

In 1961, '62, '63, and '64 we were faced with the simple problem of trying to battle with Negro apathy, which did not exist. How do you get Negroes to register to vote when they know in fact that they're not going to be registered, that the entire power from the courthouse to the jury system was designed not to work for them.

Now we're in a period of transition, both as a movement and as a group, the people here. And I think this is a microcosm of the people working, trying to organize in Mississippi, who vary from people who are functionally illiterate to people who have college degrees; who have different orientations, different backgrounds, different aspirations, different interests and obviously different frames of reference. You combine all of these seemingly irrelevant and vague instances and you arrive at the need to politically organize by people most of whom have an obvious disdain for political organization.

The reaction to the congressional challenge was a historical, I think deep, significant distrust of the democratic process. A meeting was held in Hattiesburg. Most of you weren't there; those of you who were remember it well. It was an argument that went on for three days. The simple undercurrent was whether or not we carry out the challenge. Two months before it was brought up in Hattiesburg, it was brought up in Atlanta, where it was presented to the SNCC staff, and they turned thumbs down collectively. So we're dealing with the question of whether or not political organization within the conventional institutional frame of the distribution of power politically is possible by this group. I think, as I in a very biased manner presented last night, there are two alternatives. We organize politically or we work outside the system.

Now, the strategy is age-old. A lot of us have worked for 4 years,

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some for two, some for one on the simple fundamental of politics in Mississippi, and that's voter registration. But in voter registration you bring in the force of the first, 14th and 15th amendments and you bring in the entire process of organizing for the right to organize. Now a lot of us are tired--emotionally, psychologically and physically. But I'm willing to argue that what happens politically in the next three months with us will to a large extent determine whether or not the concept of independent, issue oriented politics can happen in this country. I don't mean in Mississippi, because at the time everyone that's attempting to organize is attempting to find some means of finding an answer in the political marass that we call the Republican and Democratic party. Three years ago I think we all could perhaps predict, but it's here now. You can pick any three alphabets that you want at random and you can find a poverty program to fit into it. Now we are going to be faced with dealing with the '65 Voting Rights Act which is going to be implemented just as much as the first amendment is implemented--no more, no less. And I think we're going to be constantly faced with a difference in orientation.

Now, to Lou King the Democratic Party is one thing; to Phil it's pretty much the same thing. But to the gentleman who was here and to a lot of other people it's quite another thing. We are going to be forced to deal almost consistently ambivalently with the question of politics. How do you tell people that John Kennedy is not a great man? Or do you tell them? And if you tell them, at what level? Is it ethical to involve people in an election and to get involved in an election which hundreds of thousands of people are going to get involved in and do that with the purpose of attempting to prove that the political framework as it exists cannot work for certain people? Is this ethical, is it politically expedient, and if so should it be done?

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The question was brought up last night of the freedom posters-- Freedom means Lyndon (FDP Freedom Vote posters). My only answer to that is, who in this country could freedom mean? Now as long as elections are personality-oriented, then the people who would like to see politics really function in the way that it should and can, I think can arrive at one conclusion, and that is that it's an impossibility as long as we vote on personalities. Not the whole question of voting on issues--and I think that's right now a dream that a lot of us would like to see happen. But I think that the strategy of FDP will be quite simply to work within the existing procedural steps, political steps, attempting to revamp or change them on every level. Now whether or not that can happen depends upon the kind of work and the kind of energy that we can release around the political regime.

Right now the argument is quite real: how do we know that the FDP won't differ from the traditional Democratic Party only in color? And quite frankly we don't. But I think there are two simple questions involved here and that's the use of power and the misuse of power. Now the strategy as far as reapportionment, as far as voter registration, the question of political classes--these are musts, they must be done, they are going to be done by someone. I think that it's necessary at this time to really attempt to consider . . . I would argue that every person involved in Operation Headstart is not only a prospective and probable vote for Johnson, but that the parents of each child involved in any way in Headstart is two votes for Lyndon Johnson. And I think it offers another possibility and that is that those two parents are also two democrats. Now the problem then becomes a question of what is the identity of an institution that has in fact controlled this state and a large extent the politics of the country. Now yesterday we went through how do you investigate an institution. Do you judge it by what

says, latent or manifest, or do you judge it by what it's actually doing?

You know I think that if at any time we can begin to do one thing internally that we are demanding over and over again of the rest of the country, that we will have gone a long way. And that is work on issues and programs and work through the personality differences. I know that there are a lot of personal differences, a lot of deep-seated animosities, and I'm sure they have some basis. Otherwise, they wouldn't exist.

But I think that when we begin to really be aware of the fact that demonstrations as such are on the way out, civil rights as such is on the way out; the question now will be an attempt to gain political power, and an attempt to see that it's not misused. And that simply means, how do you get not only the right personality or the right individual in office or in power, but I think the guideline could be established where that person, regardless of who he or she happens to be, would in fact be answerable to a process, to a structure. Now a lot of us have trouble with that term. And I think that the trouble we have with that term will depend on whether or not we are prepared to accept one political axiom. And that is that the only power that you have is the power that you're prepared to give to someone else. I would question whether or not that's possible, because it's impossible to think of the Freedom Labor Union in Shaw and not think of Leroy Johnson. So there's the whole combination of how do you objectively analyze politically what is happening without going into the personality syndrome. We must do it and whether or not we do that I think really determines what happens politically in this country - not in Mississippi, not in the south - because the concept of what we are presently failing at doing is a concept that no one else has attempted to do. And that's open up the political

process as such to people who by their very entrance into it have to change it. You cannot think of Mississippi politics if you register 250,000 Negroes in the same frame of reference that you thought of it when 6,000 Negroes were registered to vote. So the move will be to release as much energy politically as possible on every stage from the parent-guardian law to the food stamp plan to registering Negroes in the unemployment agencies for the simple sake of having them go down there, that the law says that they should be registered and that they should receive certain benefits - they're not going to receive those benefits but they should register - and they should then demand jobs as agents of the unemployment agency.

Now, the question of the possibility of a sellout by FDP. I think that that is quite a possibility. I think what we have to look at is, who is there to sell out to. Now if we tried, we couldn't sell out to the National Democratic Party. They won't have us. Now that does not, however, mean that we cannot use the National Democratic Party as an umbrella in the same manner as we used voter registration in '61. We said to the country in McComb and elsewhere that we want to register people to vote. And that's one of those lily-white, puritanical, acceptable entities that, you know, everyone should be registered to vote, law and order, what have you. Now we're saying that we want all of the political power that political parties occupy in this country. We don't any more, we don't want any less. That's a different thing, quite different. So there's the need for the umbrella. And there's a need for a broader umbrella.

And I think there's also going to be the need to revamp or change the way in which we judge what we're doing, how we're doing it, and whether or not it's being done effectively. Because until the organi-

zers in Mississippi are prepared to leave the counties they're working in, turn their work over to someone else, hope that it doesn't die when they leave, then, and we must be objective about it, we are simply building parochial kingdoms of individualistic, personality-oriented power. The organizers have power and that power can be used negatively or positively. Let's assume that Jesse's working in a county. A program is then discussed. Jesse disagrees with it. Leroy Johnson goes to that county and Leroy Johnson is immediately upon entrance into that county faced with two problems. Number one, he's going to have to treat Jesse gently because he's invading his territory. Number two, the reaction of the people that you attempt to organize is going to be, "If this were really a good program, we trust Jesse, we know Jesse, Jesse would have told us about it." Or perhaps the program gets launched and it gets moving, the people accept it and work on it, release energy, and then there's the question of why didn't Jesse tell us about this?

So the basing of organizers and their work in one area is a problem that goes very deep because it's hard to face people in an area that you're not known. It's hard to deal with new people. It's hard to deal with new programs. We're going to constantly be faced in an attempt, I would hope, to give more and more power - and I use that word constantly 'cause that's what we're talking about; we 're talking about the distribution of power. To me, that's what politics is. It has been misused traditionally in this country and whether or not it's going to continue to be traditionally and casually and completely misused depends on, I think, the type of political organizing we are attempting to prove exists, if not works.