

The questions, what are we going to do when we get into a community this summer, and why are we in this community, i.e., what is our role here?, and how are we going to go about doing whatever we decide to do? were raised at the February meeting of the Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee. One answer, which is a partial reply to all of these, was given by Stanley Wise, representative from SNCC. This paper is an attempt to summarize what he said, what others in the meeting added, and what the basic principles are which underlie this answer. Hopefully, this paper will give some idea of what we want to do and why we feel that we ought to do it. It cannot be taken as an adequate representation of Stanley's position since it is largely drawn from memory and, hence, necessarily transposed to some extent by the author's own ideas. Finally, it should not be taken as the final position of the Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee since many members may not agree with my interpretation. However, I hope that it can serve as a point of departure for discussion and that it will give some idea of our purpose and ultimate goals. Also, I believe that it can at least get us off to a start in answering the questions outlined above.

Stanley's speech came primarily, I believe, as an objection to our discussion which, at that point, was assuming that we were going into a community to give them something. That is, our attitude resembled what is known historically as the "white man's burden," which has been and still is characteristic of the opinion of the 'western world,' especially the white developed nations, toward the non-western world, especially the non-white underdeveloped nations. Only now, this was the attitude of an integrated group of college students toward less educated and poorer people. What we seemed to be discussing was, what program are we going to choose which will help these people, i.e., what are we going to give them, voter registration, community centers, etc.? In simple language, we were trying to decide for people whom we had never met what was their good. What we were doing, then, was quite similar to what the southern white planter is doing when he maintains that it is much better for Negroes not to vote because he knows how to take care of them, he knows what they really need, and how to make them happy. It was this assumption on our part of presuming to know what is best for others that Stanley challenged.

Instead, Stanley questioned is not our role more nearly that of a catalyst and a helper? If a community organizer seeks to address the needs of the people, then he is defeating his own purpose if he decides before he goes into the community what its needs are. Although it might seem that this position removes one necessary part of any political or social movement, namely, some sort of structured *program*, *has a* ~~or~~ standardized approach to problems without having a particular program which is to be imposed on the people. This formal approach is not a rigid formula, but an aid to thinking out how one can help the community meet its own needs. For example, assume that the community wants the worker, to aid in setting up a voter registration program; how to go about this can be analyzed in the following manner:

<u>Needs</u>	<u>Offers</u>	<u>Function</u>	<u>Programs</u>
Voter Registration and Education	Find out what you know Find out what they know Classes Information Experience at polls Not able to vote-why What to do	Help them to face problems Demonstrations Help them to deal with problems	Take people to polls Voter registration classes Freedom Democratic Party Mass meetings

One lists the needs which the community presents. Then, one tries to enumerate what can be offered to meet this need. Then one's own function in meeting this need is listed. The final result is a program; hopefully one which places emphasis on the role of the people in helping themselves, and which is designed to build up local leadership and ultimately to eliminate the organizer.

One prime example of this is the development of the Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi. People who were denied access to the normal channels of participation in the Democratic Party, (the sole party of import in Mississippi), set up, with the help of organizers, their own party, parallel to the regular one. They held precinct, county, district and state conventions. They voted, caucused and drew up

took an active and forceful part in shaping their political destinies. By coming together they developed the sense of solidarity and purpose so necessary to a political movement. Furthermore, a structure with grass roots support was set up so that the people themselves could establish and perpetuate a claim to a permanent role in Mississippi politics.

Other needs and possible answers are listed below:

<u>Needs</u>	<u>Offers</u>	<u>Function</u>	<u>Program</u>
Food	Welfare Office	Presenting the problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aid from North               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Communication</li> <li>b. Send representatives to appeal to Northern groups</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Organization and transportation to Washington to ask for aid.</li> </ol>
Community Center	Recreation Dept. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local</li> <li>2. State</li> <li>3. National</li> </ol>	Assistance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Writing letters</li> <li>2. Organizing people</li> <li>3. Securing transportation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Get them to see representatives</li> <li>2. Get them transportation</li> </ol>
Job Opportunities	See Gov't. Bureaus	Demonstrations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mass meetings</li> <li>2. Newsletters</li> <li>3. Send representatives to Elected Officials</li> <li>4. Provide Information</li> <li>5. Get transportation</li> </ol>

The implication of this analysis is that we, as college students, have in our acquaintance with "democratic institutions" and our grasp of academic skills, the means to aid a community to mobilize itself. If we do not know how to go about filling a need--and we very often have a better knowledge of where to go than we might realize--we have the academic tools or the contacts to find out where to go. Our role is to address the needs of the people, to act as a catalyst to organize people around the need, and to research and think out methods of meeting this need.

The philosophy of organizing which does not prescribe the needs of the people, but rather tries to discover the needs and adapts to them, does not deny the necessity for forethought about and planning for what the probable needs of the community will be. One can predict, for example, from our statistics on the Fourth Congressional District that the people there need increased participation in voting, aid to opportunities, additional legal and medical services, etc. Thus, some things can be done beforehand to prepare and inform the organizer as to how these needs can be met. This we have tried to accomplish by writing research papers which have been duplicated and are available to all organizers. Thus, the idea is to prepare oneself as well as possible to cope with general problems, but to remain prepared to adapt the "answers" to the particular community.

The presuppositions of these principles of social change are that men are capable of governing themselves, that the inherent value and dignity of the individual must be respected, and that democracy and democratic practices can be made to work. The insistence upon not dictating to the community testifies to an awareness of each individual's right to determine his own destiny and of our respect for each person's dreams. The practice of utilizing or attempting to utilize the institutions of government for the betterment of the people reveals an insistence that democratic institutions can and will work.

These principles have very practical applications. For it is simple psychology that human beings will react to any attempt to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, education, etc., with at least as much

enthusiasm as abstract appeals to their rights and duties as citizens. Also, by organizing people around basic human needs, one can perform an educational function in demonstrating how the government and other agencies can and do help people to meet their needs. If the agencies are not functioning correctly, or if Negroes are segregated from or ignorant of the programs, the reasons for their separation can be made crystal clear. The relation of the Negro and poor white's political weakness to his economic exploitation and deprivation are points that can constantly be pointed out. A practical appeal can be used to help in creating the understanding of the roots of the economic and social injustice inflicted upon the poor. Such an understanding is necessary in building indigenous leadership with the vision and the will to suffer the hardships necessary for the achievement of equality.

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