

NEWSLETTER FROM THE NEW YORK OFFICE OF SNCC
October, 1966

This is our first newsletter in several months. We hope to get one out regularly now, and hope you will find it of interest. This bulletin will cover developments since our staff meeting last May at which new officers were elected.

Among the highlights of SNCC's work over the summer were: the Julian Bond campaign and other activity in Atlanta; the Alabama and Mississippi elections, the Mississippi March, expansion in the North, efforts around the CDGM (Child Development Group of Mississippi) program, anti-Vietnam war activity -- and finally, efforts to rebut the distorted press image of SNCC. We'll discuss some of these in detail, and then give a partial schedule of future events as well as a list of available reprints and other literature.

NOTE: Because the list of persons receiving these bulletins is two years old and may be outdated, and because of the cost of such mailing, we ask that everyone who wishes to continue receiving them PLEASE NOTIFY THE NEW YORK OFFICE AND SEND \$1.00 TO COVER EXPENSES.

SOUTHERN PROJECTS

In Atlanta, Julian Bond campaigned for election in the Democratic primary on September 14. He was elected and will thus run again in November for an office he has already won twice.

On September 6-8, SNCC workers (among them, Chairman Stokely Carmichael) were arrested on charges including insurrection -- which carries the death penalty in Georgia -- and inciting to riot. This was the result of a disturbance reported with great inaccuracy. SNCC's full account of what actually happened is available on request; the important points are:

- 1) On September 6, an Atlanta detective shot and wounded 25-year old Harold Prather, whom he suspected of stealing a car. According to one witness, he was about to kill Prather as he lay on a porch with a bullet in the head, but his gun was empty. Prather, in fact, was driving a car borrowed from a friend.
- 2) People of this impoverished, ghetto community, many of whom had witnessed the brutal sequence of events, gathered angrily. Some of them telephoned the SNCC office and asked help in preparing a protest demonstration. Carmichael went to the scene, spoke briefly, and left; he did not return. While people milled about before the 4 p.m. demonstration, police filled the area. Mayor Ivan Allen arrived to "calm the crowd" but refused to listen to their complaints. When he was booed down, Allen ordered the police to "tear gas them or tear those houses down." They fired guns and tear-gas cannisters indiscriminately, often into homes; they seized and beat black people in the area at random.
- 3) The charges against Carmichael of inciting to riot and rioting were later dropped, revealing that even the city of Atlanta knew it could not make them stick. The charge of insurrection against SNCC worker Bill Ware still stands.
- 4) SNCC has brought a suit to enjoin city and county officials from using unconstitutional statutes which were the basis for the insurrection and riot charges.

The current issue of the SOUTHERN PATRIOT carries a story on these events with statements by eye-witnesses, including a radio reporter who happened to be on the scene, which confirm the above.

In Alabama, attention is focused on the elections November 8 with Lowndes County the center of activity. Funds have been raised in New York to enable 16 persons from the area to go down as poll-watchers. SNCC workers concentrated on registering new voters up to the deadline, which fell on September 24. Unfortunately SNCC has had only 3-4 workers in the area; lack of funds has also limited their ability to move around the county and circulate information.

People are still living in tents in Lowndes and Greene Counties; they face a long, cold winter. Two of the tents were destroyed by fire in September.

There have been numerous shootings in honor of the upcoming elections. Black candidates are also being contested on their qualifications; both black candidates for state representative have been disqualified. In Dallas County there is an "anti-panther movement" within the black middle-class community; the townspeople (Selma) are influenced by it while the rural black people tend to favor the Freedom Organization.

In Arkansas, SNCC has been working in four new counties of the southeastern section as well as former areas of activity, mainly on programs of voter registration, running for office, school boycotts and action against police brutality. In School Board elections late last month, 7 black candidates won seats in three towns (none of them with black majorities). For these elections, black poll-watchers were employed in some areas; in one town, Marvelle (Phillips County), there were black clerks and judges at the polls for the first time since Reconstruction. This was accomplished by utilizing the Republican Party, which has no white support in that district. Black consciousness of the need for unity is reportedly growing in Marvelle, where an order to desegregate schools was won by a 75% successful school boycott.

In the town of Gould (85% black), a Negro woman has filed to run for Mayor. On September 16, SNCC worker Robert Cableton was arrested and severely beaten in Gould.

In Wabbaseka, black people have recently begun to organize and decided to run candidates for the City Council. Most of the black candidates with whom SNCC has been working in Arkansas are independents.

In Mississippi, the terror and police brutality which made headlines in September, when black children attempted to attend "white" schools in Grenada, has continued unnoticed. There have been many incidents in various parts of the state: shootings, beatings, and a bizarre attempt by a white man in West Point to sell poisoned watermelons ("these are only for niggers", he said). The most promising development is in Sunflower County, where a Federal Court earlier this year ordered new elections; the state's suit to void this order was recently rejected and elections will proceed within the next few months. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer plans to run for Mayor of Ruleville.

In late September, Mississippi issued new regulations for the nominating of candidates for the Senate and Congress, which require a far greater number of petitions.

VIETNAM WAR AND DRAFT

Across the nation, SNCC has participated in many activities related to the Vietnam war and the draft -- an issue of great concern not only to the nation as a whole and black people in particular, but also one which directly affects many SNCC staff members.

In Atlanta, SNCC conducted a series of demonstrations at the induction center which led to the arrest on August 18 of 12 workers from SNCC's Atlanta project and local people. One of them was charged with insurrection. Dwight Williams of SNCC was beaten and others were brutalized by the police in various ways. Ten members of the group were jailed for 2 months and denied the opportunity to be released on bail, supposedly because the judge was unavailable to sign necessary papers. On October 10, a suit was filed on their behalf claiming cruel and unusual treatment in jail.

In Alabama, Samuel Schutz -- who has been working with SNCC -- was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment for failure to report for the draft.

In New York, SNCC actively supported the "Fort Hood 3" and other anti-Vietnam war protest. It has also worked with a recently formed group called Black Women Enraged. In addition to protesting the draft, these two groups (together with CORE) held a demonstration at the U.S. Mission to the U.N. to protest the International Court's decision on Southwest Africa.

OTHER URBAN PROGRAMS

In areas of the North where SNCC is working, such as Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, New Jersey, efforts are being made to build independent political organizations in the ghetto, using the black panther as a symbol. SNCC's impact upon black communities has greatly increased over the past few months.

In Philadelphia, 3500 persons attended a rally at which Stokely Carmichael spoke. The trumped-up charges against SNCC of possession of dynamite still stand in that city and incidents of police brutality against SNCC workers -- which have been going on all year -- continue. But if anything they have increased unity in parts of the black community. SNCC has opened a Freedom School in Germantown as well as two new offices in other parts of Philadelphia.

NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

In the New York area, SNCC has concentrated on the issues of schools, welfare, and the anti-poverty program. We have actively supported the struggle for control by parents of children at I.S. 201 and other schools. Bill Hall, SNCC Field Secretary in Harlem (address: P.O. Box 768) has been working with the parents for the last two months. SNCC advocates parental control and genuine participation in school administration, and maintains that this issue must remain paramount.

In New Jersey, SNCC Field Secretary Bob Fullilove has been working with local groups in Jersey City and Newark mainly on issues related to the anti-poverty program and welfare. Demonstrations were held in September at OEO headquarters in New York City by the Ad Hoc Committee for a Better Anti-Poverty Program (Jersey City) to demand changes which would create genuine control by the people of the anti-poverty program.

PRESS SURVEY - May 17-August 17, 1966

(based on the national news magazines, the New York dailies and several syndicated columns)

A survey of this period shows how the press cultivated a rising hysteria among whites; how distortions were irresponsibly repeated and thus mushroomed. The pattern of attacks on SNCC suggests a certain manipulation by the powers-that-be and by reactionary forces seeking to take advantage of the climate.

This is the general chronology (dates are those of publication):

- May 17 NY TIMES breaks story on SNCC elections. Jim Forman, and especially John Lewis, projected as "not non-militant but did keep a working relationship with the established coalition of Negro leaders" and the Administration.
- May 24 SNCC announces it will not attend White House Conference.
- May 28 Dr. King attacks Carmichael as "separatist."
- June 9 "Black Power" is heard as slogan of the Mississippi March. Charges of racism reach peak. SNCC refuses to make March a demonstration for the 1966 Civil Rights Act, and says that bill is unnecessary -- there's enough legislation.
- July 1 John Lewis resigns.
- July 5-8 At NAACP convention, with Humphrey leading the way, Roy Wilkins says black power is black death. Also charges SNCC with mishandling of funds, etc. But final resolution is modified, indicating that even the NAACP leadership doesn't want total alienation from ghetto youth.

CORE convention asserts black power.

- July 9 King calls for summit conference to repair rift in movement.
- July 14-22 Press full of stories about declining funds as whites withdraw support from SNCC (NY TIMES, NY POST, WALL STREET JOURNAL)
- July 24 Stories on links with nationalists; Carmichael calls for unity talks with Muslims.
- July 24 to late August Violence in Northern cities at a peak; SNCC and CORE call for "Black Power" blamed.

- Aug. 5 NY TIMES publishes SNCC paper said to be key in evolution of black power; plus Carmichael "I don't trust any whites" profile.
- Aug. 9 House of Representatives approves amendment to 1966 Civil Rights Act which would make it a crime for persons to use inter-state travel to foment riots.
- Aug. 12 Dyanmite "found" in Philadelphia SNCC meeting place.
- Aug. 16 HUAC begins hearings in D.C. of subpoenaed anti-Vietnam war workers on Pool Act (aiding and abetting the enemy).

SPECIFIC AREAS OF DISTORTION AND ERROR:

- A. The press stories up to the Mississippi March contained 3 major areas of error and distortion:
- 1) Misinterpretation of the changes in officers. Gene Roberts in the NY TIMES saw not only Lewis' replacement by Carmichael but also Forman's replacement by Robinson as evidence of take-over by super-militants. This was picked up by the other media, which apparently never bothered to check. As late as July 1, the TIMES was still saying "it has never been completely clear whether he (Forman) left against his will." There are other minor errors about the staff meeting, such as that it was "secret" (TIME magazine).
 - 2) Statements that whites are going to be or are being "purged" (TIME): later reappeared in WASHINGTON POST and NY TIMES. In the POST, a column by William Raspberry (Negro journalist) was headlined "Why SNCC Demoted Its Top Whites" -- but the column itself never touched on this subject.
 - 3) SNCC's "new direction" seen as complete break with past. NY TIMES of May 22 says:

"...The new philosophy is a major development in the civil rights movement because it stands in such sharp contrast to the philosophy of the committee when it was organized in 1960 by Southern students -- both Negro and white. Then the committee dreamed of integration as an end in itself..."
 - 4) Carmichael statement "integration is irrelevant" was quoted everywhere -- incompletely. Actual statement: "integration is irrelevant when initiated only by blacks".

These early stories emphasized SNCC's "black panther" program, its "boycott" of Alabama elections and especially its distrust of the Democratic Party (the second most widely quoted Carmichael remark was "asking Negroes to become Democrats is like asking Jews to join the Nazi Party"). Then came SNCC's rejection of the White House Conference and the 1966 Civil Rights Act. Our position on the 1966 Act so enraged Congressman Emmanuel Celler that he said on two public occasions (including one radio program): "I'm for birth control -- if they'll make it retroactive to include Stokely (sic) Carmichael."

All this set the scene for the next stage of press attacks: charges of racism and the whipping-up of "white back-lash." King's criticism of SNCC as separatist played right into this, as did John Lewis' statements.

- B. During the March, wide publicity given to Carmichael calling for black power; Willie Ricks "calling for white blood" (he actually said that if black blood was going to be spilt, white blood would be spilt -- the doctrine of self-defense, not unilateral aggression). The press portrayed SNCC as having suddenly dropped non-violence, again picturing us as having broken with the past. (NY TIMES, July 8: Roy Wilkins quoted as denouncing "the SNCC and CORE modification of the doctrine of non-violence..." Such charges were published without correction: another example of how press published second-hand comment and thus mushroomed distortions.

The NEW YORK POST carried a series of articles on the March by Pete Hamill which reached a new high in malice and irresponsible reporting. Hamill's charges of racism, unsubstantiated by any direct quotes, were repeated by former SNCC friend Ted Poston

in another article; he took Hamill's word for it without checking. This was typical of the press in general.

The press labelled black power "anti-white," "racism-in-reverse," "black supremacy," "black nationalism," "separatism," or else condemned it as an impractical go-it-alone policy which denies necessity for coalitions. The NEW REPUBLIC and NEW YORK POST claimed SNCC is not interested in coalitions with poor whites, although Carmichael and others in SNCC have said that is the only likely coalition and SNCC wants to help organize poor whites.

C. Following the Mississippi March, distortions continued and took on a new dimension:

- 1) The NY TIMES Story on August 6 stating that position paper on black power was key in its evolution. In same issue, profile of Stokely Carmichael in which he reportedly stated at a meeting that "he had never known a white person he could trust...not one." A tape recording of that meeting reveals that the discussion actually went as follows:

QUESTION: I think it's important, though -- the more basic question of whether you are, in fact, responsible when you might not like to be responsible. In other words, a lot of whites would like to say, "No, I'm liberal, I'm not those people." And it seems to me that SNCC is rightly saying to them, "Yes, you're responsible and you have to answer for those people." It seems to me that the underdeveloped peoples of the world might very well say to Negro members of SNCC: You might want to say "I'm not American, I have nothing to do with this society," but they might hold you to that responsibility.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The only thing we can say to them is that we spoke up. When Vietnam is twenty years hence, all I can say to my children is I did not have much power, but I told them I would have nothing to do with it. I spoke out, now. I didn't wait until Germany destroyed 6 million Jews to become liberal. And if there are good white people, we are looking for them to speak out. That's the old argument about the good whites in the South -- well, damn it where are they? I've been here six years and I can't find one. Now don't tell me about them because the old white liberal slogan is, "All that is necessary for evil to prosper is for good men to say nothing." And, baby, it's been prospering a long time.

QUESTION (a white man): Are you serious when you say you can't find one?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I'm looking for one...

The whole tone and meaning of this exchange was thus very different in reality -- yet the TIMES refused to publish our letter correcting the account, on the grounds that our version of what happened was not sufficiently in conflict with the TIMES' version.

- 2) Numerous press stories reporting charges that SNCC was responsible for wave of violence in cities, accompanied by editorials based on these charges without verification. SNCC and Stokely personally became responsible for every Molotov cocktail from New York to San Francisco.

When the 1966 Civil Rights Act failed to pass, Johnson is quoted (NY POST) as blaming SNCC. At this point, from the viewpoint of much of the press -- and therefore most Americans -- SNCC is a racist organization responsible for the "white backlash" which is preventing liberal Democrats from doing all the good things they want to do. If it weren't for SNCC, the press suggests, this would be a fine country.

PARTIAL SCHEDULE OF FUTURE EVENTS

- Oct. 30 - - - David Susskind Show with Stokely Carmichael
- Nov. 1-8 - - Franz Lee, South African leader of the black freedom movement (called Unity Movement) in New York. For further information, call the Alexander Defense Committee (873 Broadway).
- Nov. 20 - - - Dancing and entertainment at Small's; sponsored by Mrs. Julie Belafonte. Admission: \$10 per person.
- Dec. 22 - - - Jazz Concert at Village Theatre. Carmichael to speak.
- Feb. 20, 1967 SNCC Photo Show opens at the Countee Cullen Library (Schomburg Collection of the New York Public Library, 104 West 136th St. This will be a revised and updated version of the photo show which opened in New York in July, 1965; it is now available for bookings.

REPRINTS AND LITERATURE

Now Available from the New York office:

- 1) Reprint of article by Lerone Bennett in EBONY on black power and Stokely.
- 2) Reprints of article by Stokely Carmichael in THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS. Full text or excerpts.
- 3) New general brochure on SNCC. 12pp., illustrated.
- 4) Reprint of advertisement in NY TIMES by black ministers on black power.
- 5) THE FREEDOM SCHOOL POETRY BOOK. 48 pp. of poems by Mississippi children. \$1.50 per copy.
- 6) I PLAY FLUTE. Poems by Jane Stenbridge, former SNCC worker. \$1.50 per copy.

Forthcoming items of interest:

- 1) Article by Stokely Carmichael in THE MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW
- 2) Tracy Sugarman's book (Nov. 14) A STRANGER AT THE GATE. Personal accounts of Mississippi in 1964 and 1965, plus over 70 drawings by the author. Available from Hill & Wang, \$5.95.

HELP WANTED IN THE NEW YORK OFFICE!

It's zip-coding season, and we need help urgently. There is also much work to be done on the mailing list. Typists and non-typists welcomed.