

NATIONAL CORE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION PROJECT - 1964
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND PRESS COORDINATION
FROM: Shirley Ann Mesher

Thursday 25 June

Arrived in San Francisco (from Los Angeles) to confer with Norman Hill and chet duncan on convention plans and coordination.

Friday, 26 June

Made arrangements and set-up for press conference on following Monday. Informed press - vastly expanding normal local press lists to include wider Bay Area, major media in other parts of California, national networks and representatives or 'stringers' of important newspapers and magazines.

Returned to LA late in evening for meetings there.

Monday, 29 June

Arrived early morning. Further Conference, final preparation and run-off of List of Demands and short Hill Statement. (see Press Release 1 and 2).

2 PM - Press Conference at the Sun Reporter Building. Well attended. Hill read statement and list of demands. Questions answered by both Duncan and Hill. Dealt with reasons, demands and 'planned' (i.e. picket lines etc.) activity. Pointed out then, - and continued to throughout Committee and Convention time - that any consideration of further 'more dramatic' action would depend on what the Committees and Convention did. Mainly that was re: Seating of Southern lily-white delegations; requested repudiation of those who voted against the Civil Rights Bill; Platform, and the actual candidate nominated.

Some personal interviews followed.

After contacted Press unable to attend and gave statements and general planning. Answering of further press questions.

Tuesday, 30 June

Continued latter. Also further discussion on plans and work on coordination with other groups, especially for 12 July - March and Rally.

Afternoon left for Kansas City. (Some necessary telephone calls made during 'lay-over' period in LA Some personal and political contacts for support and 'bodies' of CORE conventions plans.)

Tuesday, 30 June - Monday, 7 July

At CORE convention. Checking back on details. Conferring there with concerned parties. Two further planning and discussion caucuses; one including Dave Dennis discussing Mississippi political situation.

Re-run of list of demands and position paper. Distributed to National Staff, NAC and concerned parties and to all chairmen of delegations.

Release on joining/unifying March and Rally for Sunday, 12 July (Release No 3).

Monday 6 July - Tuesday 7 July

Left CORE convention for Los Angeles. Cleared up meetings and immediate problems. Picked up car and drove to San Francisco.

Tuesday - 7 July

Norman Hill and others testify before Republican Platform Committee at the St. Francis Hotel. (See copies of testimony released - no. 4) Followed by interview outside Platform Chambers.

SPM Briefing of Northern California CORE members. Press excluded.

Wednesday, 8 July

Start of distribution of flyers by thousands for "Human Rights March" (March for Equality) and Do You Want? (for picketing) - see copies no. 5 and 6.

8 pm - Short briefing of press. (Did not set up; small representation invited, few therefore showed.) Before arrived, a decision had been previously made and an ultimatum was presented news media to the effect that they must present a signed statement pledging confidential treatment of any special pre-action information we would care to supply.

NOTE: Though it does result in some leverage, I am not certain I would have approved the requirement of a 'signed' document of intention. Was some feeling about this among press. Did manage to clear up and pacify those objecting on the basis it was a 'policy decision' to allay fears caused by a few of the Western press who had not respected release dates etc was not against any particular media and simply took place of usual verbal agreement since we did not know all of the press about the country and difficult to personally speak to all representation. They did manage to 'swallow' that rationale. However, since I understood it to be official Western Regional policy, I did accept individual letters and prepared a standard form and cover letter for general distribution. Did get a return from about 20 major media and networks - plus I accepted several on usual personal 'verbal pledge'. (See nos. 7 & 8)

On the second day this agreement was virtually abused by us due to a premature general announcement of planned civil disobedience. However, since Convention was running late on Platform, we were able to pull out of it gracefully by 'explaining' that CORE could of course not really plan any action or timing of same until we definitely knew what the Convention would do. This embarrassment arose through a lack of internal communication and the fact that most of the major spokesmen forgot about the agreement we had insisted upon from the Press. Later, those who signed forms were given some advance information on location and timing of actions (civil disobedience - blocking of gates).*

Thursday 9 July

Conference on planning coordination.

Answering of 'normal' press calls and setting up of interviews for media with major CORE spokesman (see release no. 21)

NOTE: Both press calls for information and requests for interviews were to number in the hundreds. Obviously, this meant both came in heavily and steadily at all hours of the day and night during the days to follow -- both from those media with representation at the Convention and requests telephoned in from radio and newspapers throughout the country.

Preparation of Press Kit (see no. 9)

List of Contents (in order)

Cover Letter and Pledge of Confidence Form	Nos 7 & 8
All About CORE Booklet	No 10
Convention Committee for Civil Rights (CCCR) flyer	No 11
Fact Sheet on Picketing Details/Major Spokesmen.	No 21
CORE Rules for Action	No 12
Demands of Republican Platform Committee & Convention	No 1
Testimony Before Platform Committee.	No 4
First Norman Hill Statement.	No 2
Notice of 'Second Meeting' CCFD Parents Mississippi Delegation	No 22
Report on 'First Meeting' with same	No 18
Wire Sent to Mississippi Delegation.	No 15
First Release on Confrontation with Mississippi.	No 16
Copy of Maureen Murphy First Sent to Delegation.	No 14
Fact Sheet on March and Rally.	No 20
Typical Threat Letters Received by CORE.	No 13

NOTE: It, of course, took a few days to compile, prepare and assemble Press Kits which were designed for both informational and educational purposes. Unfortunately they were done in rather a hurry and therefore they were not everything I might have desired. A complete void in CORE pamphlets brochures and other educational resources was the main problem. However, the kits were well received by the Press. Many thanks are due to Sherman Gerke, San Francisco Chapter PR Chairman, for organizing most of the production end of the Kits - and to Jed Rakoff and John Bennett of San Francisco CORE and Barbara Britton and Sue Ackerstein of Los Angeles for typing, running-off and final assembling (with additions) of the Kit. They all worked many long hours and without them the job never would have been completed.

Thursday, 9 July cont'd

2 a.m. - Demonstration leadership and police briefing conducted by San Mateo Sheriffs Department at Cow Palace. Area for picketing outlined. Command Post assigned (for one CORE and one CCCR Volkswagon bus) inside gate and parking area. Use of telephone at post assigned. Space for additional cars just outside gate arranged.

4:30 p.m. - Television interview with Chet Duncan, Norman Hill and Frank Glover. Normal procedure.

6 p.m. - Staff Meeting

Visiting of Press on various matters.

Friday, 10 July

Press calls, servicing, arrangements, etc..

10 a.m. - Joint Press Conference with Convention Committee for Civil Rights (CCCR). Usual procedure. (See their press release no. 17) note partial list of participating organizations at end.) Anything not clear or appeared 'disapproving' of CORE or CORE activity in their release was more than adequately handled and cleared up by the CCCR spokesman. I also used this opportunity to have announced to the National press representatives the background and timing for the sentencing of Dr. Thomas N. Burbridge. They did show, resulting in the broad and immediate coverage.

Finalizing of Press Kit. Awaiting only a couple of pieces and material from National.

Planning of confrontation between Maureen Murphy (see her letter, No. 14) Bay Area COFO Parents and the Mississippi Republican Party Delegation. Copies of her original letter were prepared and delivered in envelopes individually addressed to each member of the Delegation and the then acting chairman, National Committeeman, Mr Fred LaRue. Later another copy of the letter was delivered to Mr LaRue in a fancy, hand-addressed envelope. After no reply, a telegram of intentions was sent through Western Union (see no. 15) and a press release prepared and delivered (see no 16). (For report of that meeting see Saturday notation, press release no 18).

Press release on the James Farmer Reception for Saturday night (see no. 19). Many of the press in town earlier had been verbally informed during the week. All now received official invitation.

The press releases of this day were personally delivered to the downtown 'nerve center' locations of the various media and we again greatly expanded the press lists by noting all the various media assembled and their location, personnel and telephone numbers. Picked up a large number of reporters from all parts of the country as well as most foreign media and services represented.

(Many friendly pressmen had tried to get us a complete list from the Republican Press Center or Press Credentials Committee, but no such complete list existed and the Committee would not let us copy registration cards. A small brochure published by the telephone company gave some of the major media, but not a significant number.)

Saturday 11 July

The by now usual two/three hours sleep followed by the usual hectic rush and demand of the day and night.

Notification by telephone of the expected arrival time of James Farmer. Only the National Networks, New York and local press and the wire services were notified for the purpose of taking pictures only. It had been felt best - for many reasons not to hold any type of press conference at the airport but simply to move him through and directly to reception.

9:15 a.m. - Joint Press Conference with Church-Labor Council (Norm and Chet), Sheraton Palace Hotel. Usual procedure.

10:30 a.m. - Special radio interviews.

1 p.m. - Convention Project Team meeting.

Sunday, 12 July con't

12 noon - Picket Captains meet at Ferry Building for briefing on March and Rally.

12:30 p.m. - Dignitaries and leaders assemble at Beal and Market. (Arranged for COFO parents to march as group right behind leadership - did, had great sign which was very effective and picked up by number of press.)

Others assemble at Stuart or First & Market

1 p.m. - March started approximately 2 mile route to Civic Center Plaza. Estimated by Police at about 35-40,000 people. Any given point, took 45 minutes to 1 hour for all of marchers to pass.

3 p.m. - All Marchers had arrived in Plaza and program began. Very heavy press coverage enroute and at site of Rally. Believe all networks carried live... or at least good parts of it. Had group there to service press ... did good job. Whole thing generally very impressive, especially if consider whole bit organized in two/three weeks. Rally lasted over 2 hours.

After Rally - Second Non-violent workshop at Good Samaritan Church - 25th and Potrero. Press invited.

Also Captains and Monitors meeting.

Further distribution of Kits, calling attention to materials within.

After several conversations with Mr. LaRue and Parents chairman, Mr. Hal Light, meeting was confirmed and set with representation of Mississippi delegation for 1 p.m. (or Convention break), Monday, 13 July. Note press, at LaRue's insistence, was not invited until 2 p.m. (my compromise). Press Release prepared and distributed. (See no. 22).

Continued contact with Negro delegation leaders and individuals to learn of possible plans, thinking and ways we might tie-in.

Monday, 13 July

Usual servicing for heavy press demands. Staffing of office (myself as well) to keep up with lead.

Personal reminder to major media and special interest (eg: Southern press such as represented by Hodding Carter III and Mrs. Hazel Brennan Smith) ... of COFO Parents Representation in meeting with 4-5 Mississippi delegates.

Continuation of Press Kit delivery, shifting heavily now to Cow Palace where press headquarters were now set-up and in operation.

9 a.m. - Convention opens and CORE and the CCCR begin picket line and set-up Command Posts outside the Cow Palace. It had been arranged that at least one of the official CORE and one of the CCCR spokesmen would always be on duty at the Command Post and one spokesman for each group would always be at the line for the purpose of talking to and coordinating the press and to facilitate general communications. Each spokesman was supplied with an over-size badge (also imprinted with his/her name) to make identification easy.

NOTE: At all times during the Convention, all the networks and others had several mobile television units and booms, etc., surrounding the picketing area. A good representation of radio and newspapermen were also always on hand. This, of course, made it easy to quickly inform the press and to set-up our outside press conferences with speed. In addition to this, friendly press representatives provided admittance cards to the Press area inside the Cow Palace and this further easy access enabled me to distribute press releases and gather and furnish further information with greater ease. While outside, other members of the press would keep me posted on inside information, timing and the like which was particularly helpful in exactly timing protest actions etc. The added effort in reasonably servicing the press and keeping them informed and in establishing good relations with them obviously payed-off by their 'assistance' with tactical problems.

NOTE: I also felt it necessary that the office be manned for calls coming in there. These arrangements proved to be essential; in fact, it was late in the day, Monday, before I could leave the office to go to the Cow Palace. The three telephones were constantly going with Press calls and also urgent requests for materials and other things that needed doing as relayed from the Command Post. Such heavy demands were

to continue throughout the Convention time ... both from the press and from those with CORE organizational and materials problems. I was able to find a few people I knew personally to help in the office, find needed materials and information and run errands. Unfortunately, some were from out of town, and it was rather bad that they had come long distances to join in the demonstrations and were pressed into other duties away from the Cow Palace. However, they were aware of the desperate need and gladly helped. Still, in fairness to such people, it would be better if an adequate number of local people -- if only because they are more familiar with the area and its people and resources -- were to be solicited and set well in advance to perform such essential tasks.

As individuals joined the CORE-CCCR lines they were asked to fill out a general information sheet and also handed a CORE rules for Action flyer.

A flyer was also handed to the delegates and Convention visitors listing the basic points demanded of the Convention (see no. 23).

1 p.m. -- Meeting time set for 4 of the Bay Area COFO Parents to confer with a similar number of Mississippi delegates. Recess running late so Parents informed Mississippi headquarters that they will go for lunch and then return. They did and arrived back in hotel lobby shortly before 2 p.m. Press representation by this time was excellent and crowded into somewhat small lobby.

I went back to room which served as Delegation headquarters with Parents. We were informed that they had not yet arrived, did not know when they would and heavy doubts were expressed by an alternate that we were expected or that arrangements would really have been agreed upon to meet with Parents. Asked to return to lobby to wait - not even in hallway outside room. Did former.

The Mississippi Delegation bus arrived shortly after and the delegates disembarked and walked quickly through the lobby in the direction of their headquarters and hospitality suite. Mr. LaRue was nowhere to be seen.

Some of the delegates clustered down the hall and I went to find where Mr. LaRue was and where and when the meeting would be held. As approached, several of the newsmen had cornered Mr. W. Yerger, chairman of the Delegation. He was telling newsmen that there had been some misunderstanding, that there had never been any agreement to meet and that they had attempted to contact the people setting it up to so tell them. I approached, introduced myself as the person who had several times spoken to Mr. LaRue and the one who had received firm confirmation of such a meeting. He then admitted that this was really so, but that he had further discussed it and decided that meeting of no use and that they came here "to attend the Republican Convention only." In response to further questioning he also acknowledged that he did not - nor did any of his delegates - intend to talk with the Parents ... that it was not their concern... and this meant at this or any other time. Before additional questions could be asked they all retreated behind locked doors and refused to see even the press.

The press reaction to all of this was of course very good from our standpoint. They immediately returned to front lobby and began interviewing, televising, and photographing the Parents. Actually it turned out better this way than if meeting had taken place. Normal procedure after.

During afternoon, close tabs kept on progress of the Credentials Committee meeting then.

After picketing ended late in evening there was a joint CORE-CCCR executive meeting. This was followed by CORE alone, in brief conversation.

Tuesday 14 July

Usual hectic activity. Included visit to Press "nerve centers," especially to get "Confidence" forms signed or similar agreement.

1 p.m. - CORE staff meeting.

4 p.m. - Picket line resumes as Convention reconvenes. Though idea had been rejected earlier, it was at last accepted, and Information Sheet for Picket Captains and Monitors had been prepared and passed out (see no. 24).

Later, after the "lily-white" Southern delegations had been seated and while one amendment after another on the Civil Rights plank was being voted down (had both radios and television at the command post), quick executive strategy meetings were

held and the preparation of a statement of protest began. This statement was delivered by Hill at promised outdoor press conference somewhat prior to actual action... and it warned that if the Convention continued on in the tone it was setting that CORE might well find it necessary to take more dramatic action (See release no. 25).

There followed a flurry of additional media signing "confidence" forms. Shortly before the Convention adjourned -- having just approved their miserable platform - those newsmen who had signed such forms, or given personal assurance, were quietly informed of the locations.

NOTE: It was earlier this day that we virtually broke our own agreement by announcing pre-maturely that there would definitely be civil-disobedience and promising a press conference a little later to describe exactly what form it would take. This not only brought the newsmen into a constant hounding routine, but the police swarming all over the place.

Luckily -- since the Republican Convention Controllers purposely delayed the action on the Platform to avoid most of the Eastern coverage -- we were able to withdraw any suggestion of definite action and of a promised statement to detail type... Instead, we promised a 'statement of purpose' to be given later in the evening... which was fortunate since the later and later hours forced us to change the form of action. This whole thing was embarrassing and for a long, tense time we were really on the spot. But, as mentioned earlier in this report, we finally got off the hook in an acceptable manner. However, thankfully, this was the first and only serious breakdown in top level communication.

Press coverage for action (jam-in at turnstile) was tremendous. Despite late hour -- past midnight -- none of the press left, but all stayed to hassle with police.

After leaving the Cow Palace, an executive CORE strategy meeting was held ... until 4:30 a.m.! Stayed on to discuss outline of rationale for following day.

Wednesday, 15 July

Usual frantic pace.

Preparation of rationale for inside action. Was timed exactly to coincide with inside action planned at close of normal Scranton demonstration on Convention floor. Inside action was well covered and 'confidence' media were tipped-off a little before and therefore prepared for it. 'Outdoor-press-conference' - promised and set-up earlier - began just as banner was unfurled inside. At same time press outside and inside received copies of statement (see release no. 26). (Unfortunately, must have mounted 'scap box' during couple hours sleep and stayed on it in hazy morning hours when wrote diatribe. Really bad!).

During entire day and evening, continuous contact with Negro delegation to ascertain their plans. They kept vacillating between "walk-out" and "walk-around." Finally decided on latter, but would not really state exact timing for this. Really got more information from 'friendly press' and other inside contacts who sat in on their meetings. Learned was timed for just after Goldwater count went over necessary votes.

At that point, whole line of approximately 1000 sat down in front of main entrance outside and Dick Gregory and others spoke for television etc. Previous to this a coffin with guard had been placed in the center of the normal picket circle and as the count began, the CCCR ministers had taken up their vigil in front of the main entrance ... with sign denoting such civil rights martyrs as Medgar Evers.

After Goldwater was acclaimed the nominee, the honor guard carried the coffin to the vigil point, followed by a young carrying group, beating drums and guitars, and then by the flag upside-down in mourning and then the entire line. Three girls dressed in black knelt in front of the coffin, which was flanked by a flowered cross and a sign reading REPUBLICAN PARTY - BORN 1856 - DIED 1964. All of the marchers also knelt down, with the exception of a solid line which circled the whole scene. Long moments of silence were followed by the singing, very softly, of "We Shall Overcome."

The coffin was lifted and the group rose in a body and proceeded to follow behind gently singing "Freedom Now." The procession passed by the turnstiles and other gates as the delegates and visitors began to flow from the Convention. At this point, the police locked arms and held the crowd back behind the gates while the coffin and over 1000 marchers paraded by.

The effect was weird and tremendous, this whole action by far the most powerful and moving of all. The people just stared silently, most with a worried and bewildered look. There were almost no comments at this point -- rather they seemed stunned. It was not until later, as the parade wound through the upper part of the parking lot, that some people began pushing through the lines and making rude noises.

As the circle was completed and the line headed back toward the entrance, we ran into a solid wall of angry-ready-for-a-fight Youth For Freedom (young Birchers) with elbows and signs and loud comments all prepared. At this point the leaders wisely did not attempt to plow through them, but rather just reversed and led the line back up the path, up the stairs and down the exit road spreading across the lanes as they went. This ended with a total sit-down at the gates, then a re-grouping by the edge of the main road (See Operations Report).

The press had given the coffin routine total and massive coverage and even lined the roof to get vantage shots. A good number quickly followed into covering the street sit-in as soon as the word spread. Here the crowd's attitude, and particularly those motorists held-up, quickly changed to intense anger and harassing cries. A frantic air also gripped both the demonstrators and the police for a tense time, but subsided as effective discipline was brought into play on both sides.

After a very late adjournment (1 a.m.), a CORE executive meeting was again conducted into the early hours.

Thursday, 16 July

10 a.m. - Staff meeting.

Usual heavy gathering, checking and dispersal of information to press and others.

3 p.m. - Picket Captains and Monitors Meeting.

4 p.m. - Pickets started march. Continued through day without incident. Ended in massive sit-down in front of main entrances as Convention closed.

Preparation of final position statement and rationale (see release no. 27) and also statement for Western Regional direction (see release no. 28). Outside press conference was again called and set-up to coincide exactly with internal demonstration at the close of Goldwater's speech and final bravos.

As Goldwater spoke, received word and details (checked directly) of mass arrests in Greenwood. Prepared facts which were rushed to Norman Hill, who was beginning final address to the press. (See release no. 29).

Inside two banners had been unfurled (with full press coverage); three demonstrators were carried out, but two managed to out-last Convention and were interviewed on the spot.

Press calls continue, broken only by airport run.

1:30 a.m. - Drinks for all.

Friday, 17 July

Usual. Discussion. Clean-up

Walter Winchell column appears. Large number of calls on this, including Mr. Winchell late that night.

Start work on reports.

Saturday, 18 July

Begin checking down (continues for 3/4 days) all accusations in Winchell column. Alert CORE attorneys etc. Find absolutely no substance to charge (see Special Report no. 30).

Receive calls about House Un-America Activities Committee and their observation of picket lines etc. Kept checking for more detailed information. When found out

what said by Rep. Johansen (Rep., Michigan), then issued statement (see release no. 31).

Sunday, 19 July

Continuation of Winchell column investigation.

Reports. Clean-up details etc. etc. etc.

and on

ADDENDUM

Monday, 29 June - Chapters were also sent demands and first statement, along with special Memo on some dates and general information (see no. Add. 1/2 A).

Briefing notice for Thursday, 9 July from San Mateo Undersheriff Pomeroy (no. 12A).

Community Relations Department and Chief Cahill of San Francisco Police Dept. visited to personally convey displeasure with their force as opposed to others.

TO BE DONE

JOINT STATEMENT FROM CORE AND POLICE RE: WINCHELL COLUMN.

Statement congratulating San Mateo Sheriff's Department

Thank-you Letters.

GENERAL EVALUATION

The coverage was of course excellent ... but one also honestly realizes that to some extent this was due to the lack of any real fight for the Republican Presidential nominee. This should mean that demonstrators at the Democratic Party Convention will receive even greater exposure.

Through personal relationships, steady and quick supply of information and checking on their requests and through near normal servicing of the press, we were able to elicit generally a good attitude and perhaps a much better understanding than is often in evidence from members of the press corps. Hang-overs from local relationships that were not always too cordial continued to cause some problems, but on the whole I think there was great progress in improving even these areas. Press relations were certainly further enhanced by the tenor and tone of those now in complete control of the Republican Party. More than once it was the press against the guards etc. - rather than demonstrators. The real test of any assumed gains in media contact will be how CORE fairs in a Convention atmosphere that is likely to be more favorable to the press. I think some substantial inroads were made, particularly as it affects the Western States and the normal presentation of civil rights in general and CORE in particular. Evidence of this is the continued high interest in the area and the desire of a number of networks and national and local media to do some in-dept reporting on the Western scene.

A few discipline problems came up on the line - but the vast majority of participants were extremely cooperative, unusually good spirited throughout the Convention and ... willing to abide by directions and adhere to CORE rules, etc. As an organization we probably need some improvement in attitudes and stronger cooperation when acting in conjunction with other groups.

There was also better relations with the police and a great amount of credit goes to the San Mateo Sheriff's Department and their general attitude and acceptance of the principal of the "right to demonstrate". This is certainly a great deviation from normal local attitudes. (See letter from Sheriff.)

There was a desperate need for a separate press center - but one had to settle for two extra telephones. Five or six staff plus volunteers working out of one small office - each with their own area of operation - is caotic at best. There were not even enough places to sit, let alone work. Somehow, even

under these most trying circumstances, we did manage to accomplish something. The great need for training more members in the public relations/press coordination skills was also sadly evident. Though there are willing workers, even most serving in this capacity within their own chapters have very little concept of the field as a whole nor are they prepared in the techniques. (This is only one aspect of what must be done.)

Also, it is almost imperative that a duplicate press center - with all necessary equipment - be established at the Convention site. Without such recourse, it made the job all that much more difficult. And with time always at a premium, the many miles between production and delivery were tough ones to overcome. Press credentials for admittance to the working press area and also to the floor where the press platform is would be most helpful. Friendly reporters did assist in loaning tickets, but this is at best an uncertain process and they were not always, particularly at first, available at convenient times... but, I was certainly most grateful for such assistance.

Several times networks or stations throughout the country would ring asking me to verify something they said they had received from the National CORE office. This was always bewildering and sometimes embarrassing - especially when it dealt with matters or actions on which we had made no announcement and did not intend to, at least at that immediate time. I do not know if it was information inadvertantly given or if it did in fact come from a National office source. However, if it did, then our communication with and from National was bad.

By no means do I feel that everything that could be done was done - time and facilities had limitations. Nor do I think that relations and especially "education" of the could not be vastly improved ... but I do feel that some major advances were made and a good basis for further rapport and better coverage established.