

July 29

Memo to : SNCC Staff

From: SNCC Communications

For your information, there are enclosed two reports taken from the Los Angeles Times. One is a story on John Lewis's resignation, the other on Stokley.

We will try and send out news reports of interest at least once a week.

Suggestions as to how we can best service SNCC staff will be appreciated.

July 29, 1966
Los Angeles Times (Report)

The following news story appeared in the Los Angeles Times on July 29th, 1966. It is under the line of Jack Nelson of the LA Times, a correspondent in Atlanta.

OUSTED CHAIRMAN TELLS OF NEW SETUP IN SNCC

Militant Lewis deplores shift to "Black Power" and purging of whites from rights group.

Atlanta: It was easy to see why John R. Lewis, deposed head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, could never ride the black Panther Party or cry out for "Black Power". Both the Black Power slogan, and the Black Panther emblem used by SNCC for its all Negro Political Movement were added to scare the hell out of white people Lewis said. No good can come out of it. I agree with Dr. King that racism is implied in the slogan, and what is scaring hell out of the people going to do for Negroes in the long run? he asked.

Lewis, a twenty six year old Negro, and son of a Pike County Alabama farmer spoke softly of his three years as Chairman of SNCC, and his commitment to Dr. King and nonviolence, direct action philosophy, side with King. That he agrees with Dr. King on many things about the civil rights movement is one reason why he is no longer SNCC's Chairman, nor even a staff member. In an interview, Lewis disclosed that his ouster May 14, 1966 was engineered by James Forman, who long has been at odds with Dr. King. The action coincided with the beginning of "Black Power" as SNCC's rallying cry. Forman opposed him, Lewis said, "Because of my connection with SCLC, he and Dr. King just don't get along". (Lewis is on the Board of Directors of Dr. King's SCLC). At the May meeting, SNCC, which in the past has had more white than Negro members, voted to be "Black Staffed, Black Controlled and Black Financed" Lewis said.

White Power Complex

The organization voiced concern in a position paper that if it continued to allow white financial support, it would be intertwined in the tentacles of the white power complex that controls this country. Few whites are left in SNCC Lewis said, and they have practically no influence. Lewis, graduate of a Baptist Theological Seminary and one of the founders of SNCC in April, 1960, is leaving Atlanta to study Philosophy at Fisk University in Nashville. His resignation from SNCC becomes effective today, but he said that he hopes to remain active in the movement.

He was unseated by Stokely Carmichael, 24, a native of the West Indies, who organized SNCC's all Negro political party in Alabama's Black Belt. Since then, Carmichael, a fiery speaker who uses phrases with anti-white overtones, has been the organizations chief spokesman.

Most Powerful

But Lewis said Forman, 38, a former Chicago schoolteacher who has lead SNCC in some of its toughest civil rights struggles in the South remains the "most powerful" figure in the organization. "Forman can cut off Black Power just like that" Lewis said, snapping his fingers.

Lewis said Forman decided last May to direct operations from behind the scenes rather than run for re-election for Executive Secretary, a post he has held since 1961. Mrs. Ruby Doris Robinson, 23, was elected Executive Secretary, but Lewis said she has little influence.

Recent Worries

One of the recent worries of many longtime SNCC supporters has been whether the organization is increasingly having to rely on the support of far left radicals, a problem that also bothers Lewis. But what concerns Lewis most about SNCC's new direction is that it is alienating white supporters of the civil rights movement and dividing the Negro community.

"Many whites are having second thoughts. They are bewildered" Lewis said. "They don't understand the talk of Black Power. Whites who had identified with the oppressed Negro begin now to identify now with other whites who seem threatened by the talk of Black Power."

In the past, the movement has been conveyed as well disciplined and nonviolent. It appealed to millions around the country and around the world. It was dignified, peaceful and orderly and it exposed the demagogues. "Now some whites are afraid that elements in the movement are falling into the same trap and using the methods of demagogues. They see evidence of racists and black nationalists gaining influence." Lewis said "Within SNCC there is no real consensus on Black Power". We had a heated argument over it in the Atlanta office the other day. Even some who said they would support the concept said they would not use the phrase".

Luci's Wedding

In another recent debate, he said, he argued against picketing Luci Johnson's wedding August 6th. Some SNCC members want to picket the wedding, he said, in hopes of embarrassing the United States on the 21st Anniversary of the Atomic Bomb attack on Hiroshima. Lewis called the idea "absurd".

Carmichael and other SNCC officials have made the recent remarks about President Johnson's part in the Civil Rights struggle. But Lewis said, "The President has made real attempts to help solve some of the basic problems of the Negro in the South". Lewis said that Mr. Johnson, in his voting rights speech in March, 1965, (during which he said, "We Shall Overcome") identified with the movement as no other President had done".

Lewis has not always had such kind words for the Federal Government's part in the Civil Rights struggle. His prepared speech for ceremonies, concluding the massive "March for Jobs and Freedom" on Washington, August 29, 1963, was such an angry attack on the Government that the liberal Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, Patrick O'Boyle, refused to participate in the program until Lewis agreed to tone it down.

Even the unaltered version assailed the government for lax enforcement of existing laws and failure to enact new legislation to protect Negroes and civil rights demonstrators who were beaten and jailed in the South. Lewis knew the story well, for many of the victims were SNCC workers, often called the "Shock Troops" of the movement. One of the deleted passages of Lewis's speech demanded, "I want to know which side is the Federal Government on?" The remark seems mild in the context of today's civil rights movement.

Dramatic Changes

Reflecting on his six years with SNCC, Lewis said that dramatic changes had occurred because of the movement and federal intervention. "You had segregation across the board before SNCC and the Sit-Ins of 1960," he said. "But segregation is no longer the order of the day in transportation or public accommodations. As late as 1965 there was massive police action against the movement in Selma, Ala. and there are still problems here, but nothing like the opposition the movement once had."

Lewis, a veteran of forty arrests, and several beatings by police, (he suffered a skull fracture when Governor George C. Wallace's troops beat back demonstrators on the Edmund Pettis Bridge prior to the Selma to Montgomery voting rights march last year) said most Negroes "will never identify with black nationalists and other black reactionaries who talk loud and use cutting words like "Black Power", but also never engaged in confrontations to bring about change." But he added, "If the nonviolent movement fails to attract the support necessary to solve some of the Negroes problems in housing and jobs, then we are in serious trouble and the movement can degenerate into something else." "And right now the whole movement, not just SNCC, has got to do something. The image of the movement is not good."

LOS ANGELES TIMES ARTICLE
April 29, 1966

"BLACK POWER" ADVOCATE SEEKS CHICAGO BACKING

Leader of SNCC attacks whites, says he hopes his group can work with Muslims

By Line...D.J.R. Bruckner

CHICAGO—Stokely Carmichael circled around Chicago Thursday tossing out encouragement to "Black Power" advocates and sought support from various groups to take the place of the white support he and SNCC deliberately rejected last May. What he received from two rallies and half a dozen meetings with local radical groups was mostly applause, without an accompanying commitment or check. However, he took a significant step along his path toward Negro separatism, saying he had asked for a meeting with Elijah Muhammed, leader of the Black Muslims. "We would like to work with the Muslims," Carmichael said. He claimed he has corresponded with Muhammed and expects to meet with him shortly. But the office of the Muslim leader here refused to comment, beyond saying that no meeting has been set up.

Strong Separatist. The Muslims teach a severe form of Black Separatism, refusing in any way to recognize the principle of cooperation with whites. Carmichael, at a press conference and in several rambling speeches during the day, moved closer to that concept.

"We are waging a psychological war," he told an audience in suburban Evanston. "We will make our own plans as Black People and then let the whites decide to react anyway they like."

Did he exclude anyone from his "Black Power" structure? "Yes, Whites," he said. "Well, we would have to allow some whites who are legitimately appointed to represent Black interest, such as in the NAACP, but we want a Black Movement entirely. We want the cooperation of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and of Dr. Martin Luther King and of the Muslims and everyone else who is Black." (RAM has been described by the FBI as a militant, secret organization that follows the Chinese Communist line.) He said RAM, Dr. King, the Muslims and other Negro groups have been invited to attend a National conference on Black Power to be held in Washington on Labor Day weekend under the sponsorship of Rep. Adam Clayton Powell. (D-N.Y.) Dr. King's office here said no decision has been made on whether he will attend. Carmichael's visit to the city was billed as part of a National tour of Negro ghettos, but his activity was concentrated on the South Side, not on the West Side where four days of rioting occurred in the Negro Ghetto earlier this month.

View on riots. Does Carmichael approve of violence, for instance in the form of riots? "I do not call them riots," he replied. "I call them rebellions. It is not for me to endorse, condone or condemn them. It seems to me that the people of a community have to decide how to overcome their own oppressions, and if rebellion is the way, then that is the way and it is alright with me."

He is willing to acknowledge that Dr. King, the patron of nonviolence who strongly disapproves of riots is still "The center of the black movement." But he adds that any effort to work out a common ground between him and Dr. King "Is our problem, not that of the whites. The whites have shown that they are opposed to equality (Negro) entirely." Carmichael made it clear he was attacking all whites including those who have been strongly identified with the civil rights movement in Government. He specifically attacked Senator Robert Kennedy (D-NY) as "So called Liberal Bobby Kennedy who tries to define our language for us." And he said his purpose was "To get the whites off our backs. We do not want them around. Sure, we are losing contributions and so-called support. Well, we do not want it from whites who are going to try to tell us what to do." In his effort now an attempt to take over the leadership of the entire Negro movement, whether you call it the civil rights movement or the "Black Power" movement or a rebellion? "You see, that is what you do. You play with words." He snapped at a reporter. "No one is bidding for leadership of the movement. We are trying to get rid of the whites in this thing."