



**WE MUST BE ALLIES...**

**RACE HAS LED US BOTH TO POVERTY.**

COFO's experimental white community project in Biloxi has forced an inescapable conclusion: our existing experience organizing the white poor of Mississippi must be developed into a major portion of the COFO program in the coming year. No matter how difficult the task, every effort must be made, by those of us who share the dream of an interracial movement of the poor, to establish programs in white communities in twenty counties by the end of next year.

This means that we need people, i.e. personnel and leadership to undertake a most difficult, dangerous, and fascinating task of community organization. There are a few requirements for these people. They must have an understanding of the poverty of the Southern white poor. They must be able to communicate a concern for that poverty without precipitating or reinforcing fear and hostility toward the Negro and the freedom movement. They must have training in the field under COFO's sophisticated programs. The leadership must be willing to stay in the field for several years; the personnel, for several months. White skin is required only of those who have the initial task of sounding out the potential community leadership as unobtrusively as possible. If enough of those leaders respond favorably to the idea of COFO programs with which to fight their own poverty, then they will invite COFO staff in to help them run their program.

PLEASE SEEK OUT people who are interested in working with this program and get them in touch with White Folks Program, 1017 Lynch St. Jackson, Mississippi. There is a great freedom of choice over jobs in this movement. Its bureaucracy does not bite, does not stick people into convenient cogs. People are encouraged to do the job they think they can do best. No one should have the fear that his humanness will be sacrificed to the cause.

The important work to be done is with poor folks and not with moderates and liberals. The white poor have the political need of decent jobs, housing, education, and health. The movement must go to them and help them develop their own leadership rather than demand that the moderates and the liberals fight their political battles for them. The greatest thing about the freedom movement in Mississippi (and what the rest of the country should consider very seriously) is that the people themselves are voicing their own political needs.

Both politically and in human terms, the freedom movement has no other choice but to develop the white folks program. The resistance in the past within the movement to the white poor program has not been to the idea or to the necessity, but has reflected a frank recognition that people who know how to do the job are not available and that the hostility of the white poor to the movement makes it a near impossible task. The populist movement and the labor movement both failed to resolve the issue of race. It is the responsibility of the freedom movement, before the threat of the movement to the white poor further increases, to include them in our efforts.

Politically, the freedom movement cannot succeed as a Negro movement for two reasons: First, a solid black vote can never be a political majority of the state or the South. Neither can a solid voting block of the white poor. Only 42.3% of Mississippi and roughly 20% of the South is Negro. In only 27 of 82 counties in Mississippi are Negroes a majority, and in eleven of those, they are bare majorities of less than 60%. Negro political control of these counties would eventually lead to partition (Pakistan was created out of Muslim sections of India). Separate black societies is an impossible solution in as interdependent a society as ours.

Secondly, a racial political order can never be a stable one. Not only would that order create a chaotic stand-still in legislative chambers, it would also create nothing less than a racial war among the people. For the freedom movement to follow the insane path toward that order would create a revengeful Samson who destroys himself in order to destroy the nation which oppressed his people. Hopes for human rights would suffer a destructive blow if race were to block the possibility of the South solving its problems of poverty. It is important to note that the creation of a political voice of poor folks stands to improve the economy for all. There is no reason for the middle and upper classes to be threatened by the development of decent jobs, education, housing, and health for all.

In human terms, the freedom movement has the clear imperative to include the white poor chained to the Negro at the bottom of the economic ladder. It is clear from the U.S. Census of Mississippi (p 132) that this is true:

Negro family income of less than \$1000/yr.--	65,711 households
" " " from \$1000 to \$2000/yr.--	52,040 "
Total-- 28% of population. . . . .	117,751 "
White family income of less than \$1000/yr.--	32,751 households
" " " from \$1000 to \$2000/yr.--	38,622 "
Total-- 12.7% of population. . . . .	71,373 "

Almost one-third of the really poor folks in the state are white.

Personnel for the program will come from interested staff and volunteers a couple of months experience in the movement. Hopefully, white SNCC and CORE field secretaries will undertake the leadership of this program in Mississippi and the rest of the South. Disgusted labor organizers who want a fresh approach provide a second resource. The experimental projects now underway of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) may develop some good community organizers they could spare for work in the South, as could the Hazard movement. Highlander Folk School, in all probability, would continue to provide orientation and workshops for the White Folk's Program. Effort will not be spared to recruit personnel from Southern colleges (even in Mississippi) as well as from Northern and Western schools. Hopefully, this recruiting effort will mean that one-third of COFO's work in Mississippi by the end of three years will be with white poor folks.

Northerner and Southerner, black and white, should be encouraged to join this effort. The white task force which moves into the community first will spend a couple of months finding the potential leadership of the program by talking to people individually, and disassociated from COFO, in the bars and restaurants, churches and ballgames. The task force should interest the people in decent jobs, etc. for poor folks, overcome their hostility to the movement, and encourage them to organize and run their own program. COFO would provide the financial and personnel resources to make the program work. COFO would draw on both white and black sources of people to establish interracial programs to fight the battle for decent jobs, etc. That fight will eventually draw the two groups together.

Guidelines for this kind of community organizing have been developed from the experience in Biloxi. Eighteen of us lived all together in one hotel for the month of July. We spent more time attempting to resolve the problems of our in-group than we did learning the problems of the community. Dress and controversial literature became major issues which absorbed several hours of heated discussions in meetings. Frustration with the project drove six people to leave it. From this experience, we concluded that the task force which moves into the community should number no more than three or four people and should preferably be less. The smaller the number of people the less time they will spend relating to each other and the more they will be forced by their isolation to relate to the people in the community. The same goes for eating out. You aren't in contact with the community if you are eating at home.

In August, the problem was partially settled. Six people moved to a house in a community called Point Cadet basically composed of Biloxi fishermen. Four stayed in the hotel. The six at Point Cadet continued to waste a lot of time living in their house, time wasted which later developments proved to be very costly. The white people we worked with during the month of July were principally moderates and liberals. We found that they were just as paralyzed in fear of retaliation from the rest of the community as the white poor folks were.

Two interest groups appeared in the Biloxi project. One was to set up a voice of moderation in the state, the other was to create an interracial movement of the poor. The four people who have remained in the state with the white folks program all feel neutral to the former idea, believing it should be a function of the National Council of Churches, the Southern Regional Council, the Mississippi Council of Human Relations, and the public relations office of COFO. Too much work needs to be done in actual community organization toward a poor folks movement.

At Point Cadet, the developments which proved to be costly were two rumors. One was that we civil rights workers (and therefore working for Negroes) were trying to get Negroes into white schools at Point Cadet. The other, and the fatal one, was that the building we had rented as an office was to be used as an employment bureau to get Negroes jobs at the point. These rumors would not have gotten started had we been skilled community organizers. For one thing, a skilled organizer would not let his identity be known until he had the backing of the key potential leaders in the community. For another, he would quickly inform the community about the nature of his program and not sit idly by to have rumors kill it before it gets started. He certainly wouldn't have put a SNCC sign in the office window or attempted to have a precinct meeting of the Freedom Democratic Party to get people curious enough about him to call the owner and make bomb threats. All this did happen though and the owner evicted us.

One more note on the Biloxi project. There is a familiar sociological idea that groups are more immoral than individuals. Our experience in Biloxi bore this out. We found that we could canvass successfully in the white community for the Freedom Democratic Party, even in integrated teams. The reaction of the people was not generally hostile but rather neutral. Many interesting conversations extended to one or two hours. The blind submission to the "Southern Line" about the civil rights movement was hardly evident in individual contacts. To realize that these same contacts were the same people who attacked Negroes at the beach wade-in of 1960 with chains and spent the three following days rifling at Negro homes from cars, is quite a shock.

The counties in which these programs will begin will be counties in which neither Negroes nor white poor folks are in a majority, but in which an alliance between the two groups is essential to form a political majority. A few counties where racial domination is a threat to one group and a few where the violence level of the white poor is high will be chosen to find out how to overcome those obstacles. An influx of volunteers in February is a necessity to meet the twenty-county goal. Please do all you can to recruit people.

Bruce Maxwell  
White Folks Program