

Prospectus for the Summer

"It can be argued that in the history of the United States democracy has produced great leaders in great crises. Sad as it may be, the opposite has been true in Mississippi. As yet there is little evidence that the society of the closed mind will ever possess the moral resources to reform itself, or the capacity for self-examination, or even the tolerance of self-examination."

from Mississippi: the Closed Society
by James W. Silver

It has become evident to the civil rights groups involved in the struggle for freedom in Mississippi that political and social justice cannot be won without the massive aid of the country as a whole, backed by the power and authority of the federal government. Almost no hope exists that the political leaders of Mississippi will steer even a moderate course in the near future; in fact, the contrary seems true: as the winds of change grow stronger, the threatened political elite of Mississippi becomes more intransigent and fanatical in its support of the status quo. The closed society of Mississippi is, as Professor Silver asserts, without the moral resources to reform itself. And Negro efforts to win the right to vote cannot succeed against the extensive legal weapons and police powers of local and state officials without a nation-wide mobilization of support.

Therefore, a program is being planned for this summer which will involve the massive participation of Americans dedicated to the elimination of racial oppression. Scores of students, teachers, professors, ministers, technicians, artists, and legal advisors from all over the country are now being asked to work in Mississippi this summer.

Why a project of this size?

1. Projects of the size of those of the last three summers (100 to 150 workers) are rendered ineffective quickly by police threats and detention of members.
2. Previous projects have gotten no national publicity on the crucial issue of voting rights, and hence, have little national support either from public opinion or from the Federal Government. A large number of students from the North making the necessary sacrifices to go South would make abundantly clear to the government and the public that this is not a situation which can be ignored any longer, and would project an image of cooperation between Northern and white people and Southern Negro people to the nation which will reduce fears of an impending race war.
3. Because of the lack of numbers in the past, all workers in Mississippi have had to devote themselves to voter registration, leaving no manpower for stop-gap community education projects which can reduce illiteracy drastically as well as raise the level of education of Negroes significantly. Both

of these activities are, naturally, essential to the project's emphasis on voting.

4. Bail money cannot be provided for jailed workers; hence, a large number of people going South would prevent the project from being halted in its initial stages by immediate arrests. Indeed, what will probably happen in some communities is the filling of jails with civil rights workers to overflowing, forcing the community to realize that it cannot dispense with the problem of Negroes' attempting to register simply by jailing "outsiders."

Why this summer?

Mississippi at this juncture in the Movement has received too little attention---that is, attention to what the state's attitude really is---and has presented COFO with a major policy decision during the last months. Either the civil rights struggle has to continue there as it has for the past few years, with small projects continuing to work in selected communities with no real progress on any fronts, or the Movement must concentrate on confronting Mississippi with a representative task force of such a size as to force either the state and municipal governments to change their social and legal structures, or the Federal Government to intervene on behalf of the constitutional rights of its citizens. The first alternative, in one sense, could mean continuing deaths, beatings, with no real progress resulting, since a complete withdrawal and abandonment from the state is unthinkable for anyone who has seen its conditions and experienced the terror of its police-state atmosphere.

Since 1964 is an election year, the clear-cut issue of voting rights should be brought out in the open. Many SNCC and CORE workers in Mississippi hold the view that Negroes will never vote in large numbers until Federal marshals and troops intervene. At any rate, many Americans must be made to realize that the voting rights they so often take for granted involve considerable risk for Negroes in the South. In the larger context of the national civil rights movement, enough progress has been made during the last year that there can be no turning back. Major victories in Mississippi, recognized as the stronghold of racial intolerance in the South, would immeasurably speed the breaking-down of legal and social discrimination in both North and South.

The project is seen as a response to the Washington March and an attempt to assure that in the Presidential Election year 1964, all American citizens are given the franchise. The people at work on the project are neither working at odds with the federal government nor at war with the State of Mississippi. The impetus is not against Mississippi, but for the right to vote, to have the ability to read, the aspirations and the training to work.

Description of the Project

This summer's work in Mississippi is sponsored by COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, which includes the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the NAACP, as well as Mississippi community groups. Within the state

COFO has made extensive preparations since mid-January to develop structured programs which will put to creative use the talents and energies of the hundreds of expected summer volunteers.

Voter Registration---This will be the most concentrated level of activity. Voter registration workers will be involved in an intensive summer drive to encourage as many Negroes as possible to register. They will participate in COFO's Freedom Registration, launched in early February, to register over 400,000 Negroes on Freedom Registration books. These books will be set up in local Negro establishments and will have simplified standards of registration (the literacy test and the requirement demanding an interpretation of a section of the Mississippi Constitution will be eliminated). Freedom Registration books will serve as the basis of a challenge of the official books of the state and the validity of "official" elections this fall. Finally, registration workers will assist in the campaigns of Freedom candidates who are expected to run for seats in all five of the State's congressional districts and for the seat of Senator John Stennis, who is up for reelection.

Freedom Schools---Plans are being made to set up as many Freedom Schools as possible. The number will ultimately vary according to housing, facilities and staff personnel that are available. Recent projections call for roughly ten day Freedom Schools and two or three away-from-home schools. The day Freedom Schools will for the most part draw tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students from the locale. Each school will have a high student-teacher ratio, perhaps one teacher to every four or five students, so that instruction can be as individual as possible. It can be estimated that day Freedom Schools will have approximately fifty students and fifteen teachers each. Curriculum for the schools will include: remedial work in reading, math, and basic grammar; seminars in political science and the humanities, journalism and creative writing; recreational programs such as dramatics, music appreciation, arts and crafts, organized athletics, movies; and voter registration field work. In addition, students will be encouraged to develop a school newspaper and organize a student government. Whenever possible, studies will be related to the society in which the students live. Away-from-home Freedom Schools will draw particular students from around the State. At present, two such schools are planned. These schools would try to develop the talents of students who show promise of exceptional leadership in the future.

The Freedom Schools stand as an integral part of COFO's voter registration activities. They will provide politically emerging communities with new young leadership, and constitute a real attack on the present educational system, which is limited and stifling. By the end of the summer, the basis will have been laid for a cadre of student leadership around the State of Mississippi committed to critical thinking and social action.

Community Centers---The Community Centers program projects a network of community centers across the state. Conceived as a long-range institution, these centers will provide a structure for a sweeping range of recreational and educational programs. In doing this, they will not only serve basic needs of Negro communities now ignored by the social service provisions of the State, but will form a dynamic focus for the development of community organization. The educational

features of the centers will include job training programs for the unskilled and unemployed, literacy and remedial programs for adults as well as young people, public health programs such as prenatal and infant care, basic nutrition, etc. to alleviate some of the serious health problems of Negro Mississippians, adult education workshops which would deal with family relations, federal service programs, home improvement and other information vital to the needs of Negro communities, and also extracurricular programs for grade school and high school students to supplement educational deficiencies and provide opportunity for critical thought and creative expression. Each center would have a well-rounded library because Negroes in many communities now have no access to an adequate library.

Though the community centers program is primarily educational, some of each center's resources would be used to provide much-needed recreational facilities for the Negro community. In most communities in Mississippi the only recreation outside of taverns is the movies, and for Negroes this means segregated movies. If there is a movie theater in the Negro community, it is old, run-down, and shows mostly out-of-date, third-rate Hollywood films. The film program of the centers will not only provide a more agreeable atmosphere for movies, it will bring films of serious content which are almost never shown in Mississippi, where ideas are rigidly controlled. Other recreational offerings will be: music appreciation classes, arts and crafts workshops, drama groups, discussion clubs on current events, literature and Negro achievement, etc., pen pal clubs, organized sports (where equipment allows), and occasional special performances by outside entertainers, such as folk festivals, jazz concerts, etc. Organized story-telling for young children will be entertaining, and will introduce them to the resources of the center's library and to reading for pleasure in general.

Special Projects---

a. Research Project--A number of summer workers will devote themselves to research on the economic and political life of Mississippi. Some of this work will be done outside the state, but much will need resources which can be found only in Mississippi. In addition, a number of people will be asked to live in white communities to survey attitudes and record reactions to summer happenings.

b. Legal Project--A team of lawyers and at least 100 law students are expected to come to Mississippi to launch a massive legal offensive against the official tyranny of the state of Mississippi. Law students will be dispersed to projects around the state to serve as legal advisors to voter registration workers and to local people. Others will be concentrated in key areas where they will engage in legal research and begin to prepare suits against the state and local officials and to challenge every law that deprives Negroes of their freedom.

c. 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 such as Tennessee, and occasionally native Mississippians, SNCC hopes to develop programs within Mississippi's white community. These programs will deal directly with the problems of the 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 project will be pilot and experimental and the results are unpredictable. But the effort to organize and educate whites in the direction of democracy and decency can no longer be delayed.

d. The Theater Project--Sponsored by the Tougaloo Drama Department, this summer will also mark the beginning of a repertory theater in Jackson, Mississippi. The actors will be Negro Mississippians; the plays will dramatize the experience of the Negro in Mississippi and in America; the stage will be the churches, community centers and fields of rural Mississippi.

Using the theater as an instrument of education as well as a source of entertainment, a new area of protest will be opened.