

GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZING PROJECT
G.R.O.P.

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Since its beginning SNCC has recognized the necessity of organizing in the white community in order to change its racist character and produce a firm basis on which poor people can cooperate.

For a long time SNCC tried to change the white man in the South by appealing to his conscience through the use of nonviolence and Christian love. This did not work because the man didn't have a conscience or, at least, he had something which he valued more than conscience -- his whiteness. So the poor whiteman in the South has always been put in a trick bag of accepting "whiteness" rather than demanding for himself the basic rights of a human being to decent food, housing, medical care, education and a real voice in the decisions that affect him.

The poor white, then, has always been used by the power structure to keep the black man in his place. (Even in slavery times the patrol which chased runaways and generally tried to keep the blacks in line, were made up of poor whites.) For this privilege he has accepted poverty, because "We may be poor and hungry, our teeth are falling out and the house is falling in, but at least we better in than the niggers -- we white!

If the poor white in the South can ever be brought to realize that the power structure makes him think this in order to keep him from seeing his common cause with Negroes there will be a revolution in the South.

What is needed is a project which will appeal not to the poor whites (non-existent) conscience but to his selfish self-interest. I propose, then, a Grass Roots Organizing Project (G.R.O.P.) in the South.

If the reason for SNCC's retreat or withdrawal into the black community is because SNCC people believe that no real change can take place in this society, then there is no need to organize in the white community.

If SNCC believes, however, that radical change can be brought about, it must recognize that blacks alone cannot make a revolution in this country. Poor white people must be organized.

According to SNCC present policy it looks to an eventual coalition with white groups and at this point no one else is really organizing whites. If we really believe that change can come about then we know that whites must change and to change they must be organized. SNCC could wait for someone else to come along and do this job, but I propose that a few of us take it on.

Grass Roots Organizing Project (G.R.O.P.)

I. General Purpose

To begin the serious long-range effort to really organize the white people of the South into a force equal in strength and similar in commitment to the Movement now flourishing in the black community with the idea of linking up with the present movement in order to move forward together in the task of creating community-run

communities.

II. First Steps: Beginning the Project.

A. Resources

1. Access to the facilities of the Atlanta office for printing, photography, mimeographing, mailings, etc.
2. Access to the facilities of SCEF contacts and possibly some money.
3. For the major financing it will have to devote some time in the beginning for some special fund-raising for the project using sources that are generally outside the regular SNCC sources. For instance, it will have to beg a car from somewhere.

III. Project timetable.

- A. Raise money. Two months -- January-February.
- B. Move Zellner family to South (Mobile, Nashville, other) end of February.
- C. Travel, exploration, recruiting. It will take, I imagine, from four to six months to get the feel of the various local situations in the South in order to determine where the organizing possibilities are and what kind of people (students, farmers, factory workers) are available for working in local communities. This will mean going to campuses to find interested white Southern students who are willing to work in their local communities. It will mean renewing old contacts and making new ones among ministers, teachers, relatives, farmers, miners, old friends, unemployed people, city dwellers, hill dwellers, country dwellers, etc.

The time schedule for this period must be flexible so that I will be able, when a promising situation arises, to follow each possibility for organizing as far as I can take it. In other words, I don't think that on a project like this that you can just choose a town or county blind and decide to organize there. Promising circumstances must be found and followed as far as they go. One of these may become the project, the one which may serve as a model for future projects or serve as a base from which to organize other areas.

basis of someone or some small group going forth to found a "project". Many times they have not panned out but many times they have. SNCC's organizing philosophy, then, has been "get started and see what happens."

IV. Long-Range Possibilities.

A. I might find some people who want to work in their own community and who are able to support themselves in some manner through part-time jobs or a team effort of some working to make money while others work on the project. These folks might set up freedom schools in the white community to serve as community action and political education centers. If things progress rapidly a few of these schools may be set up for this summer in one or two communities.

B. In Birmingham the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers have recently joined with the Steelworkers Union to form a single union for steel workers in Alabama. This combines some of the worst racists in the South with some of the most progressive and radical-minded whites who were long-time members of the Mine-Mill Union.

This situation might provide an opportunity with the help of the former Mine-Mill people to set up a freedom school or community center in Birmingham to reach these workers. We would concentrate not on the stone racists but on those who might be salvageable.

C. A rich chicken farmer I know in New Haven has said he would put up the money to buy land for a chicken farm and would volunteer time to help people set up a co-op. This kind of enterprise traditionally is one which gives real economic and therefore political independence. Once it gets going the co-op would be a center where people from surrounding areas could gather for discussion and it could become the inspiration for the founding of similar co-ops by people from the area.