

Memo to: "Friends Of Freedom in Mississippi"

Roy Wilkins, James Farmer, Martin Luther King, James Forman, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, John Lewis, Harry Belafonte, James Baldwin, Dick Gregory, Ossie Davis, Marlon Brando, Aaron Henry, Ed King, Robert Spivey, Jesse Gray, Larry Landry, Clyde Ferguson, Noel Day, Ella Baker.

From: Bob Moses

Re: Mississippi Freedom Summer.

Dear Sirs:

I am writing on request of the Executive Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and in my function as Program Director of the Council of Federated Organizations (C.O.F.O.)

You are all aware of the summer program C.O.F.O. is sponsoring in Mississippi this summer. We expect to field over two thousand workers in Freedom schools, community centers, voter registration drives in every county, and projects in selected white communities. We anticipate up to one thousand volunteers from across the country to join us in this program, including ministers, teachers, lawyers and students.

We have learned through bitter experience in the past three years that the judicial, legislative and executive bodies of Mississippi form a wall of absolute resistance to granting civil rights to Negroes. It is our conviction that only a massive effort by the country backed by the full power of the President can offer some hope for even minimal change in Mississippi.

We have already been accused of launching this project to incite violence and chaos in Mississippi this summer. We have two answers to this charge. For one, violence is prevalent throughout the state, at least six Negroes have been killed by whites in the past three months. And, more important, the responsibility for maintaining law and guaranteeing, at the same time, the right to peaceful protest, must rest, in the final analysis, in the case of Mississippi, with the President of the United States.

The President must be made to understand that this responsibility rests with him, and him alone, and that neither he nor the American people can afford to jeopardize the lives of the people who will be working in Mississippi this summer by failing to take the necessary precautions before the summer begins.

We are writing this letter now to you, to join together as the "Friends of Freedom in Mississippi" to seek a meeting with President Johnson to ask him to do the following things to insure peaceful change in Mississippi this summer:

President Johnson should:

1. Meet in early May with Governor Johnson of Mississippi and extract from Governor Johnson the pledge that he will call together all state and local law enforcement leaders and lay down certain ground rules for the summer. Under these rules the following activities will not only be permitted, but will be protected: peaceful orderly picketing; voter registration; orderly distribution of leaflets; peaceful assembly; freedom of inter-racial groups to live in the Negro communities and to move around the state without molestation.
2. President Johnson will inform the governor that these are clearly established constitutional rights which the federal government has the responsibility to protect, and that if the governor will not do this, the federal government, will before the summer, establish at key points throughout the state constabularies of federal marshalls who will be ready on call to protect these rights by preventive action, including on-the-spot arrests; and that the full power of the federal government stands behind these marshalls. If the governor agrees, but then there is an obvious breaking of the agreement, these marshalls will be immediately moved into Mississippi.
3. President Johnson pledge to the committee in advance that he will take these actions if the governor refuses.

We are asking those who join the Friends of Freedom in Mississippi Committee to agree to the following:

1. Sign a letter to President Johnson requesting a meeting with him at the earliest possible date. (See enclosure)
2. When and if the President agrees to meet with the Committee, release of the letter to the Press so that the country may know, in advance, the reason for the meeting.
3. Hold a joint press conference after the meeting to discuss fully the results of the meeting.
4. To carry the entire question to the country in the event the President does not agree to the above proposals.
5. To send four dates and places where you can meet with other members of the committee before April the eighteenth. Please write to: Bob Moses, 1017 Lynch Street, Jackson, Mississippi.