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Report to
SNCC Staff
"Only."

By
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REPORT TO THE STAFF/CUBA

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I would first of all like to say that I was somewhat disappointed to find the people of SNCC had allowed themselves to be caught up in a hysteria which is now being generated in this country, but that is understandable for I almost got caught up in it myself. I read the AP and UPI and CBS reports daily when I was in Cuba and they were a wonder to behold.

HOW AND WHY CUBA?

We were in London attending the Dialectics of Liberation and Stokely and I were invited by a representative from Cuba to attend the Organization for Latin-American Solidarity (OLAS). We had thought that Julius Lester was already attending the conference in Havana as an observer so we said that we couldn't officially attend as official SNCC representatives but that we would like to go.

We made that decision based on a couple of things: from our own subjective points of view, considering SNCC and considering us. We knew that in Cuba, at that time, there would be some of the more outstanding revolutionaries from all over the world. People whom we would never get a chance to meet under any similar circumstances anytime soon and that secondly, we would not have such an opportunity again.

We were told that we could make the trip two ways. We could go to Cuba, be very incognito and have very little to say and simply observe. We could talk quietly with the people we wanted to talk with or we could go and participate as fully as we desired in whatever activities were going on.

We decided that we, Stokely and I, we would go to Cuba and we would not make the decision about how until we got there. We wanted to take a look at things and then we would decide what role we would play based on :

1. what is going on in the country now and
2. a consideration of what SNCC's position is and where SNCC is at this present time in the country.

WHAT WE SAW IN CUBA.

When we got to Cuba, we arrived the day before the 26th of July Celebration which is a celebration of the attack on the Moncada which was the first major attack that Castro launched against the Battista regime. We went to Santiago where a Carnival was going on and it was a wild place, made up of about 95% black people. Preparations were going on for the 26th of July Celebration.

We left there and went with everyone else up into the hills of Cuba into the farm region to a place called Le Grand Tierra. We stayed there for a few days along with about 800 other people. Castro was showing us some of the things he had done. One of the things he had done was to allow people to build their own schools, furnished them with the materials, architects and advisers and to

allow people to reconstruct a whole area which had formally been geographically isolated from Cuba. We then returned to Havana for the OLAS Conference. We saw in Havana how the nationalization of industry, and the resources of the country had allowed the country to begin to take a firm grip on some of the problems which it faced. Problems of poverty, illiteracy and health. We saw that many of these problems were being dealt with very successfully. That the problem of illiteracy had virtually been eliminated. That the former schools and some former homes of millionaires along the beaches had been converted into residences for students. The largest country club in Cuba is now a school for the study of marine science, oceanography. In general people were very energetic, worked very hard, because they could see that their efforts would be rewarded in real concrete terms. We saw that the standard of living of people in Cuba, especially in Havana, was much higher than most people under similar conditions in the United States. That in general people lived much better, eat very good food and did not have a lot of problems to face. Their biggest problem we saw the people facing in Cuba was the United States.

The United States blockade of Cuba which is on one hand a serious economic attempt to destroy the economics of Cuba. On the other hand it just involves a lot of emotionalism. I will give you an example: If you try to get to Cuba, you will find that there are four places in the world from which you can get to Cuba. They are Mexico, Prague, Moscow, Russia; and Madrid, Spain. In order

for us to get to Cuba, we had to go from London to Prague, from Prague to Shannon, Ireland, from Shannon to Ghand, Newfoundland from there to Cuba.

On my return, I had to go from Cuba to Moscow-Frankfurt, Germany - London, England and from there to New York. So you see Cuba is in fact a very long way from the United States. If you enter Cuba according to what the United States calls illegally, or through Mexico, you cannot return that way. That is why I didn't come back through Mexico. Also, the Mexican officials, if they let you back in will confiscate any materials or written notes that you have and destroy them, as a personal favor to the United States. But what we saw repudiated the vast amount of information which gets into the United States about Cuba.

The fact that Fidel Castro is a dictator, which is a strange thing to say considering that the people of Cuba are all armed. It would be a rare situation indeed where a dictator could afford to arm his people, teach them how to use guns and then continue to exert his will over them. We didn't see many oppressed people. We saw people who seemed to love Castro very much and who seemed to love what has happened to Cuba.

WHAT WE SAID AND WHY

After having seen Cuba, and after having met with a few people and talked with some Cuban officials and other people from Latin America, Africa and Asia, we decided that we would partici

pate in the conference as fully as we could. We decided that we would have nothing but positive things to say about Fidel Castro, because in reality we could find very little negative to say about him. We had talked at great length with people about the race problem which we were very sensitive to and which did exist. There is a lot of racial prejudice in Cuba, but very little racial discrimination which is really the point. We saw a lot of energy was being put into removing a lot of racism from that society.

We viewed the racism in Cuba as an artifact of the United States' involvement in the Caribbean. We believe that wherever the United States goes, it spreads its racism and transmits it to the peoples it oppresses. We started out by taking a position of positive non-alignment. We never deviated from that position. Now positive non-alignment as it was decided by the Coordinating Committee meant that we would make no formal alliances with any group whatsoever, whether we were in favor or not in favor of what they advocated. Whether we were thinking along the same ideological lines or not, that under no circumstances would we form any alliances with any groups. We decided to simply state a position which we felt was ours and as closely as we could possibly ascertain, would also be the position of SNCC. We stated that the fight of black people in the U. S., especially in SNCC (this became a problem distinguishing when we were talking about SNCC and when we were talking about black people in the United States) were fighting against the exploitation of black people in the United States. We

were opposed to the exploitation of peoples around the world, especially people of the Third World by the United States. And just as we would be opposed to the war in Viet Nam, we would also be opposed to American intervention in the Dominican Republic, or American intervention in Bolivia, of which there is very much and in Guatamala and in many many other places in Latin America. We said that we should all fight together to end this exploitation, this racism and this imperialism. That was kind of like the core of everything we said.

There are two speeches which Carmichael delivered. One was a press conference. Julius Lester, Stokely and I participated in this conference which lasted for three hours and from which we deliberately excluded all American press so as to minimize or to maximize the confusion, either way the American press wanted to handle that. It was the most beautiful press conference I have ever attended because for the first time we had press who were seriously trying to find out what we thought, rather than try to place all of their energies to repute our ideas. We had very little trouble explaining our points of view.

We talked about what Black Power means in an international context. At first, since a lot of people in Latin America and the Caribbean are white, there was a question about "Was there racist undertones to Black Power?" We claimed there were none. That what we were saying in fact is that the non-white peoples of

the world are the ones who have been exploited by white Western society and that what we sought to destroy was the concepts which are inherent in which Western society. We said that white Western society feels it is superior to all else and that they will not recognize the humanity of other peoples and that that concept must be destroyed by any means necessary. There was a debate which had broken out in OLAS over the question of peaceful co-existence and armed struggle. We decided we were not going to get into the debate, but that we would concretize our position all the way down the line and anyone who disagreed with that on either side of the fence, well tough luck.

We felt that peaceful-coexistence was utter sheer nonsense for people who were being exploited by the United States and that what Russia had in mind when it talked about peaceful co-existence was a real economic battle between the United States and Russia, where Russia would seek to subplant the United States in areas where the U. S. had control. We did not view that as a revolutionary line of thought and we described it as being counter-revolutionary. We said that we thought the people of Latin America would have to take up arms and would have to fight to drive out the people who were controlling their countries, mainly the U. S. and anybody who is being controlled by the U. S. in those countries.

Our position all the way through was that we were in favor of armed struggle. That the energies and efforts of black people in

the United States reflect an attitude that black people in the U.S. are in favor of armed struggle and that they are forming guerilla units to begin to fight. Whether they are forming them in an organized manner or whether they are being forced to form them by the necessity of a battle such as the one engaged in in Detroit were secondary.

The fact was that people were getting organized. That people were not going to fight in a haphazard manner as they had in the past so that they would just be wiped out while throwing bricks and bottles at policemen, but that people were going to be engaged in serious struggle and that black people would not stop until such time as they had total control over the areas in which they lived.

Ideologically that is the crux of what we said. A lot of that has been distorted. We knew a lot of it was going to be distorted. We decided that we would not try to anticipate the distortions and try to figure out how to say something so that the American press could take it and twist it any way it wished. We decided that we would attempt, as carefully as possible, using Julius, myself, Liz Sutherland and Stokely to try to figure out what exactly our position is and to state it as carefully as possible, and as clearly as possible. We decided also that we would not get caught up in any hysteria which grew out of that. We recognized that there was already hysteria in the United States, based on the fact that black people had been taking care of business

over the last few months and that Stokely's trip to Cuba would probably add to that hysteria. We believed that that hysteria would come from white people.

On my return to the states, I stopped in places like New York City, Washington, D. C.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Atlanta, Georgia, I find that very few black people are caught up in that hysteria. I felt that we shouldn't get caught up in the hysteria, because we have done that too many times. We have started to run scared everytime the white man runs scared. And the only time I can conceive of us being frightened or disturbed is when black people begin to turn against us and our ideas. Allegations that we are Communist are not new. They are allegations that have been launched against us since I can remember and I don't feel we should begin to get disturbed about that.

If we start being concerned that if we take a trip somewhere, people begin to interpret that as believing we are Communists and that we are lining up with the world-wide Communist plot to overthrow the free world, then we will not be able to go anywhere in the world. We will have to stay in the United States. It would even be difficult to go to Europe. It would surely be difficult to go to Africa where most of the countries are independent and are also socialist countries. If we are or were to allow ourselves to get caught up in that, we will once again be caught in a box.

So our decision was that we were not going to get caught up on either side of that argument and my position is that I will not be caught up on either side of that. Regardless of whatever else happens because it is silly. There is another point. At one time the question of Carmichael's death came up in a press conference. A reporter asked, considering the fate of Malcolm X, what did he (Carmichael) think about the possibility of his being executed by the CIA or some associated agent. Then Carmichael said, "It is time for us to stop reconciling ourselves to the fact that Lyndon B. Johnson, Westmoreland and MacNamara can, without impunity, direct the CIA to execute the leaders of black revolution and revolutionary people around the world. If that is the game people are going to play, and they are going to execute our leaders, then their leaders must be executed. "

"Which would mean, in fact, ;that if Malcolm X, that if Lumumba, if the Nkrumahs, if the Stokely Carmichaels, if the Sukarnos and all of those people can be brought down, defeated and destroyed by people like LBJ, Westmoreland, MacNamara, Harold Wilson and all of the forces of the Western world, then people who were serious about revolution-would have no recourse but to make it equally as dangerous and as threatening for those leaders of the Western world." That is exactly what he said.

Now that became great news in this country because I read an AP report which said Stokely had said or threatened to kill LBJ, MacNamara, Dean Rusk, Westmoreland and Harold Wilson.

I knew that would happen. I knew that was the way that would come out in the American press. But it still remains for us to define what we say. It does not remain for UPI, API or any white man, or any black man working for a white man to define what we say. Only we can say that.

We are now trying to get all of the transcripts of what Carmichael said in Cuba, into the New York office so that they can be duplicated and sent to all the members of SNCC so that people can read them.

I will defend any argument coming from that. I will not and cannot accept arguments which grow out of interpretations of the New York Times or CBS news or any of those folk. I cannot understand any SNCC person who would confront me with discussions coming from those newspapers.

One big problem we encountered was with the use of the word we. It was very difficult given the translation and given first our unawareness of that that when we said we, sometimes that came across as being the black people of the United States and sometimes it came across as being SNCC.

After we became aware that that was a real problem, we sought then to try to be more emphatic so that the people would understand when we meant SNCC and when we meant "we black people of the United States". Since we were outside of the U. S., and in many instances when we said "we", we were talking about "we" black folks and not "we" SNCC folks.