

July 16, 1964

Talk at Millsap College in Jackson - Ed, Johnnie, Lon, Diane

Thursday evening, Lon, Johnnie, Ed and I went to talk to a group of faculty members at Millsap College at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Reiff where I stayed that night and Margie the subsequent night. The group was extremely intelligent, penetrating curious and suspicious - this was my impression; the others may disagree. They wanted to know very badly what COFO was doing, what made us feel we had to do this - and more than anything else, why Mississippi?

I felt that we left a good impression with them of the movement and a few questions in their minds. They seemed to resent outsiders attempting to solve their problems, were convinced that we despised the white Mississippians and had no understanding, knowledge or empathy for the people here. We were doing nothing that could be continued after the summer and hence were only agitating and why? In the course of the discussion these feelings were broken down somewhat and they asked themselves why they weren't doing this work.

Rev. and Mrs. Reiff are wonderful people and very sympathetic - it is unfortunate that they are moving this week to Texas. Mrs. Reiff said that in many ways they are relieved to be leaving such a closed society. Of eighteen teachers she works with, she says there are only three to whom she can talk freely. She believes that people in Mississippi are expected to all think in the same way unlike anywhere else in the United States and there is this great fear of social repercussion if a divergent idea is expressed. She experienced a real shock at local reaction to Kennedy's death and its infection amongst the children.

The people present at the discussion were Mr. and Mrs. Chandler, r. Jim Reed and Mrs. Jackson. There was a consensus on the slanting and omission by the press and the subsequent lack of knowledge by Mississippians on what was really happening in their own state. This was borne out by Mr. Reed who was from Natchez - in a discussion about south west Mississippi, he knew about Herbert Lee but not about the other five negroes killed. He felt no guilt feelings about his relations with negroes - he grew up playing with them and treating them as equal - he is annoyed with the guilt wave across the country e.g. Kennedy's death. He insinuated that Ed's involvement in the movement and that of other southerners was motivated by a guilt that he does not feel. His feeling towards COFO is a resentment against outside interference and a criticism that we are leaving nothing behind that can be continued.

Everyone agreed on the need for education - they realized that it was outsiders doing this work because of the paralysis for a concerned Mississippian to act in a closed society. This admitted they asked what can we do? ( i.e. without risking too much) There was discussion on what the summer might accomplish and the opportunities for local people to continue work similar to the freedom schools and voter registration. They emphasized the importance of our communication to people like themselves who we are, what we are doing and what COFO is doing and why.

John outlined the COFO program as being two-directional - political and educational and Ed described the white community project showing its three levels.

1. showing poor whites that their interests are similar to those of the negro and they might have a voice to articulate these interests if they were affiliated politically.
2. act as a pressure group on moderates to urge them to vocalize their concerns and establish an active Voice of Moderation in Mississippi.
3. to interpret the COFO program to the white community.

Ed and Len expressed their interpretations of New Testament Christianity.

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Also in Jackson -

At the COFO office I realized the necessity of closer communication with them.

I discussed with Micky her relation to the Human Relation Council and her work up to date. She recommends discussion in homes rather than organizations - coffee sessions after church is a good way to meet people although she says most of her contacts have come through Mrs. Scutt, whom she feels has been drawn much closer to the movement through their involvement with each other. She emphasized the need for communicating a revolutionary goal and expressed how important she felt Len's message was.

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When we returned from Jackson Jeff and I had a conversation with Bob Williams. He told us how much pressure Mr. Naples was under and how scared he was, caught in the middle. He fired Bob for not answering his questions in a desirable manner - he had asked Bob for advice and Bob told him he shouldn't do anything. Yet to us Bob described the danger to Mr. Naples - that no one would trouble us as long as we were here - Mr. Naples would bear the brunt. He has been pressured by the mayor, the police chief, Bailey, his directors and the hotel owners.

Talk at the Unitarian Church - Long Beach July 19, 1964

Gene gave an outline of the COFO program in Mississippi - Doug continued by describing the freedom schools more fully and by explaining that it was COFO policy to discourage demonstrations because we want to work with Mississippians in a framework built up by Mississippians even though we don't always agree with that framework - that's why we want a voice of moderation who will work for resolution of red hot issues by dealing with others such as social and economic problems like unemployment or housing.

Boren described why we were here - a philosophy of what we are doing and how he sees himself within this picture. I did the same.

Jim Guinan expressed his concern with the gap between the church and the civil rights movement. He described the myth of the moderate as two-dimensional - it is a belief that the problem will go away with time and that if conflagration comes about, the moderate can stand in the middle and reconcile.

Jim pointed out that before you can reconcile, you have to be in communication with both sides. He observed that officials of the church and local clergy have little understanding of what is going on in the civil rights movement. Reaction he has found here has been "why didn't you consult us before you came". The reality of the situation is, he continued that it is doubtful that even if COFO had the staff and time to consult these people if the existing moderate minority would be concerned enough or would dare to do anything. It is a fact that this project is the result of three years of hard spade work on the part of the different organizations concerned.

The moderate has to realize that this is only the beginning - it is necessary to use strong words - The moderate must understand that the depth of resistance in the South is no greater than the depth of conviction of the civil rights workers. "If the moderate is to act as a reconciling agent, he must realize that the REVOLUTION IS ON. The COFO program is only the beginning of a struggle which will be going on for ten or fifteen years until a dehumanizing system is broken down. Until the moderate realizes this, he can't reconcile and he is still part of the system that is segregationist. It is necessary after this realization that he plan a strategy to follow to be effective in the reconciliation.

When we returned to the Achron's for dinner, we replayed a tape of the morning's program and Ed added an expression of why we were working in the white community. He stressed the fact that we are working for the freedom of the white people as well as for the freedom of negroes. He illustrated this by describing the limitations on his own freedom. "My freedom is circumscribed by the system under which we live. I can't entertain whom I please - I can't associate with whom I please and I can't express my ideas as I please". He quoted Anne Strickland's reasons for working

in this area and said that he hoped next year that we would have not 25 but 125 or 225 southern white students working along with northern students throughout the south.

A girl I met at church, Lucy Bouton who works with Teesler said that if her room mate goes on vacation for two weeks, I might be able to live with her for that time. She would get in touch.

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Jim, Soren, Sue and I went to St. Mark's episcopal church and afterwards, the priest, Herbert Ward, explained that he didn't like COFO's methods, resented the morally superior attitude of most northerners in the movement - said that he was a good friend of Ed King's, preached on integration once a month and was very much involved in the problem.

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Monday Soren and I talked to the director of Moore Community Centre, Carleton Caruthers because we understood from Dorothy Swisshelm that they needed help in a children's program. He said they don't need help right now because they aren't having a program until September because he is leaving then and a new director is coming.

We then visited Mrs. Fritz at the American Red Cross - she was very friendly as she was before - indirectly we told her quite a bit more about COFO and what we were doing. She agreed that discussion groups in homes was a good idea and that everyone should be free to explain what they are doing. She promised to do some phoning and talking to friends, etc. and discuss the possibilities of such informal groups, raise the idea of the human relations council, having people put some of us up, etc. I have a feeling that although she is unwilling to commit herself too far at this stage that she will go ahead and do this and because she is basically sympathetic might become more involved in doing so.

On our way downstairs, the mayor could be seen talking to his secretary and looking right at us - to walk right out past him if he had any idea who we were would have been rather rude so Soren and I decided to tackle him.