

Memo:

To: Members of the Coordinating Committee and Staff

From: A letter by Courtland Cox

" As I sit here neglecting my studies and engaging in important matters, I would like to make some comments on direct action, I would also like to comment on SNCC and the use of direct action, and the role of the Federal Gov't. and generally talk about the world at large. This last task being one that I am well suited for being given my ignorance.

Let us now do away with the light comments and get down to the situation on hand, that I consider to be quite serious, that of SNCC's future and direction.

I started to write about three days ago and in my first letter I discussed, off the top of my head some of my ideas toward direct action. Today I read in the Washington Post that Diane Bevel Nash and John Lewis calls for a non-violent army to wage the war of social dislocation in the capital of Alabama.

This call for an army was supposedly submitted to SCLC. This announcement seems to many a logical threat to March through the South as we Marched on Washington.

I would like to submit again at this time some of my thoughts on direct action, for if we are to succeed as an organization we must have sound policies.

The results Of Birmingham, Danville, Cambridge, and Mississippi movements illustrates the demonstrations in the hardcore areas where SNCC usually operates is frustrating at best.

This is not say that direct action has now become obsolete, but it does mean that we are going to have to consider what new targets to direct our action at and how this should be geared, and what are the steps that we have to take to make our direct action meaningful.

SNCC should explore more fully the reasons given in Bob Moses report why direct action does not work in Mississippi. Bob mentions that long jail terms, excessive bail and small numbers of peoples, has been the major problem.

I am convinced that the lack of numbers has been our greatest drawback in the area of direct action. This death of folks is due to the dislike of the elderly to change their way of life disturbed, the meaningless targets of our direct action (e.g. mainly lunch counters and theatres etc.) Although these targets have symbolic meaning in terms of our direct action and of the symbol of dignity for black folk it has no target like gain for them. Furthermore the targets of lunchcounters cannot provide them with the basic needs and essentials of food, clothing, and shelter.

I am now convinced that the civil rights movement (the militant SNCC CORE) must now think seriously of new and meaningful targets. These targets are to be found in the political and not the moral. (I hope to deal with these points later)

I am now convinced that if we are to arrive at a meaningful target for attack we shall have to sit down and think seriously over our plans. At any rate if we were to arrive at a meaningful target for attack we are to be doomed to frustration if certain facts are not considered.

It seems to me that the Negro in these hardcore areas (e.g. South-west Ga., Birmingham Ala. and practically all areas in the deep South) can not look forward to fruitful results from their endeavors unless they have every element of the Negro community engaged in a demonstration. This means moreover, the young, the old the black bourgeoisie. The teachers and preachers. Some of us young radicals would say, yes teachers and preachers, for if they are not fully committed to our actions, they will be the first to serve on those bi-racial committees.

We should all be aware of the fact that (whereif) we get into the streets we have to stay in the streets. If and when we are able to get a community in the streets we must be able to stay in the streets even if death should occur.

I would like to mention here my reaction to the proposal of a non-violent army in Alabama. If we are to be realistic about these things even if we were able to get into the streets two things must be considered about the white and their reactions to our movement and their results.

A. They again would bring out their dogs, troopers, hoses, and other measures of police protection.

B. The great white father in Washington will move in with more proposals of negotiations, bi-racial committees, etc. In a word, if we started demonstrations there would be police brutality, if whites get hurt the Federal Courts and Gov't. (i.e. Justice Dept.) would step in and the Negro leadership (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr.) would agree to a cooling off period. The condition of a status quo is equal to the Negro back in his place.

Let me say frankly that the bombing in Birmingham has left me confused as to the motive of a course of action. But while I am writing to relieve my tensions, I might as well include some reactions to the situation.

Kennedy

was afraid of white people being hurt (which is the greatest fear of the white Southerner and of white America, that its person or property is damaged by the black masses. This fear is a combination of a guilt feeling and ignorance, but it has a history which began with the passing of the slave codes and laws to prevent slave uprisings) and was willing to do a great deal to insure the safety of the white Southerner.