

Jan. 1963

Summer Project

Meeting, evening of January 24, 1963, to discuss summer project, Hattiesburg. Attending: Gwen Gillon, McArthur Cotton, Charles Sherrod, Sandra Hayden, Joyce Ladner, Willie Blue, Mike Sayer, Mendy Samstein, Lawrence Guyot, Frank Smith, Oscar Chase, Donna Moses, Joan Bowman, Jim Forman, Mrs. Ella Baker. Forman presided. George Greene, Helen O'Neal.

Forman called for discussion of summer project.

Mrs. Baker reported on telephone call from Second Congressional District: They want no summer workers, especially for field; project "too difficult" to house and administer. In Greenville Carol Bolton opposed project because fears whites would take over project.

Cotton: Initially felt more time needed to "spell out" project; feels we still do not have enough time. However since recruitment is already underway, "will do all he can" for project. Main question is whether we are ready.

Bowman: Felt that staff apathy would mean failure. Has been out of state and not involved. Impression is that little discussion has been devoted to content of program; rather centered on logistical problems. Should be scuttled unless staff attitude changes.

Greene: The staff has been forced into summer project; workers already recruited, without concrete commitment from staff. People on projects do not have enough opportunity to do creative things ...

Forman: Heard that the Greenville meeting called for 5,000 students. Then 100, now 1000. Where along the line were these decisions made?

Samstein: (history) Nothing resolved until December 15 staff meeting. Voted there to allow "unlimited number" of students. At later staff executive meeting decided to re-think question. Number defined as 100; at later meeting "verbal affirmation" to continue project. (His feelings) There will be a natural staff expansion: some outside projects will come such as the national council of churches. A broader program might be implemented by staff if "will" exists, with teams into counties, and workers into major cities.

Harris: At Greenville discussed notion of recruiting staff from state. Moses added students from out of state, thought in terms of 5,000. Voted for them to come to do research-related work. Opposed until state executive meeting. At Tougaloo meeting Moses presented details of what they could do: freedom schools, community centers, research, voter registration. Agreed then because they would have something to do. Could create national attention. We voted to set up machinery; therefore we are committed.

Hayden: Idea is good because they get attention from congressmen, press. We cannot handle 1,000; however limited number is feasible. Students should pay own way; we set up qualifications. Perhaps 100-500 could be absorbed.

O'Neal: 1,000 too many; is "impossible." Number should be reduced.

Smith: Opposed the project from the beginning. Felt it was part of a pattern: not recruiting and developing state talent, instead taking easy way, using people who want to do "sociological research," then return to their campuses. To complete the revolution we must rethink. Feeling now is that we can learn from Hattiesburg Freedom Day and develop a program if we (1) recruit people (2) set up situation where they can work. In Columbus I can arrange housing and food; a number might

be used for a "Freedom Day" there; would release energy. We have brought the people to a point, now they are ready for "something else." If summer project seen as moving people from one point to another, could utilize this energy. (Might take form of) demonstrations all over state, in every congressional district and by end of summer there will be no doubt that people in Mississippi want freedom. We can provide mechanism if we can orient students into projects.

Gillon: Bringing kids down would be good. Noted publicity which attended Freedom Vote. Could use them on voter registration.

D. Moses: Opposed to any program the purpose for which is to get publicity. If can orient around on-going program and if staff needed, then alright. Any staff must come for a meaningful length of time. May be a detriment in terms of program already set up.

Ladner: In favor of program if it can be developed to use people effectively. The Freedom schools, community centers are meaningful and might be effective. They would be picked up doing voter registration. If we are not ready, then it should be thrown out now. Thousands are "in the clouds," should think in terms of hundreds.

Sayer: Fears that summer project might sink the Mississippi Project. Large numbers might overwhelm staff. We are having trouble with our own problems. Deplores tendency to think of organizing Mississippi "from outside" and the exaggerated focus on Washington. Do revolutions get organized from outside anywhere? We must organize from within the state. To attempt both would involve more than we are prepared to undertake. Must have administrative apparatus, probably take 2 years.

Blue: Notes the negative attitudes expressed, but thinks is a good project. The experience of having people, especially white, to "turn a friendly face" would be good, especially for kids. Doesn't see why it can't be done. "100 years too late."

Chase: Does not agree that the summer project would inhibit Mississippi people and the Project. Ought to develop both. Kids will learn in Freedom Schools; Community Centers cause people to think about their conditions; does it matter that the people running these are from Peoria? Voter registration teams can organize in communities where SNCC has not been. A state organization grew out of the Freedom Vote; similarly organization might grow, or at least develop contacts in state. Hattiesburg shows that out of state people bring protection. We need federal government involved, and they never will move unless nation forces it to.

A. Ponder: (asked by Forman to contribute) Should be a state operation. Fit the students into current programs as district directors see it.

Sherrod: In favor of project, except can't go into it halfway. Might make or break us.

Mrs. Baker: Favors concept of summer program, as long as we can spell out what is possible and get to work on that. Having outside people who can offer leverage is good. Concern is that it adds to total thrust and growth of people involved. Those already working must map out program. Recruitment is important.

Forman: Must reach some consensus. There are two objectives: confrontation between state and federal governments, and the program for the students. Questions validity of notion of "cracking state" by summer project. Should ask if we want to involve students in 3 forms of activity: voter registration, freedom schools, community centers.

Smith: No specific program has been discussed, only some talk. Agrees with 3 objectives. Opposes "huge influx" or "crash program." In Columbus could use 30 students to develop classes for high school drop-outs, in Negro history, citizenship education, voter registration classes. Need staff to develop those programs. To work must knock on doors every day and have a responsible staff in charge.

Hayden: The idea has never been only confrontation. Clearly need is to develop people in state. Is a way to involve the north, but emphasis is development.

Forman: (citing paper on summer project drafted by 7-8 people) Suggests a discussion of the paper by topics:

- Office in Meridian: Suarez volunteered for job; Meridian was suggested because (1) tension free and (2) Suarez would not work elsewhere. Because of the advantages of office being in Jackson (COFO office with files, WATS line, other programs, central location) the consensus of group was to have office for summer project located in Jackson.

- Administrative Coordinator: Suarez is no longer coordinator (cannot leave Meridian project). Suggested Betty Garman, but she is not familiar with Mississippi Project. Mendy Samstein suggested, declined because he is a partisan of project. Donna Moses suggested; refuses because she is unenthusiastic. Decided to set up a steering committee: Gillon, Ladner, O'Neal, Hayden, Samstein, Morris, Mrs. Baker, which seems a good balance of white-black, north-south, those with administrative experience. Is to remain sufficiently flexible to add others; hoped that someone will emerge to take overall responsibility.

Mrs. Baker noted that the National Council of Churches has program for Delta. To include involving the World Council of Churches sending people in to assist in the development of the area. They propose to set up orientation sessions for summer workers in the South, in cooperation with SNCC. Presbyterians to make available 6 seminary students, mature with skills for an entire year. (Mr. Wilmore will look into leasing us Presbyterian property in Mississippi for schools, retreats, etc.)

- Recruitment of northern students: Stipulation that students raise own money would relieve us of fund-raising. Recruiting ought to take place where good people are: conferences, WSM. Can find ways of raising money, for example fund-raising on campuses, selling buttons, literature. Should be flexible and try to give financial help to anyone who cannot raise funds, who is otherwise qualified. Decided that there are ways to raise money if one is genuinely committed; probably would be better workers. Fund-raising and recruitment will be done in Atlanta. There is some question about commitment of CORE and other COFO contributors to summer project. Pending that, we must assume the project is a SNCC project.

A general staff meeting on the summer project was suggested.

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