

Minutes of COFO Convention, February 9, 1964

Dr. Henry Presiding

~~Open~~ Opening Remarks by Mrs. Clarie Harvey, of Jackson.

Mrs. Harvey proposed that Women Strike for Peace members and other groups of women be invited to come to Mississippi for the summer to work ~~on~~ within the regular framework of the summer program. She related ~~the~~ several accounts indicating that these women are very interested in the problems of Mississippi and want to do something about them. Unanimously passed that they be invited.

Jack McKart of Operation Freedom. He described the ~~Organizat~~ program of Operation Freedom. It provides money for people subjected to economic reprisals. They have worked only in the Delta ~~in~~ so far. (in their Mississippi activities). He related that he went to a meeting of the National Association ~~of~~ for the Advancement of White People in Ohio recently, and was taught again that the people in the civil rights movement must stick together to fight bigotry such as he saw in the NAAWP.

Dr. Henry ~~then~~ turned the floor over to Bob Moses to explain the COFO staff program in some detail. Bob dealt with the items in the packet (appended) one at a time.

A. Freedom Registration. Bob Moses explained that the concept is an extension of the LFreedom Vote concept. The Freedom Registration (2 number 2 in packet) would have its own structure and requirements. It is not a project to teach people to register officially; it is a separate registration. The goal is to register as many as 400,000 (of the 425,000 Negroes of voting age) around the state.

Dr. Henry raised the question~~s~~ of the reluctance of some people to sign their names. In the general debate that followed, the following points were raised.

Mr. Rayford (also Peach~~uck~~) said that ~~axxxx~~ man should be worth his signature. Others, notably Mrs. Pige~~e~~ argued for those who would sign, but are afraid. A man who is not worth his signature ~~is~~ still worth milk for the children, etc..

~~People~~ People should be required to sign, because the name, even if the registrar puts it there, is damaging enough, if it falls into the wrong hands. People who are really afraid will be afraid even to allow others to sign for them.

If people do not sign their names themselves, the books are open to charges of fraudulent registration. This could even be dangerous legally, because a man could deny he authorized his name to be put on the books and bring charges against the registrar.

The purpose of the Freedom Registration is to make registration easy in terms of literacy, etc., not in terms of courage.

Dr. Henry closed debate and called the question. The vote was 51-41 that people should be required to sign their own names. Amended to read that exceptions would be made for the blind, illiterate, etc., using the standard procedure of the person making a mark, and two witnesses signing their names.

B. Democratic Convention ("2a" in the packet), Bob still presiding. Bob outlined the convention plans (see packet), and urged those at the meeting to attend the precinct conventions.

Dr. Henry raised the point of the Republican convention. There are plans in Washington County to try to challenge both parties. Mrs. Pigeon proposed ~~that~~ the plan be expanded to include the Republicans. The consensus was to include the Republican convention, but with a more modified plan. Bob said that people who have tried to register can consider themselves "qualified electors" if they are not officially registered until the Freedom Registration books are set up. Then those who are freedom registered can attend the party conventions. Bob reiterated that the convention delegates should go home and organize the rival conventions, and watch for the regular conventions.

C. Discussion of candidates for the Democratic primaries. Bob proposed that the ~~next~~ next COFO meeting (early in March) be a nominating convention. Passed.

Break for lunch.

AFTERNOON SESSION (Dr. Henry presiding)

D. Area reports

1. Hattiesburg. Rev. Bob Stone ~~of~~ reported on Hattiesburg, and ~~on~~ expressed sentiments for the visiting ministers. He ~~xx~~ described his first meeting with Bob Moses in Washington over the Thanksgiving weekend. Bob suggested that ministers come to Hattiesburg at ~~that~~ time. Three religious organizations, The Presbyterian ~~and~~ Commission on Religion and Race, the ~~Rabin~~ R Rabbinical Council and The Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) sponsored the visits. ~~After~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ Fifty-one ministers actually came for Freedom Day, January 22. Dr. Henry and Charles Evers were there. It was a great picket line.

Speaking of results, Rev. Stone said that the experience had been very educational for the ministers; they had become acquainted with the reality of economic reprisals, police harassment, etc. Furthermore, it was the first sustained demonstration in the history of Mississippi. More people applied to register than ever had in Hattiesburg, now over 250 and still going down. ~~The~~ He concluded that this was the beginning of a breakthrough on fear in Hattiesburg. The ministers also learned about the "valiant young leadership", which along with NAACP activity through the years, had made Hattiesburg such a success. The ministers reported that they were planning to keep at least a contingent present for Hattiesburg through the spring, with some staying, some going and returning later. Other reports from Hattiesburg--Mr. Fairley, NAACP branch pres., recounted an incident where the police were lenient in an accident case. A lady whose husband was fired said that they were continuing to picket, etc.

Summary of Hattiesburg report: Negroes began signing affidavits around 1949, asking the federal govt to do something about voter discrimination. The government finally went to court and won a contempt citation against Theron Lynd. The idea of the Hattiesburg Freedom Day drive was to test the federal government's intentions. The City backed down when the people tested it.

The question was raised: How long should ministers, COFO staff remain in Hattiesburg in large numbers: People from Hattiesburg were unanimous ~~is~~ in saying that they should stay a while longer. Other ~~a~~ towns are asking for similar large-scale campaigns, so the ministers, with Rev. Stone speaking, decided to work on getting more ministers. Dr. Henry pointed out the the National Council of Churches

so far has been willing to help out only on the issue of voter registration, so their presence cannot be ~~used~~ called upon indiscriminately by anyone. The consensus of opinion, articulated several times, was that COFO can call on outside help only if the local community is already moving; outside help can't begin a campaign. Mrs. Pigeon suggested that local ministers be invited to lead their congregations to the Courthouse.

2. the Canton report was postponed, because none of the COFO staff people from Canton were present.

Miss Fairfax of AFSC was recognized. She spoke briefly. Dr. Henry reported that the AFSC is contemplating setting up an office in Mississippi. When they come in, they presumably will join COFO.

Rev. Ed King was recognized. He reported that stores are closing down on Capitol St. (due probably to a Negro boycott); in a short sermon he posed the problem of one's reaction to the Beckwith decision. Recommended Christlike reaction.

E. Food and clothing ("5" and "7" in the packet). Anell Ponder outlined the arrangement with the national agency for clothing distribution. Amzie Moore asked for reports from people to find out how each county's commodity program works. Bob added that people should also get a list of what food people are supposed to get (COFO office will send a list), and then check to see ~~xxx~~ if they do.

F. Federal programs. ~~2~~ ("4" in the packet) Charlie Cobb reported on the meeting at Tougaloo the day before (Feb. 8) to consider job opportunities arising from the new NASA test facility. Mr. Kirksey presented a ~~per~~ proposal (page 4), and was appointed chairman of the committee he suggested. He will travel around the state to coordinate and assist these local efforts. ~~and~~

Charlie Cobb explained the sharecroppers conference to be held Feb. 29 at Mt. Beulah. Bob Moses spoke, urging people to recruit farmers to come to the meeting.

Dave Lollis was introduced and spoke briefly.

G. Summer program. ~~123456789~~ ("3" in the packet). Al Lowenstein spoke on the general philosophy of a massive summer project. A massive effort inside and outside Mississippi is necessary to crack it. The goal is to make white Mississippians understand that change has to come, and thus create a climate where moderates will be reasonable about changing the status quo. The summer project 1. has to help the Negro community, not just stir up trouble, and 2. it has to convince whites that change is inevitable. The project must be massive in understanding of the problems and massive in the support of Negroes, ~~in~~ both in Miss. and outside. In planning such a project, we must face the fact that there will be repression and privation. We have to want change badly enough to be willing to go through even more difficult times to reach an ~~in~~ ultimately better situation. He asked the group if they were ready to rock boats with this understanding. The consensus was ~~a~~ yes. He envisioned others being attracted by the new work, school teachers getting new backbone, etc. When the white people see that change is inevitable, change will come more quickly than we could plan for it. That is the overall goal for the summer project.