

SNCC West Coast Regional Conference Workshop Report.....Sunday, November 15, 1964  
Workshop on RESEARCH

- I. Law Students came to Mississippi to assist the lawyers by doing the paperwork and foot-work necessary to collect the facts surrounding arrests.
- II. Profiles of the power structure were made in some communities, identifying the seats of economic power and the central political figures (not necessarily the holders of the highest offices: an example of dual power structure is Canton, Miss., where not the mayor but his assistant, and not the public attorney but his assistant, are the influential people).
- III. White Community Project consisted of two separate efforts, both utilizing only white COFO workers (especially southerners). Identifying with one of these efforts hinders a worker in the other (in Jackson, for instance, the white middle class is reported to feel almost as much animosity toward poor whites as toward Negroes).
  - A. Poor whites are approached with some sort of anti-poverty program and with the idea that segregation is a divide-and-conquer tactic used by the wealthier whites. Some COFO workers identified themselves as AFL-CIO organizers and attempted (unsuccessfully) to form shrimpers' unions on the Gulf Coast.
  - B. Middle class whites have been or could be approached by white COFO workers in two ways, both of which are a misallocation of energy if not actually harmful to the movement, according to a large portion of the Negro staff:
    1. white COFO workers meet with local whites and try to break the image that they are beatniks. For example, two whites and a Negro went to Ole Miss to meet with a sociology class on invitation from the professor; on his recommendation the Negro waited (at a gas station) while the others went to the campus.
    2. white COFO workers have had dealings with moderate organizations in Mississippi, and could substantially assist these organizations, according to John Parkman (a summer volunteer), if they would avoid identifying themselves with COFO:
      - a. Mississippi Council on Human Relations, a statewide organization that is integrated and has helped COFO indirectly by establishing the right to hold integrated meetings in some areas of Mississippi. Its mailing list of 2000 provides COFO with names of people who can be trusted in communities all over the state.
      - b. Mississippians for Public Education, mothers who are hardly liberal but who press for compliance with the law rather than the closing of schools that are desegregated (four school districts introduced desegregation in September, 1964). They want to protect their own children by requesting calm.

Work by COFO whites with local whites (middle class especially) is criticized within COFO from two points of view:

first: Communication with southern whites about civil rights does not become realistic enough to be relevant to the movement unless Negroes are present. Talking by whites with whites can hurt the Negro population's trust in COFO and can make the local whites think that COFO people are willing to compromise. Also it can allow local whites to lie to new northern volunteers about the local situation because there is no local Negro present to challenge their statements. This sort of useless talking could be left to "tea and cooky" groups like the NAACP.

second: Any work to create moderates among the whites who are economically benefiting from the system modifies the revolutionary situation that now exists and increases the Negro's temptation to compromise himself and accept a place in the system.

- IV. Federal Programs work was done in four towns and coordinated by Jackson office. The projects in the four towns differed because the basis of all SNCC work is to respond to the needs of the community. Activities were of two sorts: A. helping the Negro community discover and utilize available federal funds and organize for its own economic independence and self-sufficiency; B. investigating and exposing to Washington discriminatory practices in agencies that depend on federal money. In Canton the summer volunteers set out first to establish local organizations that would be able to continue the study of federal programs on their own after the summer.
  - A. Local organizations

1. Farmers' Leagues were formed, one in Madison County (Canton), and planned for other counties (particularly Benton). Rural Negroes in Mississippi are faced with an average income of \$600 a year (as opposed to \$1000 a year for urban Negroes), and with increasing mechanization and crop diversification (from cotton to soy beans, corn, cattle, etc.). The lily-white local committees of the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service decide in the winter on the "acreage allotment" for each farm, and then sometimes change their minds in the spring after seeds have already been planted and fertilized, ordering the farmer to plow under perhaps half of the seedlings he has planted at his own expense. Farmers' Leagues spread information about services such as the following:

- a. The ASCS will map anyone's land and say what kind of fertilizer should be used.
- b. Social Security returns may be deducted from a sharecropper's earnings all his life and yet never be deposited in his account in Washington. Anyone can pick up a card (at all banks) to send to Washington to find out how much is in his account. If the money is not being deposited, the employer is subject to a minimum of two years in prison and a fine of \$1000.
- c. Cheap short-term loans (for getting through the last months before picking time) are available from the Farmers Home Administration. Most farmers borrow at high interest rates (such as 7½%) from the man who owns the land they work. Segregationist FHA agents came to explain their programs to a church full of Negro farmers in Madison County, while in a nearby county Negroes have been thrown out of the FHA office.

The Madison County Farmers League had 125 dues-paying members and a mailing list of 360. They are building a cooperative grain storage bin. Local leadership was soon directing the League, and the COFO workers were free to turn to other things.

2. Negro Chamber of Commerce was established in Canton. A speaker from the Negro C of C in Jackson gave advice on how to pass the civil service examination. A speaker from the Small Business Administration office in Jackson met with the group at the best Negro restaurant in Canton and would not touch water or food, but he came and he spoke.
3. A cooperatively owned shopping center is being set up in Canton. Faced with the problem of incorporating, the group had access to an expert Los Angeles corporate lawyer who was working with COFO in Jackson.

B. Investigation of federal agencies in Canton

1. Health, Education, and Welfare

- a. The segregated library is supposed to set up a bookmobile service for the Negro community, but there is none. The library's providings even for the whites are abysmal.
- b. The county hospital (built with funds provided by the Hill-Burton Act, and therefore required to not discriminate either in service or in hiring) has air-conditioning for the white floor but not for the Negro floor. The Negro doctor in town is not allowed to use the facilities of the hospital for his patients, and has to send them to another county. The doctors from the Medical Committee were able to get into the hospital to see the facilities. It has happened in some areas of Mississippi that when new Hill-Burton hospitals were inspected by agents from Washington the wards were long unbroken halls; then partitions (of concrete) were inserted. It is very difficult for Negroes to secure admission to the Madison County Hospital. The Negro unit of the Marshall County Hospital has 12 beds (for a Negro population of 22,000).
- c. The County Health Clinics are supposed to provide pre- and post-natal care. Midwives do more for their patients in some respects because they come sooner to deliveries and stay longer. A COFO worker in examining a midwife's instrument bag found a rusty nail file.
- d. The school lunches are often the only balanced meals the children get (some families have only enough clothes so that the children can trade off and go to school on alternate days, or once or twice a week). The school lunches are inaccessible to most of the Negro children most of the year, because they cost the same as they do in the north (25¢ apiece). The program is supposed to pro-



vide free lunches to all children whose families are on welfare, but in Benton County no free lunches are given (except rarely) to children who do not cut classes in order to work in the kitchen for about an hour before the meal and another hour afterwards--this is not arranged according to need. The ten who request it first are the ones who go to the kitchen to work.

2. Federal Housing

All the people in the Negro housing project in Canton were told that they would be evicted if they talked to a COFO worker at their door. The woman who became the secretary of the Freedom Democratic Party there had her rent doubled immediately.

3. The post office in Canton has been delivering packages opened and not rewrapped this fall. There were instances during the summer of mail having been sent and never received.

4. The FBI taps all SNCC and Friends of SNCC telephones.

The workers in a factory in Canton held a vote for or against organizing a union, and 50 of the 52 who voted yes were fired.

According to the U. C. student who worked on Federal Programs in Canton, going south is the beginning of your education.