

MEMORANDUM: ON THE SNCC MISSISSIPPI SUMMER PROJECT

In August of 1961, SNCC launched its first voter registration project in Amite, Pike, and Walthall counties of Mississippi. Many hardships were met and overcome in the difficult time that followed, and eventually SNCC workers were able to spread their activity to the Delta and then the entire state. By the fall of 1963 SNCC had expanded into all five of Mississippi's congressional districts and had joined with CORE, SCLC and the NAACP in forming a statewide organization called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Voting Scaques and civic groups from all over the state are now brought together to form the real base of COFO.

In the two and a half years that SNCC has been working in Mississippi there has been a growing recognition of the need to develop programs to supplement the voter registration work. It was realized that in order to prepare Mississippi for real Democracy, not only literacy programs were needed, but also programs of social and political education. In addition, retaliation by county authorities forced SNCC to organize food and clothing drives for near-starving families. Suspension of commodity distribution and the desperate economic state of Mississippi's Negroes have led to expanded food and clothing drives and the establishment of three distribution centers. It is realized that much more comprehensive programs are now necessary to tackle the terrible poverty and deprivation to which the Negro communities of Mississippi are subject.

As a result, this summer SNCC has launched a massive, peace-corps type operation in Mississippi. Scores of teachers, technicians, nurses, artists, and legal advisors have been recruited to come to Mississippi to staff a wide range of programs. These programs can be divided generally into four main areas: freedom schools, community centers, voter registration, and special projects:

I. Freedom Schools: Plans are being made to set up as many Freedom Schools as can be realistically made to work. The number will ultimately vary according to the amount of housing that can be found in a locale, the presence of facilities, and the recruitment of qualified staff personnel. Recent projections call for roughly ten daytime Freedom Schools and two or three away from home schools. The day Freedom Schools will for the most part draw 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students from the locale and operate five days a week from roughly 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Curriculum for these will cover a wide area: seminars in political science and the humanities, remedial work in reading, math, and basic grammar; classes in journalism and creative writing. A school newspaper might be started. Whenever possible, studies will be related to the society in which the students live. Away from home schools would follow essentially the same program with special emphasis on political studies. They would be attended by the more advanced students from across the state.

The Freedom Schools stand as an integral part of SNCC's voter-registration activities. They will provide politically emerging communities with new young leadership and constitute a real attack on the presently stifling system of education existing in the state. If this program succeeds, the basis will have been laid for a cadre of student

leadership around the state of Mississippi committed to critical thinking and social action. The program will succeed if it is given support by the people of the North.

Note: The Freedom School in Hattisburg, Miss. has 600 students and the school in Meridian, Miss. has 200 students!

II. Community Centers: Community Centers, like Freedom Schools, will be set up in as many places as facilities, funds, housing, and qualified staff personnel will permit. These centers will begin to provide the services which have been denied the Negro Community of Mississippi for so long. The Centers are staffed by experienced teachers, social workers and nurses. They are providing instruction in pre-natal care, infant care and general hygiene. They are providing a cultural program for the community -- movies, dramatics, dancing and music. They are offering programs in literacy, adult education, and vocational training and serve as centers for political education and organization. The thirty thousand books collected have been dispersed to the centers around the state. Reports from the South say that the Community Centers are jammed every day with young and old alike.

III. Voter Registration: The struggle for freedom in Mississippi can only be won by a combination of action within the state and a heightened awareness throughout the rest of the country of the need for massive federal intervention to ensure the voting rights of Negroes. This summer's program will work toward both these objectives. The appeal for voter registration workers was extended to students and workers throughout the country..

These workers, whose numbers depended on the funds which could be raised and how much housing could be found within the state, will be involved in a summer long drive to mobilize Negro communities of Mississippi and to assist in developing local leadership and organization. They are involved in an effort to encourage as many Negroes as possible to attempt to register. They are assisting in a campaign, launched in February, to register over 4000,000 Negroes on Freedom registration books resembling as much as possible the official books of the state. The Freedom registration books will serve as the basis for challenging the official books of the state and the validity of "official" federal elections this fall. Finally, voter registration workers are assisting in the summer campaigns of candidates who are running for office, (Freedom candidates).

IV. Special Projects:

a. Research Project: If we would eliminate racial oppression, we must alter fundamentally the structure of political and economic power in Mississippi. In order to do this it is necessary to collect information on various aspects of the state. We must have a realistic picture of its economic life, discover which Northern Business interests sustain oppression there, reveal the extent of foreign ownership of plantations, and generally find the true structure of Mississippi's suppressive political and economic life. Much of the necessary research can be done outside of Mississippi. However, some of it is having to be done within the state. Skilled personnel are carrying out this program of action research.

b. White Communities: Until now there has been no systematic attempt by people interested in the elimination of hate and bigotry to work within the white communities of the deep South. It is the intention of the Mississippi Summer Project to do just that. In the past year, a significant number of Southern white students have been drawn to the Movement. Using students from upper Southern states like Tennessee, and occasionally native Mississippians, SCCC hopes to develop programs

within Mississippi's white communities. These programs will deal directly with the problems of white people. While almost all Negroes in Mississippi are denied the right to vote, statistics clearly indicate that a majority of whites are excluded as well. In addition, poverty and illiteracy can be found in abundance among Mississippi Whites. There is in fact a clear area for Southern white students to work in, for in many ways Mississippi has imprisoned her white people along with her blacks. This projects will be pilot and experimental and the results are unpredictable. But the effort to organize and educate the whites in the direction of democracy and decency can no longer be delayed.

c. Law Student Project: At least 100 law students are in Mississippi launching a massive legal offensive against the official tyranny of the state of Mississippi. Law students are dispersed to projects around the state to serve as legal advisors to voter registration workers and to local people. Others are concentrated in key areas where they are engaged in legal research and are beginning to prepare suits against the state and local officials and to challenge every law that deprives Negroes of their freedom as American Citizens.

It must be understood that the civil rights workers in Mississippi and the people who are housing and feeding them are facing grave personal danger all the time. Arrests and physical abuse, bombings and shootings are a part of every day life. These people are possibly the most courageous people in our country today and the work they are doing is vitally important. We in the North should do everything we can to support them.