

COFO Political Program

This leaflet describes briefly the extensive political program that COFO has undertaken in the state of Mississippi. There are two closely related programs as shown on the outline on page 3. Pages 1 and 2 of this leaflet describe both of these programs and their interaction.

The focus of political activity during the spring and summer will be an attempt to unseat the regular Mississippi delegation to the National Democratic Convention at Atlantic City, New Jersey, in August this year.

The Democratic National Convention is held every four years. The convention selects the Democratic candidates for President and Vice-President of the United States. The convention also writes the Democratic platform for the November election. Delegates from the Democratic party in all 50 states are participants in the convention. Mississippi is presently allowed 24 votes at the convention.

Mississippi does not allow many people, particularly Negroes, to participate in political affairs in meaningful numbers. For this reason, COFO claims that the Mississippi delegation to the convention does not represent all the people in Mississippi and should not be seated. An attempt is being made to contact delegations from other states to have them vote against seating the regular Mississippi delegation. It is not known whether or not this challenge will be successful.

Two groups of delegates will attempt to be seated at the convention--the regular Democratic delegation and the so-called Freedom Democratic delegation. Following is a description of how these delegations will be selected:

Regular Democratic Party. Under the laws of Mississippi, a person can register to vote by filling out an official registration form and having it approved by the registrar in the county in which the applicant lives. Any registered voter is then eligible to vote in the state and national elections (if he has paid poll tax for the state elections) and can take part in the Democratic party political meetings.

COFO is running an intensive statewide drive to get Negroes registered throughout the state. At present only about 5% of the eligible Negroes in the state are registered. There is great difficulty in raising this number; there seem to be factions in the state who would prefer that Negroes are not registered in large numbers.

The Democratic party in Mississippi holds a series of conventions every four years to select delegates to the Democratic National Convention. These conventions are held in years of a national election; 1964 is such a year. The first conventions are the precinct conventions. A precinct convention is held in every voting precinct in the state; there are almost 1800 voting precincts in the state. At the precinct convention, delegates are elected to the county convention. All registered voters living in the precinct are eligible to go to the precinct convention. The precinct conventions are all being held on Tuesday, June 16, at 10 a.m. this year. The county conventions will be on Tuesday, June 23, at 10 a.m. this year. At the county convention delegates are elected to go to the district and state conventions. There are five district conventions--one for each congressional district. This year these will be from June 29 through July 3. At the district conventions some of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention are selected. Members

of the State Democratic Executive Committee are also chosen at the district conventions; the State Democratic Executive Committee is the ruling body for the Democratic party in Mississippi and has control over all party affairs in the state.

The state convention is to be held Tuesday, July 28, in Jackson. At this convention the rest of the delegates to the Democratic National Convention are to be selected. The national committeeman and national committeewoman are selected. The presidential electors for Mississippi are selected.

So far Negroes have not participated in Democratic party politics in the state of Mississippi. This year COFO is urging Negroes throughout the state to attend the precinct meetings in their precincts. COFO is urging all Negroes, particularly those who have tried to register but have been unable to, to attend the precinct meetings. The Negroes are being urged to attempt to elect their own slates of delegates to the county conventions. It is not known how the Democratic party will respond to this challenge.

Freedom Democratic Party Because the state officials have refused to register so many people in Mississippi COFO is running a parallel registration procedure, so-called Freedom Registration. Freedom registration will take place under a Freedom Registrar, there being one Freedom Registrar to a county. The Freedom Registration is a simplified registration form with no literacy or interpretive requirements. Any U.S. citizen who is a resident of Mississippi can be Freedom registered. An attempt is being made to Freedom register between 300,000 and 400,000 people.

Those who are Freedom registered and others who so wish will hold their own parallel set of precinct, county, district, and state meetings. The only requirement for participation in the precinct meetings is to be either registered or Freedom registered. Delegates to all higher meetings will be chosen just as in the regular Democratic party structure.

It is these two delegations--from the regular Democratic party and from the Freedom Democratic party--which will attempt to be seated as the delegates to the National Democratic Convention. The challenge of the Freedom Democratic party at the National Convention is one attempt to win truly representative government for all the people in Mississippi.

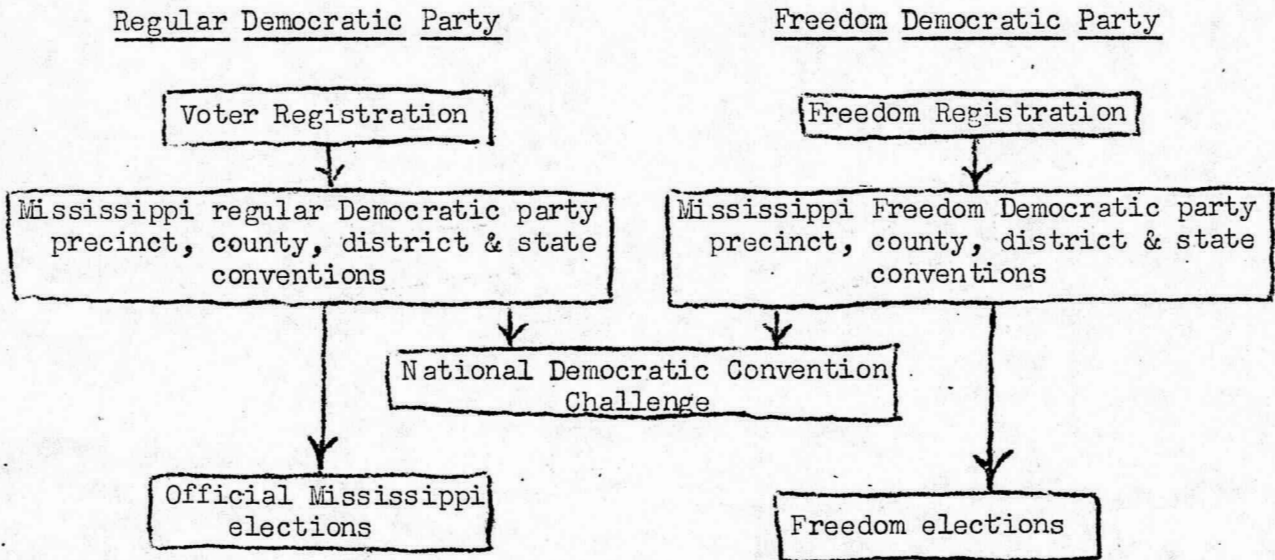
Another attempt to win representative government is being made in this year's Democratic primary election to be held June 2. COFO is running Democratic candidates in three of the congressional districts and for the U. S. Senate against the incumbent Democratic officeholders. The COFO candidates are as follows:

2nd Congressional District: Fannie Lou Hamer of Ruleville
 3rd Congressional District: James M. Houston of Vicksburg
 5th Congressional District: Rev. John E. Cameron of Hattiesburg
 U. S. Senate: Victoria Jo Gray of Hattiesburg

In the November elections in the fall all Freedom registered voters and regularly registered voters will be eligible to vote in the Freedom election. This election will have a ballot which will include Freedom candidates as well as the regular candidates. This Freedom election will again show that people wishing to take part in Mississippi political affairs are prevented from doing so by restrictive state organizations.

The COFO political program is designed to fill two rolls:

- 1) Challenge the existing political structure in Mississippi and show how it discriminates against the Negro.
- 2) Educate the Negro politically; get the Negro thinking about specific ways to improve his position in Mississippi society; train people for future positions of leadership in the state.



Note: Any registered voter can take part in both columns.