

NEWS RELEASE
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
6 RAYMOND STREET, NW
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30314

HOLD FOR RELEASE UNTIL
WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 3, 1964

ATLANTA, GEORGIA-- Sargent Shriver has been asked by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to suspend a poverty fund award to a Mississippi city because the director of the program favors segregation.

Shriver, who is head of President Johnson's War on Poverty, was asked to find a new director for the five county program because the present one, State Senator J.P. Dean, once advocated using Federal Urban Renewal funds to maintain housing and school segregation. Shriver was also asked to suspend implementation of the award, "and to consider ways in which federal money can be distributed to those who need it, in a manner equitable to all."

The letter pointed out that the five counties in the northeast part of the state, for which the money is intended, has the lowest percentage of Negroes in the entire state, while a recent study by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reported that Tunica County, Mississippi-which is 79% Negro-is the nations poorest.

Tunica is one of 18 Delta counties where Negroes are more than 50% of the population. "In Mississippi," the letter said, "the battle line in the War on Poverty is in the Delta, not in the Northeast."

The letter recommended that Shriver contact the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) about distributing federal funds in an unbiased way.

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The text of the letter follows:

November 30, 1964

Sargent Shriver
Office of Economic Opportunity
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Shriver:

One of the recently announced grants from your office under President Johnson's "War on Poverty" was a grant of almost \$670,000 to the Urban Renewal Agency of Corinth, Mississippi. The money, according to Corinth Mayor John Mercier, will be used to up-grade education through a program of working with high school drop outs in a five county area. Mayor Mercier has already called a conference of Mayors and school superintendents from the five counties. Selected to head this five county project is State Senator J.P. Dean of Corinth.

We find it hard to believe that your agency could make such a grant.

As you may know, Mississippi is one state which has raised

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serious questions about participating in the Federal Urban Renewal Program because of the possibility of resultant integrated housing. Last February 14th, in a debate in the State Senate, Senator Dean who was arguing that Urban Renewal Programs could be used to maintain segregation said Corinth would use Urban Renewal funds to relocate "82 Negro families who live within a block of our white high school and solve a potentially dangerous situation". Senator Dean not only advocates using Federal money to maintain segregated housing but also segregated schools.

Segregated schools still exist in the city of Corinth as well as the five county area for which these funds are intended. We find it difficult to believe that a program which is designed to work with high school drop outs, and potential drop outs, will be an integrated program where schools are segregated and where the administrator of the program is one who apparently believes in both segregated schools and housing. The meeting called by Mayor Mercier to discuss the program did not include one representative from Negro schools in the entire five county area.

Negroes comprise more than 40% of the total population of the state of Mississippi, yet the five counties chosen for this program, according to the Southern Regional Council, have the lowest percentage of Negroes than possibly any other five counties in the state. Just a few days before your announcement, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued a report which said that Tunica County, Mississippi is the nation's poorest. Tunica County, according to the Southern Regional Council, is 79% Negro, and is one of a group of 18 counties in the Mississippi Delta where Negroes make up better than 50% of the population in each county and where the impoverishment of the Negro has never been in question. In Mississippi, the battle line in the War on Poverty is in the Delta, not in the Northeast.

We do not wish to deprive impoverished people-white or black-from receiving federal funds under this program, but in view of Senator Dean's statements and the segregation which exists in the five counties already selected, we ask you to suspend the implementation of this grant, find a new and unbiased director, and consider ways in which federal money can be distributed to those who need it in a manner equitable to all.

We suggest that you contact the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a state-wide group whose many programs include the alleviation of poverty for all the people of Mississippi.

s/ John Lewis

Student Nonviolent
Coordinating Committee

cc

Jesse Morris
COFO

President Lyndon B. Johnson