

This started out to be three papers. So, for the simple favor of reducing it to one, I owe me at least a debt of gratitude. But it occurred to me (as I was faced with the prospect of mimeographing three papers) that it all tied in together. So.....

First, I came out of the Knoxville labor union workshop with a burning message for "us". I had gone to the workshop with a likewise burning question. To wit: what happened to the labor movement, once The Radical Movement in this country, that it had now become so largely swallowed up by the establishment, and what could we do to prevent it happening to us? In one instance after another, as we studied the history of various unions or segments of the labor movement, the answer to both questions leapt out at me. And it was this: The unions had allowed the control to slip out of the hands of the rank-and-file (translate: "local people") and to the hands of the professional organizers (read: "staff") and elected officials (read: "nationally known and 'respected' leaders"). AND/OR they had paid any attention whatsoever to rebaiting. (Read: again.)

The second thing that I wanted to scream about is our sources of support. Now, apart from the fact that much of our present support is obtained under false pretenses, many of our present sources are unrepentable. And they coincide, and that is no coincidence. Because right now we are getting money from a lot of nice liberal individuals, organizations, foundations, etc., under the pretense that we are registering voters, conducting freedom schools, building community centers, working for "integration", or whatever else we tell the public and our loyal supporters that we are doing. Now, there may be something to be said for taking these unlightened folk for all we can take them for. But what scares me is what happens when they catch on? And what really upsets me is that we do not have the support of the people we really are on our side. Because they are the people who are going to count when the going really gets rough. Which it will, and soon. Then all of our nice liberal sources will dry up but fast. And we, in the meantime, will not have built up support - financial and otherwise where it counts. This certainly means the people in the northern ghettos (anyone care to calculate the possibility of, say, 25¢ per week from every employed person in Harlem?). But it also means the people in the South. They want to help, and I have found that when they discover that we are in financial trouble their reaction (like that of any good friend) is: "But we didn't you tell me?" And this whether it is an individual who is broke or whether it is a project or the whole COFO operation, or whatever. And another thing that is being missed here is the possibilities for organization that grass-roots fund-raising offers.

An example: A lady in Jackson called me to ask about the newspaper story that COFO was broke. Sure, I told her, that's no news. She asked me how it was effecting people in the Jackson office. I told her that, for one thing the Freedom Houses were being eliminated and a number of people would soon be homeless. She said that she would locate housing for them in the community. A little later she called me back to say that she had been thinking about it and that she thought that the families who would be willing to take the people into their homes were not those who could afford to do so. She said that she planned to get some people together (please note: one group of people organized) to collect money, on a regular basis, from the bourgeois types who would be glad to get off with only giving money, especially in a way that could not be traced. This money would, in turn, be used to pay room and board in the homes which would be found to be willing (another group organized) to take in COFO workers.

To another lady I confided the news that a number of people were not getting support of any kind. I explained that I get \$10 a week from 10 people in Ohio and asked her if she thought that people in the Jackson-Tougaloo area would be interested in forming similar groups. She said "yes", but added that she thought that it would be better to have groups of 40 people contributing \$1 per month, since that would involve not only more people but also some people to whom \$1 a week might be a bit steep, but who would like to give a quarter, especially if one of their neighbors collected it regularly and if they sometimes got to meet the person to whom they were supporting, have him or her over to dinner, etc. (Get the picture, or would you like to hear some of the more radical things these ladies come up with?)

Now this leads me directly into the question of SNCC staff salaries. Because the support group idea was originally conceived (by me anyway, though others may have had the same idea) as a means of insuring the payment of staff salaries. In the fall of 1963 I proposed the idea under the name of "Circles of Forty" - to SNCC and tried to promote it in various places, chiefly national women's organizations. The first group that I know about was formed after a small notice appeared in the Newsletter of the Washington, D.C., Women Strike for Peace. The spearhead of the group was Mrs. Ann Harris and the first recipient was Emma Bell. Then, last summer, other groups were formed. I know about the Oxford (Ohio) Friends of the Mississippi Freedom Project because my support comes from one of its groups. There are probably others. But all of their support is used to give subsistence to "COFO volunteers", and not to pay SNCC staff salaries. Which leads to another point.

Why must SNCC pay the salaries of its staff? Why can't support groups do the job? And get to the larger point: why has it worked out to the situation we now have, in which staff equals check (or check equals staff, whichever it is)? Why should salary be the criterion in deciding who is fully "in the family"? Why should we allow our lack of funds to prevent us from accepting a staff member? And why, on the other hand, should everyone on the staff get a pay check? There are people who don't need money - either because they have it or because they just don't use it.

In "A Band of Brothers, A Circle of Trust", the paper he presented at Waveland, Jim Fox tells about the movement of organizers that he had in pre-SNCC days created in a novel:

"The second distinctive feature was that the organizers would work on a sacrificial basis. This was deliberate. They would work for only what they needed because of the corruptive effect of money on this society. If people were working out of dedication, not for material gain, I felt the group would be strong and incorruptible and it would be almost impossible for people to come in and steal them away from certain ideals by offers of large sums of money."

It is also apparent that in the society we oppose money puts strings on people. It is generally conceded there also that "you get what you pay for" and that the only way to get a job done is to pay somebody to do it. We should be trying to break down this attitude, not supporting it.

Now, I am not suggesting that anyone is likely to want to work for SNCC because of the fabulous salary offered. But I do think that it is likely that people are sometimes put on staff chiefly because they need subsistence. This is more likely to be true in the case of local southern kids whom staff people feel may in time become valuable to the Movement but who are likely to leave the South in search of work or to take some kind of full-time job in order to help their families, if they do not get a salary from SNCC. The other side of this coin is the people who never get considered for staff because they have money from home or from a support group, or who are supported by the local community. Now the trouble with this is that the local young person may or may not be really committed to SNCC ideals and may or may not in time become a real part of the staff. Would that it would work out in all cases. (Would that everyone everywhere were a part of this community of ours. But, at the present time this is just not so.) On the other hand, there are people very much committed to the Movement, whose commitment is a lifetime and total one and whose only community, whose only family, whose only nation is the Movement, and, specifically, that part of the Movement whose only visible manifestation is that beloved bundle of contradictions called "SNCC", and who yet are kept somehow on the fringes, allowed to work, but not quite to belong (The only thing worse is not being allowed to work, and this has happened, too.)

I suggest that we re-evaluate the criteria for "who is on staff". First, may we know what, if there be any standard ones, are the qualifications presently required? We should all know this. Who decides? and how? And how is one dropped from the staff? At Waveland there was an opinion voiced that only the staff should have the final word on separating anyone from itself. Perhaps the same should hold true on joining the staff. The suggestion in the first instance was that a full staff meeting should be a court of final appeal. In the second it could serve in the same fashion, with some provision being made for the staff to get acquainted with the person desiring to join it who might be unknown to many of the members, something like serving for a time in the Freedom Force. This does not mean that no one could be hired in any other way. But if anyone felt that he should be on staff and could not get accepted by the personnel department, he would have a means of appeal. The kind of informal and nebulous dropping from staff which has occurred in the past should also be eliminated. If the salary criterion is dropped, this kind of thing will become less of a possibility since the end of an assignment would not mean the end of affiliation with the body.

This then, is my proposal: consider having all staff salaries paid by support groups and involving people in the communities where we work in these groups; and have a serious discussion and some kind of decision, however flexible, on what the criteria for staff membership should be. There should also be serious consideration of the idea that full staff alone should have the final word on who may join it and who is involuntarily separated from it. And this, of course, includes a full and frank discussion by the entire body in a session where the person making his appeal and all interested parties, whether for or against, be present and speak with complete honesty and openness. We should be one body in which decisions affecting people's lives are not made behind closed doors and where diplomatic or "kind" reasons are never given in place of the truth. And this, above all, is the place for "consensus" decisions. No cold, numerical vote should decide these questions.

A final word:

Don't think that it is only my own problems that I am trying to solve, or that I shall drop this if I am reinstated to staff. Because if nothing more far-reaching and lasting than that comes of this, then I shall really feel that I have been badly treated for these last several months. But if my experience of what can happen to people because of the present set-up can serve to make us all aware of its faults and cause us to want to do something about it, then I shall consider it time well spent.

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