

rock

bottom

FOREWORD

As many of you recall, last May at Kingston Springs when I resigned as Executive Secretary, I said among other things that I wanted time to write, to discuss, to analyze and to reflect on our experiences.

Since Peg Leg Bates, I have had many conversations with various members of the staff and the Central Committee. The Chairman has asked me to serve as an Organizational Secretary. I accepted this responsibility with the understanding that I would concentrate on the internal education of us. But in order to make my job easier and to begin the systematic development of an internal education program, we must have an educational journal where things are written so that discussions can proceed in an orderly fashion from which we can learn and grow.

It is for this reason that this Journal has been prepared. It will come out at least once a month or more depending upon the volume of articles. To the degree that we discuss, read and re-read the articles, search for answers, examine and criticize, write responses and original papers -- to that degree, the Journal will have meaning. Everyone is seriously urged to respond not only to the first article but to others that will appear. I have written the present one in order to get the ball rolling. Already some people on the staff are preparing papers for the Journal. There is a wealth of existing material and I intend to answer many of the questions raised in this paper.

Your cooperation, assistance, your efforts in discussing what's in the Journal -- not only with staff people but those with whom we work, suggestions for improvement, your good will and sanction, are eagerly sought.

Jim

Introduction

Throughout my history with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, there have been various discussions about the importance of an education program for the members of the organization. At some time or another, this person or that one has assumed the responsibility for working on this program or aspects of it. It goes without saying that each day we work we engage in various forms of political education. However, there still has not been a systematic attempt to educate ourselves; to train new members; to instill a sense of the history of the organization, its objectives, successes and failures; to discuss and analyze many events occurring in the world.

I assume some responsibility for the failure to implement this internal education program. It was a mistake always to give in to the demands of the moment and not insist in a more active manner that we create and implement a program for the intellectual and political development of our staff. My present evaluation stems from observing and participating in the effects of the failure to do this, from my own development, and from accepting the criticism of many who have been crippled by the lack of an internal education program. Without question, every time we allowed a new member to join our staff without undergoing some indoctrination program we were contributing to misunderstanding, suspicion, ill-will, wasted effort and time lost.

The lack of an internal education program has been complicated by the nature of who we were and what we were working for. We have today and have had in the past people within the organization who are on many different levels of experience, who come from

different backgrounds, who range in their educational experience from some who just can read to others who are highly skilled readers. Lacking a systematic education program, staff members have had to stumble upon certain political information, and even aspects of African or Afro-American history, which other staff members had when they came to the organization. People on the staff of the organization have worked their one, two or three years and moved on. Others have just entered. Some have stayed. Some have left and returned.

Definitions of our goals have varied and still do vary from individual to individual, from this group of people to that group, from one period to another. However, there has been an underlying thread -- certain principles that concerned people throughout our history. The purpose of this paper is not to engage in a long discussion of the history of our goals. At the same time it is important to understand that all through our history the people in and associated with SNCC agreed that racism and segregation in this country were degrading, unjust, and a denial of our dignity, and that massive action was necessary to change the blatant forms of racism operating in the South.

These forms existed everywhere, but they operated most flagrantly in the areas of public accommodation and voter registration. When the sit-in movement began, the arena of segregated public accommodation was not only perhaps the easiest target, because the signs were "everywhere," but also the most likely form of racism for the students, who were mainly college students, to encounter. After all, if you were from some city in the North or if you had traveled extensively throughout the country, or if you came to any city in the South from another town, the aspect of

segregation that you were most likely to encounter was in public accommodations -- signs in the bus and train terminals, the 5 & 10¢ store, movie theaters.

Voter registration became a key target because once success had been attained by students in the arena of public accommodations they were prepared to tackle an issue that most Negroes in the South felt was a basic problem. The Vote. In a country that holds the vote as a "sacred" right, and denies the vote to people because they are black, Voter Registration becomes a key drive. However, the efforts of people in SNCC differed markedly from other civil rights groups in this area. Suffice it to say that we were interested in exposing the dirt and racism in the black belt so that the country had to deal with the contradiction between its stated ideals and its stark reality. We were not interested in registering voters for the Democratic or Republican Party.

Today, 1967, six years after the student movement started in February, 1960, we are at Rock Bottom. There is no where to go but up or under. We have finally emerged, from my point of view, from many obstacles and can realistically assess what in fact has been true for more than two years: namely, that the massive attack on public accommodations and voter registration has been successful and we have played no small part in that success. With the passage of the 1965 Civil Rights Bill, the entire character of this organization changed. Some of us saw this but we were unable to convince the organization of this shift and of the absolute need to revamp our programs. One of the reasons for this failure stemmed from the lack of an internal education program. As has been true throughout our history, we have been backed up against many walls and changes have been forced upon us.

Today, we must face the reality that we have been successful, no matter what may have been all the shortcomings, and we must quickly revamp our entire style of operation -- or there is no other way for us to go but out, nothing to do but destroy our effectiveness through lack of direction, lack of confidence in the future, a sense of failure, fatigue, despair, frustration and bad health. These conditions in turn lead to internal bickering, feuding, factional fighting, inertia, inability to work, loss of morale, hanging-on, resignation, walking-out, Fuck-it, it ain't worth it....

By facing our success and evaluating that, I am saying that the framework within which the organization worked is no longer valid.

The question is no longer the right to vote, but the nature of the politics in which we should be engaged. The question is no longer segregation in public accommodations, but addressing ourselves to certain rock-bottom problems in the society. For instance, should we as an organization actively work to do something about inadequate housing, inferior education, the inequities of welfare, unemployment, insufficient medical attention, the malignant nature of America's racist foreign policy (stemming, of course, from a racist country and the exploitative wars in which we are asked to fight and to support).

At our December, 1966, meeting at Peg Leg Bates we decided many things, but we also recognized that the nature of our struggle had changed. We did this in voting to create Freedom Organizations in the country. We voted that these Freedom Organizations would be all-inclusive political parties; namely, that these political parties would have within their structure a housing, a welfare, an educational, a cultural, an economic and a youth division. We did this in full realization that politics in this country is usually

election day campaigning. We wanted to help create political units that would speak in the name of the unit about the day-to-day needs of the people we hope to organize.

We voted to do this given our entire history of protest, voter registration efforts, and organizing people into political units. However, within our own organization we face the problem of who is going to do this work. We not only face that problem but we face many others, given the nature of our history and again the nature of ourselves, the people in the organization. Therefore, it becomes crystal clear that the need for a political education program within the STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE is a must. There are some basic questions in any internal education program that must be raised and answered and agreed upon by the members of a political unit. If there can be no agreement on certain fundamentals, or at least continuous discussion while one works, then SNCC as a political unit cannot survive.

We are in fact a political unit although we do not call ourselves that. We still cling to the rhetoric that we are a group of organizers. If we are successful in the development of the Freedom Organizations, we will inevitably become a political cadre within a political party. Whether we can assume our responsibilities and help move forward the struggle of black people, and thereby all people, as we have done in the past -- that is another question. It is quite possible that we cannot. It is also possible that we may not be able to overcome the inertia, the stagnant state in which we find ourselves. Hopefully, we will be able to make our new Program Department work.

That is a start!

Here's another!

SOME BASIC QUESTIONS, ORGANIZED INTO FOUR SECTIONS, THAT MUST BE THOROUGHLY DISCUSSED WITHIN THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE.

These are theoretical questions that have meaning not only within SNCC and not only today. They have meaning outside of SNCC and will have meaning for a long time to come. They form the core of any political education program.

- I Leadership
- II The Group as a Political Unit
- III Ideology
- IV Program and Work

I. LEADERSHIP

What is it? How is it developed? What types of leadership are there? What is charismatic leadership? How does it arise, how is it promoted? What are its advantages? What are its limitations? Can it be changed? How does it change? What is group-centered leadership? What are its advantages, limitations? What is leader-centered leadership? What forces in the country produce and reinforce the concept of the leader? How do the various types of leadership manifest themselves in revolutionary groups, in Civil Rights groups?

What is the responsibility of the membership in holding the leadership accountable for its actions? How does it do this? What happens if it feels it cannot do this? What is the relationship between leadership and its base in terms of developing and implementing programs, giving direction and predicting consequences? Why is it that, in many countries and in many organizations, people in leader-

ship positions have said that the key problem facing them is the development of a social consciousness in their constituents that will make them critical of the leadership and the bureaucrats? What can we learn from discussing and studying these questions?

II. THE GROUP AS A POLITICAL UNIT.

What is the nature of a group? Why a group as opposed to the individual? Types of groups. Is there a difference between a political unit and a social group? How does one define a political unit? How is it developed? What is the role of the following in its development: Leadership, Purpose, Goals, Ideology or guiding principles, Allegiance to the Unit, Responsibility, Rights of Members, Duties of Members, Division of Labor in the Unit, Equality, Togetherness. How are these developed and maintained, if they are desirable?

What are forces operating in the environment that affect the development of the political unit? What happens when the goals of the unit are contrary to the society's? What pressures in the environment and the society affect the members of the group and make them do this or that? Can the members of the unit solely be held responsible for all of their actions? What is empathy, understanding?

How does one relate to new members of the unit? How are new members recruited, trained, evaluated, rejected? What are in-groups? What are out-groups? Can they be avoided? How do older members make new members feel included? How do new members develop the strength to criticize, to suggest ideas and programs? Should new members expect to participate on all levels of the political unit? Is it

realistic to assume that new members can participate equally with older members given the gap in experience and relationship with other members of the group? Is this a problem? How does one solve it? How do you avoid it?

Problem Solving in the political unit: How does one solve problems? Outside the meeting. Inside. Combinations. Factions. Can a political unit survive if it has factions within it? What happens when a group within the group feels it can no longer function in the group? How does it move? How does the other group move? What causes divisions in the political unit? How can one avoid them? Suppose you can't?

When should a political unit dissolve itself? Why can't units dissolve themselves? What is vested interest? Is there a thing called the identity of the person which is equal to his identity with the group, the political unit? Should a unit ever dissolve itself? What is disintegration? How do units disintegrate? Do they disintegrate from external or internal pressure? Which is the greater force? Combinations of pressure. How do opposing forces move to crush a political unit?

How do groups overcome inertia? What is inertia? What are some of its signs? What is a healthy unit? What are some of its signs? In The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon talks about psychiatric cases referred to him by the political unit. In SNCC many of us have submitted to psychiatric consultations, before Fanon. Many have undergone long periods of treatment. What is the role of psychiatry in a political unit? What values should the psychiatrist hold before he can relate to the political unit? What is war neurosis? What

is the value of travel, of rotation, rest, medical attention? What is the responsibility of the group to see that its members get rest, medical attention, that they travel? What is the authority structure that says you need a rest, you should talk to a doctor? How does the authority structure enforce that? What are our attitudes in the unit about the question of health? Can we in fact determine when we are exhausted? What are the symptoms of weariness, of battle fatigue, of an exhaustion syndrome? Can we tell when we are under stress? Can we do anything about the stress? Do we believe that stress affects one way or the other? How does age affect our health, our energy output? Can people of all ages do the same thing? Should they try? Should we have regular medical examinations including psychiatric consultations and insist that members of the unit accept the determinations of the doctors?

III. IDEOLOGY.

What is this? What is the origin of the term, its meaning today? Why is it important? Have we had one? What has it been? How did it work? How do you get an ideology? What are the pitfalls of ideology? Does it change? How much time does one spend on it? What is a tight ideology? What is a loose ideology? What is a sect? What is the difference between a sect and a broad-based group? What is a coalition? How are they formed? How far will they go? What holds them together? Have there been, are there, coalitions in the experience of the Civil Rights Movement? What were their advantages, limitations? Why were they formed?

What do we mean when we say goals, tactics, strategy? How do you define these terms? In a military situation what do they mean? In a political movement what do they mean? What do they mean in SNCC? Within any ideology, are there long-range goals, short-range goals, both? What are ours?

What is blackness? Is blackness sufficient? Who is black? What is whiteness? Is whiteness sufficient? Who is white? Are we talking about a mental attitude? If so, who defines this mental attitude? Are we talking about skin color? Let's be specific. Can we talk and understand each other if there are no definitions?

What are the problems facing black people in America? (I define black as Afro-American and Negroes, people of African descent.) Are the problems we face only ones of color? What is class? What is caste? What is the relationship between them? What is upper, lower, middle class? Do they exist among blacks? Why do they

exist? Why is there a black banker in one town and a starving Negro in the same? The confusion of the term is deliberate. How do all these questions relate to the development of an ideology?

Do the problems of a black welfare mother arise only from her blackness? If not, then what are the other causes? Take housing, education, Vietnam, for black people -- do the problems in these areas relate only to our blackness? If not, why not? Someone said the only reason blacks are in Vietnam is because the man wants to kill us. He has to kill a lot of whites just to get us? Is this the most efficient way to kill us? Why Vietnam? On what basis are we fighting there? What is the industrial-military complex? Corporate liberalism? How are these related to the question of ideology? What about the isms: Capitalism, Imperialism, Colonialism, Facism, Socialism, Communism?

REFORM OR REVOLUTION. These terms have been used a long time. What do they mean? What is reform? How does one get reform? Is reform bad? Is this the only answer? What is a revolution? How does one work for a revolution? What kind of revolution? Who participates in the revolution? Why revolt? What's the difference between revolting and a revolution? Are there instances in history where reform movements have turned into revolutionary movements? What is the role of organizing in preparing for a revolution, for reform? Do you need people? What people - black people, white people, people? What are the pitfalls of revolutionary movements? of reform movements? What kinds of revolutionary movements exist in the country today? What kinds

of reform movements exist in the country today? What are their relationships to each other? Do they cooperate? Do they fight each other? Is it necessary to answer these questions before one works? What is the relationship of these questions to bad housing, quality education, insufficient welfare, the war in Vietnam, the industrial-military complex?

Is it possible that people can work for reform and not know it? Is it possible that people can work for revolution and not know it? Is working for civil rights reform or revolutionary? Does it matter if it is this or that?

What do we mean when we say Civil Rights and Human Rights? Is there a difference? What is it? Some say "Civil Rights mentality." What does this mean?

How do our words affect us? What is definition? Why important? Semantics? What do they mean? Are all people interested in definitions? Do you think they should be? If so, why? What is the relationship between work and words? What is the relationship between program, work and words?

THE BLACK COMMUNITY: What does this term mean? How do you define the black community? Is it one solid mass of people? Are there class differences in it? How does one respond to these class differences? Is there a role for the banker, the real estate agent and the maid? What are they? What is the black middle class we hear so much about? Is it one? A solid mass? What do we mean build in the black community? Build what? For what? How?

Control our communities. What does this mean? Spell it out. How are we going to control these communities? What do

we mean by control? What are the limits of our control? Are we to control the power to tax? Are we to enforce the power to tax and to collect? Are we to determine who is a policeman in the black community? How? Again, do we feel definitions are important? Are we just using vague slogans? What are the advantages, the limits, the weakness, the pitfalls of this rhetoric? Are they just words?

BLACK POWER: What does it mean? Some say power for black people, that's all. Others say it is magic. Some say wait and see, YOU'LL find out.

What is power?

Does Johnson have power? Oh, you know it is not that kind of power, by definition. We should not define it. It scares white people. But does it really scare them anymore? Haven't they heard the slogan enough to see that it is really a slogan? The brother knows what it is. Does he? Maybe? Do we? Does it help him to eat, to get a job, kill a few rats? Not important. Black power! And more Black Power.

Black power! A catchy slogan. How long will it last? And why do we in fact have to resort to slogans? Should slogans relate to our work? Are they important in moving forward a movement? How far can they move it, alone? Where has the concept moved us, black people, some black people, all black people? How can we consolidate the obvious interest generated by the slogan? Can we? Should we? How? Should we get to work and organize some black power, power for black people and kiss the slogan good-bye? Bye, Black Power. We're going out and organize some

black people to get some power. When you come back in two years, maybe we'll have some folks together talking about changing the system that is racist and exploiting them and moving in organized ways to get power. (Black Power Rides Again!)

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: What is it? Why is it important? How is it achieved? What is the difference between it and black identity? What is consciousness? What is identity? Origin of the term, black consciousness. Meaning today.

Nationalism and Consciousness. What is the difference? What is Nationalism? What is black Nationalism? Origin of the term. Meaning today. How is it applicable to our work? How is it programmed into our work? Why should it be? What are the advantages, the pitfalls?

What is the difference between Black Consciousness and Class Consciousness? What is Class Consciousness? Origin of the term. Meaning today. Can one have Class Consciousness and Black Consciousness at the same time? Are they mutually exclusive? If so, why and how?

IV. Programs and Work.

Assuming we agree there are injustices, inequalities, racism, exploitation, killings, unjust wars, bad housing, poor schools, insufficient welfare, lack of political organization, unfair representation in Congress, in the local court houses, in the international sphere, what do we now do? HOW DO WE NOW DECIDE WHAT TO DO AND MAYBE FIRST WHY SHOULD WE DO ANYTHING AT ALL? Why should these things bother us? Why should we concern ourselves with them? One's answer is fundamental to the degree of his commitment, is it not? His commitment will shape what he works on and how he works, will it not?

WORK: Where do we work? Should we continue to limit most of our work to the South, the rural South, the urban South, the North, the cities, North or South or both? Why should we work in the cities? What are the advantages to working in the South? Should we continue for historical reasons? If not, why not?

What is a base? How do we develop a base? How do you maintain a base? What kind of a base is already there? Are there any? Is there advantage to working with college students? What are they? What are the limitations of working with students?

We talked of indigenous leadership. What is this term? Is it still applicable? Why should we try to develop more Mrs. Hamers and Mrs. Blackwells and Mr. Steptoes? Are these people unusual? If they are not unusual, why not? Why haven't we reached more of them? Have we?

We voted to organize Freedom Organizations. How will they work? What will they do? How will they relate to the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, other so-called revolutionary

and reform groups. Where will they be organized and who will do this work? (Hopefully the evaluation committee will have some tentative answers to this.)

POSITION OF WOMEN: What is the concept of the black man castrated by the black women? Why do some brothers say that no woman can tell them anything to do? What is the impact of this on the black female? Should there be equality of the sexes in the movement? What is in fact equality of the sexes? Must we insist that equality of the sexes is important in the movement? What are the standards by which you measure this? What is the value of raising this question? Can the men in the movement realistically listen to what women have to say on this point? Are the women refraining or not saying anything on this subject because they believe that they have helped to castrate the black male? What happens in a situation where the men go to jail and there are only women left? Are they supposed to stop working in order to find some male to lead them? If they can assume leadership then, why not at other times?

Who does the work and how? What advantages and disadvantages are there to a staff-run organization? Can we realistically assume that we can expand the organization and assume you have to be on the payroll to be working full-time for SNCC? Is this a good method of working? Should people in SNCC get jobs to support themselves and really work in the communities? If they should work, what type of work should they get? We talked about the maid working in Miss Ann's kitchen. How many of us have worked there? What are the pains and even joys, maybe, some maids feel in working there?

Why is it that SNCC does not have any sustained contacts with labor unions? What are our attitudes toward the working class?

Have any of us really ever worked as the people we are supposedly organizing must work from day to day in order to survive? Could it be that one of the reasons we don't keep ongoing or viable projects in areas is caused by our not rooting ourselves in the communities and living there and going to meet the man and working after hours in talking and organizing people with whom we live and work?

We used to say that we live and work and eat with the people we organize. Is this true today or is it a myth? If it is not a myth, then where is it a reality? What does it mean for SNCC as an organization to continue to have a fund-raising base that is divorced from where it is supposed to work? Could it be that one of the reasons that we loaf and take extended vacations is that we assume that somewhere there will be a fund-raising apparatus and somehow we will get some money, at least to pay our rent and get some food.

WHO IN THIS ORGANIZATION HAS EVER DIED OF STARVATION OR LACK OF FUNDS FOR PROPER MEDICAL CARE AND COULD NOT GET THE SAME IF HE SOUGHT IT?

What checks do people in the communities have upon us? We can always leave if we do not get along with this segment of the community or that segment and go elsewhere. Need we point out examples? What are some examples of this?

Why is it that people from some bases in the South gave reports on black power that were different from those given by other people? Is it true that the people who come to hear Stokely form our base? Why organizes them, how are they organized and for what? Why do they come to hear Stokely or other people from SNCC, and who comes incidentally?

EVALUATION: How do we measure success for ourselves? How do we evaluate our work? How do we interpret our own victories? How do we evaluate the work of others in the political unit? How do we judge the discipline of others, their commitment? Is it by what they say? Is it by their work, their productivity?

Have we as a political unit or an organization been successful in our work so far? What were our mistakes, our shortcomings? What were our objectives thus far and have we achieved them totally or partially? Can we measure success in terms of all people, the judgement of many people? Do we in fact evaluate ourselves?

What were our goals in 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966? How many of them were accomplished? Were they written down? Why not, if they weren't? What have been some unintended consequences of our work? That is, in the process of doing our work what has happened that we did not expect? What was good about this or bad about it? Should we sit around and gripe about this and that without offering some positive alternatives? What happens if we do this too much?

What is constructive criticism? Should we submit our work to criticism? Can we afford to have our work evaluated? Can we afford not to have it evaluated and discussed? What happens if we do not have the internal strength to let others evaluate and examine and criticize our work? Can you build an effective political unit if the members of the unit are afraid to accept criticism, to allow others to evaluate and to give pointers and to say this was wrong and that was not right? Then, too, those giving the criticism must allow their brothers and sisters to defend their

work -- is this true? What is the advantage of this process? What are the pitfalls?

When do we stop a project here? How do we start one there? Who is working? Is it O.K. to say that I am working on project x, and he is working on project y, and I really can't evaluate what he is doing because I am not there? How do we learn about brother B and what he is doing at any time? Is this possible or necessary? Do we have to travel to find out what he is doing?

What is the role of reports? How should they get to other members of the unit? Is it necessary for people to call instead of writing? Suppose I don't write well and there is somebody on the project who does? Shouldn't I be encouraged to write and keep writing? Shouldn't the brother who writes well help me on the project? Shouldn't he hold classes in better writing?

What method will the new program department use to get to the staff the result of its findings? How will those people responsible for programmatic areas find specialists? How will they hold meetings? How will they find the money for the meetings? Will they write to people at different universities asking for information and advice? Are we ashamed to go to the universities and say we are trying to gather information for this program and that program -- do you have any ideas or leads as to how I can get information? Should we insist that all the people in the programmatic areas send out reports as SNCC Photo News is doing?

DISCUSSION: How often do we have discussions on the project about what other people are doing in the organization? Shouldn't there be someone from the national office who comes around to discuss,

hold workshops, train, check on the problems of the projects so that they don't all come up at Central Committee meetings or a general staff meeting? What is the internal education on the project? Is it limited to a few staff members? How do people sustain themselves in their work? Is there time for reading and discussion? Relaxation? Rest? Sleep? Reading, talking about what is read, teaching others, study and work?

How does frustration set into our work? How do we get frustrated by what we are doing, not doing? How do we move to solve the frustration in the project, in the Atlanta office, in any other office, assuming it is there?

Is it good to recruit people for one year, two years, three years? What are the pitfalls of short-term work? Do we frustrate new people, how and why? Shouldn't we gear ourselves to long-term struggle? What is long-term? How do we do this? How do we help people who get married, who have children?

CONCLUSION

How are all these words related to our work, to our program? We have the ideology, but how is it programmed? What is the program of black consciousness? What is the program for achieving Black Power? So we are a reformist organization! Okay, what is our program? What kind of work are we doing? How are we measuring that work? We are a revolutionary organization. Fine. And all we do is sit in our armchairs and at our desks and talk about revolution and what kind it will be when it comes, in the sweet bye-and-bye when Super Brother will be all Black. And how are we preparing for the revolution? Oh, we can't tell that. The man

will find out if we talk about that. So there can be no program for the revolution when it comes. O.K. So what do we do? We just sit and sit and sit and wait and wait. WE THE REVOLUTIONARIES. And out the window we looked and there went the people who made the revolution and then it was too late because WE THE REVOLUTIONARIES had not paid our dues!

BLESSED BE THE PEOPLE WHO MAY ONE DAY MOVE ON OVER US!