

MINUTES: COFO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
July 10, 1964

Persons Present: Bob Moses, Dave Dennis, Andy Young (visitor), Jim Forman, Stokely Carmichael, Annell Ponder, Dick Jewitt, Matt Suarez, Jesse Morris, Dona Moses (visitor), James Pittman (visitor), C sey Hayden (visitor), Gwen Gillon (visitor), Rudy Lombard (visitor), Staughton Lynd, Hunter MOrey (visitor), Bill Kunstler (visitor), Courtland Cox (visitor) and Connie McDougall (visitor).

The meeting opened with preparation of an agenda. Bob Moses acted as chairman. The first item on the agenda was the report from the legal coordinator. Hunter stressed the importance of having all suits channelled through the Jackson office. He also reported on a series of suits which have been filed and/or which have brought relief to our work situation legally. Eighteen lawyers are working with COFO in the state. Several affirmative suits have been either contemplated or initiated. "On June 19, a suit challenging the structure of the Democratic party in Mississippi was initiated in conjunction with the overall convention challenge being prepared by COFO. On June 1, a suit was instituted, and a temporary restraining order obtained, to bar the state of Mississippi from requiring a poll tax as a prerequisite of the right to vote. Filed July 10 is a suit asking for an injunction to enjoin unlawful action and violence." This is aimed especially at KKK, white citizens councils, and similar groups. (Copies are available from Legal Coordinator upon request.) The mere physical presence of the lawyers in the state is serving a useful function in inhibiting the grosser forms of arbitrary arrest and intimidation.

A legal advisory committee composed of attorneys Wolf, Kunstler Kenoy, Smith, Stavis, Pemberton, Collins has been organized for two purposes: 1) to liberalize the make-up of legal advice - to combat accusations and charges ~~that~~ of "left-wing" influence accompanying the entrance of the Lawyer's Guild attorneys into the state; and 2) to increase sources of legal advice.

A general policy of seeking to remove cases to the Federal courts has been decided in order to avoid the possibilities of having out-of-state lawyers challenged because they are not barred by Mississippi.

Hunter also reported that plans are underway to secure automobile insurance coverage for all cars used in CoFO activities.

Contacts and communications with FBI and local officials has improved. Continues to look somewhat better. Attention was called to the opening of the new regional FBI office here in Jackson.

Some discussion was given to Joe Raugh's suit to prevent the seating of the Mississippi delegation at the Democratic Convention with the conclusion being that he should go ahead with his plans in spite of any such action which may be planned and/or undertaken by the Administration.

The next item discussed caused considerable discussion relating to the structure of COFO, its relationship to national civil rights organizations, whether or not COFO should begin to do fundraising as an organization, its future as a grass roots oriented social agency. No definite decisions were made, but the discussants seemed to lean toward COFO's becoming a strong, Mississippi-oriented organization, the feeling being that the success of COFO would naturally help and not at all hamper the strength of the other organizations.

This discussion was started when it was reported that Mr. Nathan Schwerner is raising funds for civil rights work in Mississippi. He wished to give these funds to COFO rather than to any one COFO participating organization or combination of organizations. (CORE or CORE/SNCC) He indicated that Mickey's wishes were the same as his in this matter. CORE national officers had felt that the money (now standing at more than \$20,000 and which may be increased to \$100,000 or more) should be split between CORE and SNCC. CORE had also asked Mr. Schwerner to appear at meetings which they had set up. Mr. Schwerner wanted COFO to decide whether or not he should go as well as to decide what should be done with the money which he will raise.

It was decided that we will write to Mr. Schwerner saying that COFO executive committee requests that the money be sent to COFO. A copy of the letter which would also inform Mr. Schwerner that he should feel free to accept any speaking engagements which he wishes to accept, would be sent to National CORE. It was felt that a team of COFO representatives should talk face to face with National CORE before sending them the copy of the letter.

(Further attention (exploration, interpretation and explanation to staff and others concerned) needs to be given to the idea of COFO raising funds independently.)

Dave reported that CORE is interested in putting additional staff into the state if this is desirable. He talked in terms of adding 100 additional workers who would be sent by the CORE chapters across the country. Some questions were raised in regard to this: How does CORE see this proposal in terms of short term or long term work in the state, in regard to development of local people vs introduction of outside staff (could or would CORE chapters support training of local persons for work with COFO?), in regard to racial balance of Negro and white workers, in regard to present geographical area delineation. The decision was made that these questions be raised with the CORE Board of Directors. Another concern was raised regarding national organizational vs local program projection. Pragmatic question of "what will CORE want to get out of such an action" was raised in light of historical events. It was felt that a small group should get together and itemize our concerns and complaints. A special request that CORE decentralize its public relations department, setting up a local office for Mississippi should accompany this communique.

Rudy and Andy both made hearteningly impassioned statements pointing up the vital and critical importance of the Mississippi Summer Project and its strategic relationship to the onward thrust of the total movement this year. They hoped that the opportunity for all groups to participate fully in this effort would not be missed.

From this point, the discussion turned to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and ways in which it could increase its participation in the project. Andy reported that since the Civil Rights Bill was passed, SCLC will not need to conduct its planned program of demonstrations across the state of Alabama for the right to vote. Dr. King and other staff as needed would have approximately one month which could be taken up in work with COFO and the summer project.

It was felt that the following activities would be suggested to Dr. King as ways in which he could help: making short speeches for radio and television pointing up local precinct and other freedom democratic party activities, longer television interviews with COFO staff and local citizens regarding COFO program, a speaking tour of the larger cities across the state, appearance at Freedom School Convention, Freedom Democratic Party State Convention, a fundraising benefit for COFO (suggested place to come from COFO) and other ways which occur to him and to us. A committee of COFO staff would be set up to advise Dr. King on his activities, content of speeches, setting up of itinerary, and so forth. Someone, preferably Bob and Dr. Henry and/or other COFO people would accompany him on his trips helping to answer questions about the program, and so forth. Andy agreed to come with Dr. King.

The matter of summer program staff came up next. Staughton expressed concern that project directors in some cases were reassigning freedom school staff to work in voter registration without consulting him about it. It was felt that some policy clarification was needed here. Discussion following pointed up a great need for additional workers in the state, and it was decided that we would admit other volunteers - those known and highly recommended by staff or others familiar with Mississippi situation - to come to work. Annell requested that federal programs workers be allowed to help with community centers activities if they have time and interest in doing so.

The convention challenge was discussed next. There was a feeling that there is a good chance that there will be much pressure to prevent the seating of the regular Mississippi democratic delegation. (Oregon and Minnesota have recently pledged to urge the seating of the Freedom Democratic Party delegates. There has been some talk in the state that the regular delegates may decide not to attend the Convention.)

k Much consideration was given to the discussion of planned direct action at the convention. The decision was reached that demonstrations in support of seating of FDP delegates be held throughout the

country the week preceding the convention and up until such time as a decision is reached on the seating, a vigil dramatizing the tragic hell of the daily life of Negroes in this county be held throughout the convention, and that if FDP delegates are not seated massive protests, possibly involving civil disobedience be staged in Atlantic City. These suggestions to be presented to Group sponsoring the demonstrations (SCLC, SNCC, CORE, NALC and others who agree to participate, following the ground rules set by the four groups mentioned) for action.

Annell Ponder, Recorder

NOTE: Personnel matters such as transfers, terminations and new people coming in should be discussed with the personnel committee in Jackson.