

REPORT ON THE MARCH ON TALLAHASSEE

403 North Macomb
Tallahassee, Florida
April 1, 1964

The following is a detailed and hopefully objective report on the entire situation regarding the March on Tallahassee, which took place on the 27th of last month. Because the march and its ramifications have produced a great deal of publicity, reflecting adversely on the civil rights movement, because the field staff of CORE and its Florida chapters are so intimately involved, and because we feel that this incident is either a symptom of or beginning of a serious split in the Florida movement, I do consider it necessary to present this particular view of the situation. As the report will show, this dissension is not really inter-organizational as the newspapers would indicate, but rather it reflects a basic division between those members of all Florida civil rights groups regardless of their very strong organizational ties. Many groups in the state have already entered requests that certain leaders in the NAACP be removed, as these groups feel that these certain leaders are responsible for the very unhappy events surrounding the march. However, this report seeks only to present the facts as we see them. We are presenting these incidents in a chronological order in hopes that the report will indicate something of our reaction to the unfolding of events.

March 2nd, 1964--Monday

A brief announcement appeared in most newspapers stating that the Church Work Committee of the NAACP State Organization had just formulated, over the weekend, plans for a March on Tallahassee to occur on March the 27th. Rev. C.K. Steele of Tallahassee (who was not present at this meeting) was named state chairman for the march.

March 7th, 1964--Sunday

Rev. Steele announced in Intercivic Council meeting in Tallahassee that he had been appointed state chairman of the March on Tallahassee and that a meeting of the state committee would take place that following Tuesday at 11:30 A.M. at his church.

March 9, 1964--Monday

Frank O'Neill, President of Tallahassee CORE was informed that his presence

at the committee meeting to be held Tuesday was unnecessary.

March 10, 1964--Tuesday

By calling several churches, Frank ascertained that the aforementioned meeting would take place at noon at the Parish House of the Episcopal Chapel, Father Brooks being the priest there. Uninvited, Frank entered the meeting. The first person he encountered in the meeting drew him aside and said, "We really have to work in order to make this march a success. CORE has been getting all the publicity in this state lately, and we have order to make this a successful NAACP march." Frank then introduced himself as president of the Tallahassee Chapter of CORE, much to the embarrassment of his informant. At this meeting it was revealed that Father David H. Brooks, NAACP member in Tallahassee, had been appointed local chairman of the march. All persons at this meeting were members of the NAACP Church Work Committee except Mr. O'Neill.

March 11, 1964--Wednesday

A front-page article appeared in the St. Petersburg Times announcing the march again. A picture of Rev. Steele and Father Brooks was including, naming them as state and local chairmen, respectively. The march was billed as an NAACP Church Work Committee project.

March 13, 1964--Friday.

Father Brooks, as chairman of the local committee for the march, called a meeting of leaders of the active civil rights groups in Tallahassee. At this meeting were myself, Frank O'Neill, Judy Benninger (Task Force), Rosemary Dudley (Sec. Tallahassee CORE), Rev. Daniel Speed (local NAACP), Daisy Young (local NAACP), Rev. Steele, Rev. Lofton (local NAACP and Midway CORE), and Rev. Goodan (NAACP). Liberal Forum, a group which was to come in shortly, was represented in that Miss Dudley is also secretary to that group.

This was the first meeting to which members of any group other than the Church Work Committee of the NAACP had been invited. Naturally, we had many questions regarding the March. We wanted to know the following things: (1) Is the march to be a coordinated effort of all Florida civil rights groups? (2) Will these groups be included in the planning and the program of the march? (3) Have leaders of these groups been contacted heretofore? Rev. Steele assured us that it was his impression that the march would be a coordinated effort, similar to the March on Washington. He further stated that a representative from each group would be on the program. To meet the question raised in (3), we decided to call a meeting on the following Tuesday, March 17, in Tampa, to continue planning of the march. We asked Rev. Steele to invite leaders of all groups in Florida to this meeting, and to make them official members of the state committee. Right at this meeting he called Mr. Robert Saunders, Field Secretary for the NAACP in Florida and gave him the names we had suggested and asked that telegrams be sent inviting these persons to the Tampa meeting. He agreed to do this.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to assigning to ourselves the many tasks involved in preparing for such a march. Upon considering all of the work which needed to be done, the lack of statewide coordination, the short time in which to obtain nationally known speakers and entertainers, the local committee decided to recommend that the march be postponed at least a month in order that it realize an optimum in success and effectiveness. Rev. Steele appointed myself, Frank, Judy, Rosemary and Father Brooks as members of the state committee and urged us to come to Tampa to present the opinions and suggestions we had raised. Finally, we decided that we would need at least \$1,000 to prepare for the march. Rev. Steele indicated that the local Intercivic Council would probably provide \$150 and the local NAACP branch \$200. I mentioned that I would contact national CORE for funds,

and Rev. Steele noted that the state NAACP would undoubtedly be willing to provide a large sum. We were certain that Miami CORE and local groups in Miami would provide some money were they invited to participate in the planning of the march. As Marvin Rich indicated to me by phone later that evening, national CORE could not at that time provide any funds, but with sufficient time to consider the proposal and build up funds, some contribution could be counted on. We also felt that there was insufficient time between that day and the 27ths to adequately involve the Miami groups to the extent that they would contribute and be able to participate fully.

March 17, 1964--Tuesday--Tampa

In arriving at the state NAACP office in Tampa Tuesday morning, we found that the State office was just at that time sending out the first letter notifying its branches of the march. We noticed that the letter was sent under the title of the NAACP Church Work Committee, and not the state-wide committee on the March on Tallahassee, as Rev. Steele was assured by Mr. Saunders it would be.

At the meeting, in addition to the Tallahassee contingent mentioned above, were Steve Jones of Miami (Executive Secretary of the Florida American Civil Liberties Union), Dr. Marshall B. Jones (executive committee member of the Gainesville NAACP Branch) and members of the Church Work Committee. Father Theodore Gibson of Miami NAACP was there; Father Gibson had read in the newspaper that he was chairman of the committee for the program of the march, and had come to the state committee meeting to ascertain his responsibilities in this regard.

The local committee from Tallahassee immediately raised the proposal that the march be postponed, explaining that it would be almost impossible to carry out the duties assigned to it in the short time remaining for the march. Immediately the president of the Church Work Committee, Rev. McKissick,

stated that the state committee there in attendance was actually "the child" of the Church Work Committee, and only the Church Work Committee could make such decisions. This raised the question of whether or not the march was, in fact, to be a coordinated effort with representation from all civil rights groups, or whether it was to be an NAACP march. Rev. Steale asked Mr. Saunders about this in the presence of the group, and Mr. Saunders indicated that it would be a coordinated effort and that we did, in fact, have the right to vote on such matters of policy. In order to help the group to decide, the local committee presented its report to the state committee, and each area of planning, such as rest facilities, program, etc. as reported, indicated that not sufficient time remained to effectively carry out committee duties. Mr. Jones (ACLU), Father Gibson (Miami NAACP), Father Brooks (Tallahassee NAACP) myself, Frank O'Neill and Judy and Rosemary voted to postpone the march. Dr. Jones of Gainesville Abstained. The remaining eight persons, all members of the NAACP Church Work Committee (none from Tallahassee), voted against postponement. Thus the march was to go on as scheduled by a vote of 8-7. At this point a member of the Church Work Committee indicated that since the entire Tallahassee delegation voted against the 27th, perhaps it would refuse to cooperate in helping to make the march a success. Most people there were appalled at the suggestion, and we restated our interest in and support of the march. We said that we would do everything in our power to make it a success.

We asked Mr. Saunders to change the title of letters sent to branches, and we further asked that all subsequent press releases be from the "State Committee on the March on Tallahassee, including all the civil rights groups". We gave him a list of civil rights organizations and sympathetic groups such as the American Jewish Congress, labor groups, etc. We further

asked that each of these groups be contacted and asked to suggest one member to represent their group on the program. Mr. Saunders assured us that this would be done.

Therefore we left the meeting feeling that we would have to work day and night to complete the preparations effectively (all of which had been left in the hands of the local committee, i.e. CORE), but we felt that the march would be an all-out effort, representing the entire movement in the state.

March 20, 1964—Friday—Tallahassee

A local meeting of the NAACP in Tallahassee, at which Mr. Saunders and members of the local committee for march arrangements ^{were present} took place. The local NAACP branch refused to advance us any funds—Mr. Saunders had no idea of where money would come from. Mr. Saunders refused to discuss march preparations with any of the local people.

March 21, 1964—Saturday

The local committee for the march met. Duties assigned to various groups were discussed, and each sub-committee made a report. Dr. Jones had sent a graduate student from Gainesville to Tallahassee to work full time on the march, and he acted as coordinator. The progress in obtaining such items as the P.A. systems, rest facilities, first aid facilities, etc., ~~was~~ was reported, and at that time we felt that we had all preparations pretty well under control. In good faith, the Miami people had gone on t.v. announcing the march and urging groups to come. At this meeting we learned that several thousand people were planning to attend just from that area. We were disturbed that Mr. Saunders had continued to issue press releases in the name of the NAACP concerning the march. However, on Saturday night before the march, it seemed that we had most things ready, pending the final day-today work still ahead.

Tallahassee CORE volunteered to make 500 picket signs, Liberal Forum was arranging public address systems, platforms, etc., and the Miami people were getting together entertaining groups. I volunteered the Quincy CORE Freedom Choir. All national speakers had declined invitations to speak saying that there was not time enough for them to fit the march into their schedules.

March 22, 1964—Monday

Mr. Robert Saunders came to Tallahassee and ordered that all local committees were relieved of their duties and that they should discontinue any plans made and cease to function. Father Brooks was relieved of his position as local chairman. This was not said to us personally, and we spent the day looking for Mr. Saunders trying to find out if this were really true. Large sums of money had already been tied up in these preparations, including phone calls, money promised for posters, P.A. systems, etc., and we were very disturbed that all of the time and money would be wasted. On this day we were in constant contact with Miami people who stated that they had not been invited to the march, that they had heard nothing about it, and they were cancelling all arrangements to come. I spoke with Rougeau and A.D. Moore who were very disturbed about the situation and wanted more information. People in Quincy were also concerned, and Judy's friends in the Gainesville NAACP were also wondering what was happening.

James Farmer came to Tallahassee that day, and for the benefit of the march he spoke favorably of it at this press conference, and he stated that CORE was working in coordination with the NAACP for the march. By midnight, no one from the local group had been able to contact Mr. Saunders for clarification. In a desperate effort to communicate with Mr. Saunders, who refused to return our calls, a group of Tallahassee CORE people and the coordinator from Gainesville went to Mr. Saunder's hotel and woke him

said that the march is an NAACP march, "persons other than" himself are in charge of the program, and he didn't know who would be on it, and if we had any suggestions, we could take it up with Rutledge Pearson (state president) or Roy Wilkins.

March 25, 1964—Wednesday

A local committee meeting for the march, which had been previously scheduled, was held. We had invited Mr. Saunders to attend. We again posed to him the questions we had been attempting to gain answers to. In answer to the question, "can you tell us who is on the program?", Mr. Saunders replied to me "Well, if you want to be on the program, you can." Mr. Saunders informed us that he felt the state government had been "generous", in allowing us to walk through the Negro neighborhood to the segregated ballfield. We further asked that a white person be placed on the program in order that the state officials understand that the Florida movement is integrated. He assured us that this had already been taken care of. Father Brooks then reported that it was his considered opinion that the march route should be changed because he believe that marching the people within three blocks of the capitol, where they could see it but not approach it, under an overpass with police undoubtedly standing on the bridge above, would so incite the people that we would lose control of the crowd. He said that we should send a letter to the governor telling him of the change in route. Mr. Saunders said he was to see the governor in the morning, and he would elaborate on our telegram letter.

Later in the evening, Mrs. George Lewis, prominent white wife of the president of a local bank, and who has been very helpful in the Tallahassee movement, was called by Saunders. He wanted her to "find a white minister"

In order to again attempt to ascertain what plans were, the Tallahassee CORE members and Rev. Steele and Father Brooks, as an evening of further discussion, decided at 1:30 a.m. Thursday morning they should try to see Saunders.

March 26, 1964--Thursday

Mr. Saunders refused to see the delegation, but one of his assistants suggested that the nightly visits were similar to "Gestapo" tactics. However, we were assured that Mr. Saunders would see the governor and tell him of the change of route. The telegram was then sent to the governor. When Mr. Saunders saw the governor in the morning he was informed that the state could not accept the new route. Mr. Saunders accepted this non-acceptance, and did not tell the governor that the march would take the new route regardless, as he had promised us. Greatly confused, the governor's office called Father Brooks for clarification (since both he and Mr. Saunders had signed the telegram). Father Brooks told the governor's assistant to ignore anything Mr. Saunders might say and to consider the route changed. Father Brooks promised the governor's assistant that Saunders would call him later in the day, expressing concurrence with the new route. The governor's office was satisfied.

Later, that evening, the pre-arranged state committee meeting on the march was held as planned. Some members of the NAACP Church Work Committee attended, including all the of Tallahassee people formerly on the committee. Mr. Saunders refused to come to report to this committee, and he was holding a closed meeting in his hotel at the time of our meeting. We reported the deceit and confusion to the state committee and left in utter confusion. The Tallahassee people went to Rev. Steele's house. Rev. Goodan, a friend

were becoming disgusted as they realized that they were not going to the capital of Rev. Steele's, was in the secret meeting with Saunders. He came to Rev. Steele's house and reported to us what had transpired. First, he said, Mr. Saunders had contacted the governor, insisting that the telegram (which he had signed) was out of order, that any persons who attempted to deviate from the march route and who tried to go to the capital should be arrested. Second, Ruby Hurley, who had been in the background all the time, saw Rev. Steele's name on the program to bring greetings from the local NAACP chapter, and she said, "scratch his name from that program, he wears too many faces." At this point, we were all thoroughly disgusted, and decided to notify all Tallahassee groups of these developments.

March 27, 1964--Friday At ~~3:00~~ 3:00a.m., a meeting was held of leaders of all Tallahassee groups. We decided to pull our people out of the march, but we continued the policy of refusing to issue press releases in order to maintain a good public image for the entire civil rights movement.

At ten in the morning we had an observer on the field where the march was to gather. By noon all who were coming had assembled. An announcement was made on the P.A. system that "all NAACP groups should line up". The Gainesville NAACP Youth Council (the only really integrated group) had been informed of the events leading up to the march, and when they heard this, they took a vote on whether or not to participate. They decided unanimously to withdraw. They dropped their picket signs and walked to a corner, joined hands, sang "We shall overcome", and left the area. This left about 1,600 people for the march. The 500 signs provided by Tallahassee CORE were distributed, and the march began, with Mr. Saunders and Miss Hurley leading the march in a police car. Hundreds of policemen were on hand, guarding all possible entrances to the capital grounds. Persons in the march

Unfortunately, although the march was 100% exclusive, as we attempted to explain to Mr. Saunders, the ill effects of a failure would hurt the entire state. This is the case.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Stephens Due
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Field Secretary, CORE