

SNCC-1966

Comments by Stokely Carmichael, Chairman
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Over the years, SNCC has been concerned above all with making changes in the daily life of impoverished Southern Negroes — basic changes, not "tokenism." Almost from its start in 1960, SNCC realized that political and economic power was the key to this and that Negro-controlled political groups must be formed to achieve it.

Disenfranchisement, maintained by racist terror, made this impossible at that time. The right to vote had to be won, and SNCC workers addressed themselves primarily to winning the vote from 1961 to 1965. That struggle was eased, though far from won, with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. SNCC workers could then address themselves to the logistics of self-determination; getting a Negro sheriff into office, winning power.

Black power means that in Cowdles County, Ala. (80% Negro), for example, if a Negro is elected tax assessor, he will be able to tax equitably and channel funds for the building of better roads and schools serving Negroes. If elected sheriff, he can end police brutality. Where black people lack a majority, it means proper representation and sharing of control. On the state or national level, it means that black people can say to white authorities, "We need X million dollars to fix our roads, and we have X million votes behind us." Without power, they can only say "Please — we need it."

The thrust of our program today is, therefore, political organizing to win that power. This will vary according to the situation in each community. In Atlanta, Julian Bond is running in the Democratic primary — but with an independent platform geared to the needs of his constituents. In certain Alabama counties, we found that Negroes did not feel they could win redress within the Democratic Party — the party of George Wallace, "Bull" Connor and Al Lingg; the party whose Chairman in one county was a man accused by the federal government of evicting Negroes for registering to vote. We therefore helped form freedom organizations which nominated independent candidates for county office on May 3 of this year — also the date of the Democratic primary. Because of an Alabama law which could have been used to invalidate the freedom conventions on the grounds that people cannot vote in two primaries, SNCC advised Negroes in the freedom party counties not to vote in the Democratic primary. (This decision was

interpreted by the press as a boycott on voting altogether.)

We seek, then, to create power bases which can make important changes in daily life on a local level and go on to change statewide or nationwide patterns of oppression through organization from strength rather than weakness. Negroes cannot form political alliances with the white community until they have that strength and until there are whites with whom they can form coalitions — which is not the case in the Deep South today. But it is one of our hopes and goals to encourage poor whites to build a base with which poor Negroes may eventually combine their strength.

Essential in the process of organizing Negroes to win power is the conquest of fear and the development of "black consciousness;" self-respect, pride in the history of black people, our culture and institutions. We must change the attitude expressed by an Alabama Negro who voted for the white sheriff on May 3, saying "We aren't ready to have a colored sheriff. The white folks wouldn't have liked that a bit."

The acquisition of political power responsible to black people is the current stage in our struggle to create a society in which people can make free choices as equals about all aspects of their daily lives. This is our goal and our concept of integration. Too often the goal "integration" has been based on a complete acceptance of the fact that in order to have a decent house or education, Negroes must move into a white neighborhood or go to a white school. What does this mean? First of all, it reinforces among both Negroes and whites the idea that "white" is automatically better and that "black" is by definition inferior. Secondly, it allows the nation to focus, for example, on a handful of Negro children who finally get by Southern racist mobs and into white schools, and to ignore the 94% who are left behind in unimproved, all-black schools. Such situations will not change until Negroes have political power — to control their own school boards, for example. With the achievement of such control, Negroes can become truly equal — and integration then becomes relevant, meaningful.

None of this thinking is new in SNCC. "Pro-black" has never meant "anti-white" — unless whites make it so. We continue to believe, as always, that SNCC's leadership must be black. We have concluded that Negroes make the best organizers in Southern Negro communities because they encourage the idea that Negroes can do something for themselves. This re-

leases the energy and creativity which produce change. SNCC is now working in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas and North Carolina on programs which emphasize voter registration, political education and organizing, within the context of what the black community needs. We are working to get more (federal) registrars: at present only 9% out of 500 counties have them. We are also working in the specific areas of jobs, housing, schools, and segregated public facilities. We are, for example, helping Negro communities to start their own co-ops and credit unions, to improve Negro schools, to create or win new jobs. We are expanding our program of mobilizing and recruiting Southern Negro college students

as of June, 1966. This figure fluctuates somewhat.

and we are developing new programs for staff education in such areas as international affairs. Our extensive work with the California grape strikers of the National Farm Workers Association represents another new direction, as does our first experiment in urban organizing, in Atlanta.

Today SNCC's field secretaries face even greater danger and poverty than before. As Negroes register to vote and begin to organize, white resistance stiffens. Any Negro who runs for office faces loss of job, eviction from his home, death itself. SNCC works full-time to overcome the genuine fear created by white racists. We need and welcome the support of everyone, white and black, North and South.

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Behind the Hostile Press Campaign Unleashed by the Election of Stokely Carmichael

SNCC Does Not Wish to Become A New Version of the White Man's Burden

We hope white liberals will not be taken in by the press campaign against the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee since Stokely Carmichael succeeded John Lewis as national chairman. White sympathizers with the Negro have to keep several things in mind. One is that in any movement the leverage exerted by the moderates depends on the existence of an extremist fringe. The second is that a certain amount of black nationalism is inevitable among Negroes; they cannot reach equality without the restoration of pride in themselves as Negroes. The third is that this cannot be achieved unless they learn to fight for themselves, not just as wards of white men, no matter how sympathetic. SNCC is reacting against a new version of the White Man's Burden.

Fresh Approach to Southern Politics

No white man really knows what it is like to be shut into the ghetto. "The Negro," as Martin Luther King said in a vivid phrase on CBS *Fact The Nation* May 29, "is still smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of this very affluent society." For the white sympathizer, the struggle against the ghetto is an act of philanthropy; for the Negro, it is a battle to save himself, not just from poverty but from a corrosive self-contempt. The ghetto dweller distrusts the white SNCC worker. Mr. Carmichael's idea of recruiting black SNCC workers from Northern ghettos is psychologically sound. His idea of using white SNCC workers to organize the Southern poor white to the point where joint action between white and black becomes possible opens fresh perspectives in Southern politics.

The wonderful white boys and girls who went South in the past few years helped to thaw out the Negro from political deep freeze. But now that the battle has shifted from the simpler symbolic acts of sitting at a segregated lunch counter or in a segregated waiting room to the harder and more complicated tasks of winning a real economic and social

equality, the job will have to be done by Negroes themselves. These are not tasks for a summer adventure in between classes. They can only be accomplished if Negroes are mobilized to carry on for themselves. In such areas as the Black Belt, where the Negro is a majority, this means seeking majority rule and that means Negro majorities. Otherwise the Negro is at the mercy of a white minority. In Lowndes county, Alabama, for example, where the Negro third party, Black Panther movement, originated, the white Sheriff has deputized every white man over 21. To be a deputy is to have the right to carry a gun, and to have a kind of hunting license to shoot Negroes.

This is the background against which one must read Carmichael's statement, "We feel that integration is irrelevant; it is just a substitute for white supremacy. We have got to go after political power." He asked an audience in Washington last week-end, "How are you going to integrate a sharecropper making \$3 a day with a plantation-owner making \$20,000 a year?"

Some people were shocked by Mr. Carmichael's angry remark. "We want quality education, not integrated education." But here I believe he expresses the reaction of Southern Negroes to the bitter experience of integration. The *Wall St. Journal* (May 26) carried a story, "The Invisible Wall" on the ostracism and the humiliation visited on those few Negroes who have often literally risked their lives to get into white schools. Many are leaving. This frightened handful in white schools only distracts attention from the need for first rate education in the Negro schools. This is just as true in the North where the Negro schools are segregated by the flight to the suburbs. Only by improved schooling can the Negro be fitted to compete as an equal in a hostile white world. To dismiss this as Negro nationalism is neither fair nor perceptive...