I think we have to begin to talk about the market economy and more visible ways of community organizing. But we can not begin to talk about changing this system without defining it. I define it as the market economy or the market system. I just use that word--the word is capitalism.

The American way of life is embodied in the operation of a market economy. A market economy means all elements--labor, land, capital necessary to bring goods to the market were bought and sold similar to that of commodities.

There, so called commodities were exchanged in contractual terms; labor for wages, land for rent, capital for interest--for the sole purpose of the financial gain of the parties involved. Inherent in this arrangement are a conflict of interest because each party tries to maximize his gain.

Due to the organization of the market system, poverty is systematically produced. Labor is bought and sold on a sporadic basis according to supply and demand. Even if every laborer could negotiate a fair contract, it could be terminated at any time. Because of this arrangement, the market system is exclusive. I think we must understand the market system and the fact that we can not organize within the market system because this nature of it, I feel, because of the very nature of it, all we do in fact is reinforce what it is. Because of these two limits, the movement of the poor must continue to drift between demands for reform and total opposition to the system, becoming neither strictly reformist or totally radical.

We need to spend more energies organizing urban areas. Although SNCC has gotten all of its experience and understanding of the power structure and other political forms from organizing in the rural areas of the southland, the reality is that 70% of Americans live an urban life and that the major conflicts of interest are taking place in the cities. The cities are the political terrain of the nation and its power is moving very fast.

Our political task then begins with not only bringing political power to the rural south but confronting the cities confidently as the place of American life and to seek its political foundation.

And finally is what I call the international level. There's that old quote in Souls of Black Folk, where DuBoise says, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line and the relation of the lighter to the darker man in Asia and Africa and America and the islands of the sea." And obviously we live exactly what this says.

It seems to me we need to raise the questions of why the U.S. is involved in the murdering and (inaudible) of governments all over the non-white world. We need to organize protest actions: both against the



war in Vietnam and against the draft. We need to develop programs to support black resistance in South Africa, and develop strong coalitions with students of the third world.

We need to become students of world history in some senses understand the implications of the assassination of Malcolm X in its international realm, the frustration of the Hungarian and Spanish revolts which I think are very relevant when you talk about change in the U.S., the development of political motion in the West Indies which is right off our coast (and not just Cuba). But how many of us know what's going on on those other little islands right off the coast of this country? understand the development of political theory in Africa and in China.

All I'd like to say is that SNCC is no more than the sum of its parts. I guess I can apply that definition to the American system. The only way it's going to change is if we change it. And from that something that represents to me, I think, the mood of a lot of black teenagers on the streets of this country are the words from Tobacco Road and just the simple verse that says, "Bring dynamite in a crane. Blow it up. Tear it down and start all over again. I'll build me a town I'll be proud to show and I won't change the name to Tobacco Road."

And I think if you're talking about the mood of where people are in this country, a certain group of people, I think that represents their mood because that's what they want to do. You know. They want to tear it down. Blow it up and build again. And I think that in that respect we have to begin to define what it is we want to see done in this country and how that relates to what other people are trying to do in other countries. That's why I think it's important we build relationships with students of the third world and not with governments of the third world. Because I think they have their own internal frustrations in building their countries and inside of those governments are students (although in some respects those governments are healthier than what we have here) struggling even to make those work.

We have to have continuity and I think that's very important.

Now from today's conversation I've pulled out a few things that I think we must begin to think of ourselves as guerrillas. A lot is to be learned from by actions in other countries in past histories. I think we have to build a resistance movement in this country. It's like living in occupied France in World War II. It wasn't an outsider--it's French citizens who tried to bring some semblance of healthiness to their country. We have to begin to define what the resistance is that and what is is we're trying to do in this country.

I don't want to begin to deal with the problem of the group dynamics of SNCC and the dynamics of its history until the many facets of my project and your project or what we didn't do in Albany or what we should've done in Selma in 1962 or whether the Free DC movement is good or bad. Now one of the things we can do as a group is to review where we've been and decide on some kind of continuity as to where we're going. In the Alabama program (I'm sorry Stokely's not here because I think it's important to talk about organizing in the cities plus the question then becomes what do you organize around and what do you organize to do?) Do you have people in jail? Do you bond them out or break them out? The question is legitimate when you talk about raising market system dollars to give back to the market system because of the arrest of your freedom under the system and using a course that will only go so far in the long run. I'm raising these ideas because I think this is where I am and I'm trying to find out in terms of my own relationship with SNCC and its own motion in the future. Because there are groups all over the country who I think are willing to do things like hatchet the system through radical confrontation. There's a group in \_\_\_\_\_ called the X and their program is just demolish the buildings downtown. They have organized programs. They kick in store windows downtown. They don't pay rent where they are, they raise a whole lot of holycost. They go to jail and serve out their time because they haven't been able to deal with the concept --well, you're at war and when you're at war you go get your soldiers and bring them back. You don't compromise off of the esta-



blishment. You be a good boy and you get out. But just in that general phase of three levels, nationalism, community wide action and its many levels, the concept of white organizers actually working in the white community--SNCC is going to really have to deal with that because a lot of whites have talked about it. SDS has talked about it but they ended up in the black community.

We are very small and very invisible--other groups get definition. If we establish a radical plan of motion, other groups will take part in that, but we can remain an independent force. In the Civil Rights movement we all compliment each other, but I don't that CORE, SCLC or NAACP are prepared to say and do the kinds of things we are prepared to say and do. But they are prepared to take on pieces of it.

We really have to begin to understand that market system. I don't raise that in the context of socialism, but we have to point out those things we really don't like and debate about the kinds of things we'd like to see built. We should visually not support them. In Arkansas, Mississippi, everywhere, we are engaged in elections because in those communities it's the only way we can see to mobilize and make a visual attack of the system through the electoral system. But the power of the country is not necessarily there. I think you can educate the communities doing that and maybe you can mobilize the country doing that but I think it's the hidden confrontations that we have to dig out. I might be way off the key but I think that's where we are.

-the beginning-