

April 3, 1965

SUGGESTED GUIDE LINES FOR FUTURE ORGANIZATIONAL EXPANSION

James Farmer

(This paper is not a policy statement for CORE. It sets forth some of my own ideas as premises for internal discussion within CORE.)

The Steering Committee of the National Action Council last fall instructed me to present a prospectus on the organization's plan for growth. Before we attempted such a task it was fully recognized that we are operating in an area of much unpredictability -- both financially and in terms of the requirements of the day. No blue print is possible in our area of operation, and none of us should become wedded to any structural plans of growth. More or less funds may be available than anticipated, and what seemed most urgent at one period may become anachronistic at the next.

In fact, after presentation of the first draft of this prospectus to the NAC, the critical nature of our financial plight became evident, thus making all talk of eminent expansion fanciful. Dissemination of expansion plans, therefore, was held in abeyance while we wrestled with the problem of survival. While we are not out of the woods, financially, our faith that the organization will continue appears justified. So we must now plan for the future.

If it is true that no blueprint is possible, it is equally true that the direction of growth and expansion cannot be viewed in a vacuum. It must be seen from an over-arching view of the objectives we seek and the kind of society we want, as well as our conceptualization of the problem of reaching these goals. With our increasing movement in the direction of ghetto orientation, community involvement and community organization, a central question arises which needs to be answered before we can even suggest guide lines for expansion.

That question is: "What do we want to do with the ghetto?" To put the question in several other ways: What is the future of the Harlems of this nation? How do the Harlems fit into the society which CORE wants? Are we really seeking now separate but equal? Is this an "operation boot strap" to elevate the standards of the ghetto? Is integration desired and if so can it be achieved through elevating the ghetto? What is the meaning of freedom in CORE's context, now or any other time?

Obviously, no definitive answer can be given to these crucial questions at this time. But we must recognize their relevance in terms of our activities both North and South.

I suggest that the answer to the above questions be formulated in the following broad context: what the Negro community seeks in American society is Freedom and Equality. Freedom involves the right to exercise the prerogative of choice in all areas of the nation's life, unrestricted by race. Where there is no choice in where one may live, where one may work, whether and for whom one may vote, etc., there is no freedom. To the extent that that choice is restricted, freedom is limited. Freedom, then, involves the right to live wherever one's heart desires and one's means permit. It means the right to work at a job which suits one's interest, needs and abilities. Obviously, for reasons of economics, tradition, identity, burgeoning race pride, and other ranges of choice, many Negroes would choose to continue to live in the Harlems of the country even were their choice no longer limited. The open society which we seek, therefore, may be pictured, at least in terms of residence, as a society with many Negroes voluntarily dispersed through all residential areas through the achievement of open occupancy, with many others, probably a majority, living in predominantly Negro areas of the cities by choice, with such areas made livable through improvement of housing, employment, cultural and educational standards.

But even when such freedom, or freedom of choice, has been secured,

the job of achieving equality politically, economically, educationally, and culturally will remain unfinished. The two tasks, of course, cannot be separated. The thrust toward freedom advances the quest for equality, and progress toward equality increases the range of freedom. I believe, however, that it aids programmatic clarity to see the two thrusts as separate but interrelated.

"Freedom" is not yet won, so we must continue hammering away at barriers of segregation and discrimination, in housing, jobs, schools and public accommodations, etc. It seems to me, as we seek to organize community action to eliminate the inequities -- political, educational, cultural -- our community organization program is aimed essentially at the latter thrust, while CORE's traditional approaches have been aimed at the former.

Our tried and proved approaches have not lost their usefulness. To say, as some do, that "the age of demonstrations is over", is like saying to Labor that "the day of strikes is ended". It is true as it always has been, that demonstrations for demonstrations sake are foolish. But to eliminate direct action from our tactical arsenal would be destructive to CORE and lead the movement down the path of disaster.

Demonstrations are for any one or more of three basic purposes: to mobilize and cement our activists, to "demonstrate" or "show" the public the strength of our feeling on the issue at hand and thus to persuade, and, where possible, with our bodies to block a continuation of the evil we protest.

Where Negroes are denied decent jobs, decent housing, decent schools, voting rights, police protection and civility -- where laws and administrative machinery either do not exist or do not adequately remedy the situation, direct action is still appropriate and expressly indicated.

Yet, the traditional approaches are not enough. Examination of the past and analysis of the present indicate that greater depth and subtlety are required to deal with the present phase of the freedom-equality struggle.

The approach must be broadened. New ingredients must be added. It is not a question of "either direct action or community organization and upgrading", or either direct action or political action it is "both-and". But the deeper approaches, in the thrust for equality, are now desperately needed.

In the past, any talk of upgrading and improving the Negro community would immediately have been labeled anti-integrationist, separationist, reactionary and lending grist to the mill of those who cry "not ready yet". But even if such accusations come ^{from} some thoughtless quarters, we must not delay motion in this direction.

Three developments have made this new direction a necessity: (1) recent progress wrought by direct action in achieving freedom which has exposed in stark clarity the inequality (in economics, education, political savvy, culture, self-esteem, etc.) which prevents our effectively utilizing the freedoms we are beginning to win; (2) the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the forthcoming Voter Rights Act which give us tools of unprecedented specificity; and (3) the Anti-Poverty program, which, if we exercise our powers of criticism, protest and leadership effectively, can open up a new era of speeding up progress.

The new thrust, it seems to me, involves four basic aspects: political, educational, economic, cultural. Let us briefly describe each.

It is clear that many of the objectives we seek in terms of retraining and jobs, elimination of slums, city planning for integration in housing and schools, etc., depend ultimately upon the responses we are able to exact from political machinery, local, state and federal. In the past, we have relied almost wholly upon pressuring and cajoling the political units toward the desired response and have been largely content with attacking them, rather than changing them, when the required response was not forthcoming.

I suggest that this is not an adequate approach. The key to achieving our political objectives is political power. Only diminishing returns can

be achieved through political pressure of demonstrations which are not backed up by the muscle of political power.

This means much more than endorsing candidates on a national level, though I am convinced that we must now do that. It means more importantly endorsing candidates and running our own people for political office on the local, state and federal level. And it means even more than that. It also means forging machinery to get our people (CORE people) into decision-making positions on local, state and federal agencies which determine policies and fashion programs relative to CORE's objectives.

In other words, rather than standing outside of the political "power structure" and talking at it, I believe that we should now seek to place people in important positions who are responsive to the needs of the Negro community. This means trying to affect the relative decisions from within, while continuing to pressure them from without. This means, among other things, urging our members to become active in politics on a ward and a precinct level.

Obviously, there are grave pit-falls in such a course. It can become, on the local level, a dirty cut-throat business, and we will lose our political virginity and purity. We should be fully aware of this and the decision must not be made lightly. No decision in CORE's history has been more crucial or more dangerous. To follow such a course as suggested is to sign a contract with unpredictability and uncertainty, but there are few certainties in life, and nothing is completely predictable except the status quo.

In such a course as is suggested many petty politicians and grand ones will try to take over our local and regional organizations. Opportunistic individuals will join CORE to use it to further their own political ambitions. CORE members may fight CORE members in the sharp partisanship of political involvement and candidacies. Political parties will seek to make the organization extensions of themselves and adjuncts of their political machinery. Yet,

I am convinced that we must run these risks, and must quickly develop means of controlling and defeating such attempts.

A National CORE Political Action Department is projected, part of whose mission would be to help our chapters and the national organization chart a clear course through the morass which we will be getting into. This new Department should be headquartered in Washington, D.C. Political action committees should be established as soon as possible in all local CORE chapters.

A second aspect of the problem is, of course, educational. All of our efforts, including the political ones, must be limited by educational deprivation within the Negro community North and South. The Southern regions of CORE are now developing their programs in this regard. The North must do likewise. I would project as the next new department of CORE, following the Political Action Department, an Educational Action Department which would be concerned not only with the traditional attempts to achieve quality integrated education, but also remedial and compensatory programs as well. We have already had considerable consultation with two agencies of specialists in remedial education.

A third aspect of the problem is, of course, economic. I suggest that much more is involved in this than the seeking of existing jobs or the demanding of new ones through public works. It involves also finding other cures for the economic ills of the ghetto. It involves, I believe, the formation of coöps (producers and consumers), and credit unions, encouraging the establishment of small businesses, encouraging the pooling of resources in the Negro community to establish larger business and manufacturing industries, detailing a program for more Negroes who can afford it to buy stock in certain selected key industries, and pooling their stock-holding power by assigning

proxy votes.

In other words, it means, as in the case of political action, developing a concerted drive to achieve economic power, and, to the maximum extent possible, influence the "economic power structure". The latter is far more difficult than the former, and that is one reason for my projecting the political action department first and the Economic Action Department later. It also means an immediate attack on the problems of the "working poor". We must urge and assist the trade union movement to organize the neglected and sub-standard industries where so many Negroes and Puerto Ricans are employed. We must work to insure union democracy by pressuring to reform those unions which exploit or discriminate against Negro and Puerto Rican workers.

Also, as in the case of political action, I would recommend eventual establishment within our chapters of economic action committees, or enlargement of existing employment committees into same.

A fourth crucial aspect of the problem is the cultural -- the devilish concept of innate Negro inferiority, mental, spiritual, emotional, developmental, which has become so much a part of the culture of this nation that our children, white and black, breathe it in the air and very nearly suckle it from the breasts of their mothers. The other side of this phenomenon is the deculturation of the American Negro which produces the problem frequently referred to as that of "identity". I would further project the eventual establishment of a Cultural Action Department.

Such a department would not be public relations. It would involve instead the dissemination of information and the appealing to emotions through the usual media of mass information and cultural communication. This will then work in getting the message into the theatre and films, in advertising and TV, in comic books and national magazines, in the lecture platforms of the nation

and in music, the arts, literature and the dance.

There will, of course, be duplication of some of the work now being done by Community Relations, but I consider this task sufficiently important and distinct from public relations to be a specialized programmatic department. It will also duplicate, or more accurately, mesh into some of the work done by the Education Action Department, for a part of the compensatory (as distinguished from remedial) work of that department will include Negro history and culture and achievements. In dealing with the problems of "identity", this projected department must seek to develop in the Negro community a new self-awareness (I prefer this term to self-pride). In other words, it must perform its function without producing the racist overtones now found in the black nationalist swing of the pendulum.

I would project here, too, the establishment of cultural action committees in local chapters.

The expansions projected for CORE's program and organization will require much thought and planning. We must very soon come to grips with an organizational need for a Research Department. Our country's politics, economic structure, housing and sociology need demand our best insight if we are to chart intelligent courses of action. A large staff need not be projected since major resources are available to us through our many friends at colleges and universities. One staff member with clerical help would be needed to organize and co-ordinate a program.

To better implement the above program projections, and to facilitate the smooth functioning of the rest of CORE's activities, I would project a need for effective regional offices. Our major immediate deficiency is the lack of an office serving the North-Central region.

Every part of the structure of the organization must be programmatic

in essence, every department a specialist programmatic department, all field staff must be programmatic persons. Even the organization of chapters themselves must be seen as a programmatic function, rather than the organizing of chapters for their own sake. Otherwise, the organization loses its purpose for existence: putting itself out of business at the earliest possible moment.