

To: Central Committee
From: Jack Minnis

At the May staff conference, in Nashville, seven or eight whites who had been working with SNCC got together to discuss what they could do to implement SNCC's policy of whites organizing whites and blacks organizing blacks. They agreed that an area should be found in which a program similar to that in Lowndes County could be initiated among poor whites. They further agreed that it would probably be better to begin such a program someplace in the Appalachian area than in the deep south. They had in mind North Alabama, North Georgia, East Tennessee and Eastern Kentucky. Since no one at the meeting had any information about these areas, a meeting was set for June 20th in Atlanta, and in the interim people would begin enquiries about an appropriate place. I committed myself to making a trip through Appalachia to talk to some contacts I have there. I said I would report on the trip at the June 20 meeting, and would make such recommendations as I thought the trip warranted.

On June 12 I was in Yellow Springs, Ohio, to hold research workshops for the Nation Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam. It was my intention to go from Yellow Springs back down into Tennessee, Kentucky and North Georgia. However, my car was in such bad shape that I was afraid it would not make the trip. I met Carl Barden at Yellow Springs, and he suggested that I come to Louisville, when the workshops were ended, so that we could discuss what SNCC had in mind, I went to Louisville on June 14 for this discussion.

SCEF has had a project in Sevier County, Tenn., for about 15 months. Sevier County was originally chosen by SCEF because of the presence there of Bruce Moore, a native of the area who had previously evidenced some success at organizing when the county school board refused to permit him to enter his daughter in a Negro school. The project had just gotten under way when Moore was killed in an automobile accident. This was a severe blow to the development of a program in Sevier County. However, the personnel who had been there, working with Moore, remained on for some time trying to set up contacts with local people. They used the technique of interviewing local residents as a door-opener. I am unable to say of what value the contacts they made were; it is my impression that the data they gathered during the interviews should be useful to personnel working in the county in the future.

I explained to the Bradens that SNCC wanted to get something started in a white community. I also explained that the financial situation is such that SNCC probably would not have any resources to put into such a project, at least for a few months. I also explained that it struck me as inadvisable for two different organizations such as SNCC and SCEF to be working separately in the same area. I asked them what they would think of some kind of joint project--explaining that there were several whites in SNCC who were interested in trying to organize whites.

SCEF had recruited four persons to work in Sevier County this summer (one committed herself for a year--see below) on what they have called the Southern Mountain Project. I told them I could not commit SNCC to the idea of a joint project, and that I could not commit the SNCC whites to the Southern Mountain project. I suggested that they attend the June 20 meeting in Atlanta and there we could find out if the SNCC people were interested. I proposed that SCEF furnish me with a car and that in return I undertake to apply what we have learned from Lowndes County in holding political education workshops for Southern Mountain Project staff. They accepted this proposal, putting me on the SCEF payroll at \$60 per week, \$35 per week to be used to pay off the price of the car and \$25 per week to be sent to me for use in travel expense.

Fifteen SNCC people showed up for the June 20th meeting--Janet Heinritz, Donna Smith, Tom Canterbury, Marc Shapiro and Bert Halprin. Meanwhile I had discussed the proposition with Cleve Sellars and he agreed to the idea of a joint project, subject of the decision of the central committee. Carl and I explained to the five SNCC people what we had in mind and they agreed to attend an orientation

in Louisville, which was set for the weekend of JUNE 26. While Carl was in Atlanta he discussed the proposition with Forman and Ruby-Doris. I was not present at these discussions but it is my impression that both Forman and Ruby-Doris agreed to the idea of a joint project.

At the Louisville orientation the five SNCC people agreed to undertake participation in the Southern Mountain Project. In addition to the five named above, the project was to consist of Carol Stephens (SCEF staff), Wilbur Malamud, a former peace corpsman in Africa and presently a graduate student in African studies at UCLA, Gene and Sue Welborn, from Buffalo, N.Y. and Kathy Bailey from Albuquerque, N.M. SCEF agreed to provide all living expenses and emergency medical care, but no salaries. The project was started off with a \$500 deposit in a Sevier County bank, which was to be replenished as depleted. The nine people on the project were to live in an 8-room house which SCEF had had under lease for some months. The staff left on June 26 to take up the project in Sevier County.

It was agreed that the first three to six months of the project should be spent in research and training for the staff and that during that time no concerted effort to organize anything would take place. It was further agreed that we would have an evaluation meeting September 10 in order to get the opinion of the staff as to whether it seemed advisable to continue the project, make changes, seek new areas, etc. The specific objective of the project was to organize the county in a manner similar to that done in Lowndes County--to wind the elections scheduled to be held in 1968 for the offices of sheriff, tax assessor and constables.

The reaction of the power structure of the county is evident from the attached clippings from local newspapers. No effort was made either to avoid the attention of the power structure or to seek it. It sought us.

In early July, some rather severe tensions developed among the project staff and the Welborns and Malamud decided to leave. In mid-July Bert Halprin and Kathy Bailey decided they would operate with greater effectiveness in an urban setting, and they left for New York. Bailey had committed herself to the project for a year. This leaves on the project, as of this writing, four of the original SNCC people and Carol Stephens.

Sevier County is just to the Southeast of Knoxville. It has a population of about 24,000, with somewhere between 200 and 400 black people. There are 15,000 registered voters in the county. 51% of the families in the County had annual incomes under \$3,000. 76% of the families in the county had annual incomes under \$6,000 in 1960. The largest employer in the county is the Cherokee Mill, Inc., a textile firm owned by A.G. Heinsohn, Jr. Heinsohn is on the national council of the John Birch Society and is very prominent in the activities of the far right at the national level. The Textile Workers Union refers to him as one of the worst of the fascist ~~and~~ textile barons of the South. There is some other minor industry in the county, including one shirt factory. Much of the county's business income derives from tourist traps at Gatlinburg, where employment conditions are reportedly rather bad.

It is difficult to estimate the budget for the project, considering the rapid changes in numbers of personnel. When the project had the full staff of nine Carl estimated the cost at \$1,000 per month, including salary for me and for Carol Stephens. SCEF has provided the project with two cars.

The lease on the house is presently being cancelled, apparently because of the nature of the project and the fact that the landlord is the brother of the county political boss. The county is strongly Republican in state and national elections. ~~but~~ but party affiliation does not appear to be a significant factor in local elections.

If the central committee agrees that this should be a SNCC project, joint, that is, with SCEF, there appear to be two ways

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in which SNCC could participate in the cost of it. SNCC could put ~~fork~~ the four remaining SNCC people on the SNCC payroll (assuming there will be one) and possibly contribute to the cost of the common housing), if that gets worked out the way it was before. Or SNCC could simply agree to underwrite a part of the project budget which would include living expenses for the staff. I think this is a decision that should be made on the recommendation of the SNCC people who are working there, and in agreement with SCEF.

Finally, in my opinion, the absolute necessity for trained and experienced staff on a project like this cannot be over-emphasized. Furthermore, the staff and SNCC should be prepared (whether the project remain in Sevier County, or wherever it be) for a considerable period of ground work (perhaps as much as a year) before any concrete results of any kind are to be expected.

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