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Mr. John Lewis, Chairman
and the Executive Committee of
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
360 Nelson Street, SW.
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Dear SNCC People,

I am reasonably sure that during the last several months, most of you have been forced, as have I, into a radically new appraisal of the course and future for the movement. And I send you this letter to offer, if not urge, a few of my conclusions for your attention and hopefully your action.

Remember it was in 1961 that we faced a similar dilemma when sit-ins and freedom-rides began to ebb and we had to chart a bold new path which led to political action, legislation, and community organization. We had serious personal and organizational fears lest the movement betray itself by succumbing to the establishment in government and politics. We resolved that conflict by devising an organizational scheme calculated to avoid both horns of our dilemma and serve complementary areas of our need. In the face of the fears of today's movement, that swift glance backward may stand us in good stead for the program needs of the present and future.

With the crystalizing of most of the movement's primary goals in the Civil Rights Package 1964 and the creation of a vastly expanded governmental

role in dealing with the problems of the poor, something new happened. The initiative for dealing with the disadvantaged and the poor had apparently shifted from private, to public institutions. The parallel course of the essentially Negro revolution passed into a broader although not swifter current of the entire country's effort to resolve difficult problems in widespread poverty and unemployment and inhuman institutions. Generally, it was said that in spite of the fact the Negro revolution had largely given birth to the notions of the Great Society that now that parenthood must end.

Accordingly, the country has turned to its traditional method of developing solutions. It has called in the professional social worker types and theorists to build a great society. Now, at the very summit of the Movement's success, it stands in mortal danger of being by-passed by the social shock wave it was instrumental in starting. This is partially so because the social planners who have been given the job of administering the "great society" are variously afraid, hostile, or uninformed concerning the Movement. And it is partially true that the Movement has not been careful to protect its vested interest in the creation and administration of the new organs of the great society after they had been legislated largely by movement impetus.

I propose that we stop this trend. I propose that we pause to consider why the social agencies which grew from the trauma of the Civil War and later the great depression failed to alter radically the Negroes' status. It appears to me that we are faced with two great

dilemmas--The fear that the government with all its power and influence shall coop the Movement into being an imprisoned ally. Or whether the government (or, more appropriately, organized society) shall be allowed to build upon the blueprint provided by the civil rights organizations without their real involvement and guidance except by way of fitfull redress for specifically demonstrated, or more properly specially demonstrated against, wrongs.

Who is the enemy? This is always a shifting and unsettled question, but it is particularly iridescent today. The Government is both an enemy and a friend. We must not become coopted by it. Yet we must increasingly cooperate with it--Government still happens to be the only major institution in the United States in which Negroes can guarantee themselves a right to participate genuinely. We must make the most of that fact. But in order to use government, we must first know government--know it from within as well as we know it from without. When I say we must know it from within, I do not mean that we should or can make careers of civil service. I mean we must be prepared to either develop a planned program to encourage SNCC people to work for a term in civil service areas of our interest or develop a special program to strengthen our liaison through a Washington arm of SNCC with such programs. This is not only so we can learn about government, but also so that we can lend our expert knowledge to the development of government procedures and attitudes in areas of vital interest to us. It is shocking to note that most of governmental power is exercised

informally, and therefore only susceptible to study by practice. It is useful to appreciate that this is exactly what the labor movement, state agencies, and industry have done. Each of them carries on extensive programs to keep abreast of the federal government. They have vast Washington programs and constantly have their personnel bouncing in and out of official positions.

The programs I am talking about are those of the Agriculture Department, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Small Business Administration, the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Labor, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The combined worth of the various programs these agencies administer which directly bear on SNCC's program is well over a billion dollars.

And, while we can easily say that such sums pose problems too big for SNCC, we must remember that the real problems of race and poverty are even greater. Therefore, unless SNCC can expand to meet the immense proportions of these problems, it is already lost, and the Negro people with it. We can no longer expect to deal with the increased sophistication of our enemies with protest against their misconduct. We must be able to counter-propose workable alternatives to the established and developing programs. More and more we shall come to see that our goals are frustrated less because of what is done against us than by what is not done at all.

Here we can also make use of our new tax-exempt foundation wing to administer direct governmental grants in areas like job training,

basic literacy, and small business education.

Obviously, SNCC has already given some attention to this matter in deciding to designate Betty Garman as a federal liaison. However, the one person approach is inadequate for such a vast battery of programs. Given the size and magnitude of this new panorama of government action on the problems of the disadvantaged, a major effort is called for from the civil rights community. The other civil rights groups are mostly too brittle to respond. Only the Urban League has done anything to anticipate this new federal explosion; and we know they should not be trusted to hold this field alone.

I would propose that as the staff was grouped in 1961 around the separate programs of direct action and political activity, we should group a segment of the staff around the development of federal programs. These people would work both out of Washington, Atlanta, and designated regional offices. They would be charged with learning and knowing all aspects of federal action in areas of our interest. They would prepare, design, and, when instructed, execute a series of projects. When appropriate, they should be loaned to the Washington or regional bureaus of the government to further guarantee the fidelity of the projects they generate in their administration. These people should also work closely with the Urban League and the new foundation headed by Jim Farmer where appropriate, to avoid the aspect of rivalry and organizational antagonism.

Indeed, it may later prove that there can be no harmony between the civil rights community and government. Perhaps they will clash too sharply to cooperate. But let this be proven rather than assumed. Let us demonstrate as well as document the conflict before we surrender to it. Let us make sure that we will be able to tell the American people authoritatively why we have again had to take to the streets in spite of government's apparent willingness to cooperate with our efforts if and when that should become necessary.

I do not believe that what I propose here is an easy thing to accomplish. I know that it is awesome to contemplate such a vast re-examination of our effort. I can see the friction this proposal will cause within our ranks. And I am sure that such a change can initially only hope to gain modest support. But I sincerely believe it must be begun and begun in earnest. If only in one or two programs, like employment and agriculture, or labor, it must be begun now.

Our movement stands, as we should all know, in mortal danger of being pushed from the mainstream of social change by inflexibility and stagnation, and usurpation. We should not be willing to suffer such a facile defeat gladly.

Before you oppose or reject these thoughts, worry about them, work on them and improve them to the point of greater acceptance in light of your own wisdom and social goals.

I am at least sure that part of what I have said here will prove historically to be right. We lost control of the First Reconstruction and the New Deal, and we cannot afford to do so again.

Your friend,
Tim Furlin