

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.