

## Mississippi: Structure of the Movement, Present Operations, and Prospectus for this summer.

### What is COFO?

mostly SNCC  
The Mississippi Council of Federated Organizations is a federation of all the national civil rights organizations active in Mississippi, local political and action groups and some fraternal and social organizations. Anyone active under any of these groupings is entitled to attend COFO conventions and participate in policy-making decisions of the organization. The COFO staff, consisting of anyone working full time with any civil rights organization in Mississippi, implements the decisions of the COFO conventions, and prepares recommendations for the consideration of the COFO convention. Below the level of the state-wide COFO convention, there are district organizations corresponding to the five Congressional districts. These district organizations are presently in the planning stages for practical purposes. The staff, however, is broken down into Congressional districts, with five district directors; this organization structure actually functions. The state organization has four standing committees: Welfare and Relief, Political Action, Finance and Federal Programs. The district organizations have, or will have, similar standing committees. Dr. Aaron E. Henry of Clarksdale, State President of the NAACP, is President of the Council of Federated Organizations. Robert Moses, Field Secretary and Mississippi Project Director for SNCC, is the Program Director, who supervises the Mississippi staff and is elected by it. David Dennis, Mississippi Field Secretary for CORE, is Assistant Program Director, and is similarly elected.

### How is COFO financed?

The expenses for COFO's projects are paid by direct grants from national civil rights groups as these groups volunteer to contribute. This accounts for nearly all of COFO's income. Expenses of staff workers are paid by the national civil rights groups also, the arrangements varying with the group. At present, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee supports COFO projects in the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Congressional Districts as well as the state COFO office in Jackson. The Congress of Racial Equality assumes responsibility, on a direct-to-the-project basis, for the Fourth Congressional District. COFO does not solicit funds for itself, by agreement with the civil rights organizations which support it, for it is felt that it would thus compete with the supporting groups. Negligible amounts are sent directly to COFO, however, and these moneys are not credited to any national civil rights organization. Usually such small donations are earmarked for particular projects, such as the book drive or welfare relief (Food for Freedom) funds, and are dispensed according to the direction of the donor.

### What is COFO's relationship to National Civil Rights Organizations?

COFO represents the effort of all civil rights workers in Mississippi to coordinate their efforts in one direction for maximum efficiency. Staff members, however, are paid by separate organizations and do not lose the organizational identity or their affiliation with the national office of whatever organization they work for. SNCC and CORE workers work together on joint "COFO" projects, and thus must make all plans

and decisions in common; on the project they are **not** separate. But they maintain their special relationship with the organization which hired and pays them.

### COFO - Short History

COFO has evolved through three distinct phases in its short history. In its first phase it was little more than an ad hoc committee called together after the Freedom Rides of 1961, in a successful effort to obtain a meeting with Governor Ross Barnett. This committee of Mississippi civil rights leaders proved a convenient vehicle for channeling the voter registration programs of the Voter Education Project into Mississippi. This injection of funds led to the second phase of COFO as an umbrella for voter registration drives in the Mississippi Delta, and other isolated cities in Mississippi. During this period, beginning in February 1962, COFO added a small full-time staff, mostly SNCC and a few CORE workers, and developed a voter registration program. The staff worked with local NAACP leaders, and SCLC citizenship teachers in an effort to give the Mississippi Negroes the broadest possible support. COFO continued essentially as a committee with a staff and a program until the fall of 1963. There were many doubts about the validity of COFO during this period; some thought it should be abandoned. But always, we come back to the inescapable fact that the Negro people in Mississippi needed some organization which could belong to them (as opposed to their belonging to it) which would serve as a unifying force among the isolated Negro communities. The emergence of the Ruleville Citizenship group, and the Holmes County Voters League, testified to the possibility of starting strong local groups. We felt the need to develop horizontal ties among these groups, with the strongest common denominator possible within the general aims of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus there was continuing effort on our part to cut across county and organizational lines and have people from different areas meet with each other, to sponsor county, regional and statewide meetings, to bring students together from different parts of the state for workshops, to help send groups outside of the state to meetings, conferences, workshops and SCLC citizenship schools - anything to help break the despair of aloneness the isolated Mississippi Negro feels. During this second phase we began to feel more and more that the "Committee" could be based in a network of local adult groups sprung from the Movement as we worked the state.

We are presently in the third stage which really began with the Freedom vote for Governor campaign of the fall of 1963. This marked our first state wide effort and coincided with the establishment of a state wide office in Jackson and a trunk line to reach into the Mississippi Delta and hill country. During this stage we have broadened the staff to include more CORE and SNCC workers and more citizenship workers of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, have established working relations with a great many local organizations, and have established in our own minds the validity and necessity of COFO.

We envisage the fourth stage in which the funds, program and staff for the long pull are worked out with the major civil rights groups and other interested organizations and individuals across the Country, in which we reach down into every Negro community to organize and train local people to lead Mississippi through the next difficult