

## Proposal for a FREEDOM EDUCATION PROGRAM

### I. Need and Purpose

It has been the experience of nearly five years of civil rights work in the Deep South that the movement must grapple with a depressed community--depressed economically, socially, politically and spiritually. Nonviolent direct action and limited political action (voter registration) have begun the work of lifting the depression, but civil rights work must expand its scope to meet the challenge effectively. We cannot turn our backs to the community's starvation, ignorance, living conditions, etc. and promise them the vote when we know that the vote is only a partial solution to the community's problems. It is true that we cannot achieve our political ends if the Negroes in the South are not registered, but even if we are registered, we cannot achieve our ends if we are not politically active and knowledgeable. In some areas of the South where political education has been neglected, the movement now faces the problem of Negroes who are registered voters, but who sell their votes to dishonest and conservative politicians. In order that both the total goal of a better world and the limited political goals which we have set should succeed, we need an educational program.

This paper proposes that in addition to the planned intensification of political and protest action, the Southern staff inaugurate a program of comprehensive education. A suggested outline for its scope and development is presented below. The purpose, like that of the political program, is twofold: We must organize crash programs which will operate alongside existing programs, where they are inadequate. Secondly, however, we must think of our programs ultimately as supplementing, not replacing, the regular social institutions, and therefore, an integral part of the proposal is that we must work for the improvement and integration of the existing social institutions. The Mississippi movement has dealt with these programs experimentally during the summer of 1964, and this proposal will draw its examples and generalizations from that experience.

### II. Outline of the Program

As here envisioned, the educational program would be built around a new community institution, a community center. In Mississippi we have found no existing organizations or institutions which could be adapted to the needs of our educational program. (However, in other places, it might be a better plan to work through a local organization--possibly a voter's league or a civic club). The community center would house a library and sufficient space and equipment for a wide range of educational and recreational activities. The staff would have to include at least one or two full-time workers, usually sent in from outside the community, with special educational and vocational training. This training does not necessarily involve degrees--in Mississippi, these needs were often met by students from Northern colleges--but the college students who become really effective community center directors are exceptional. Besides the full-time staff, the center must have strong and dedicated local support. One of the most important responsibilities of the full-time staff is to discover, enlist and educate suitable local leadership.

The various programs which the community center would present are described as follows, remembering that each program has a dual function--1) to fill the gap where regular programs fail, and 2) to stimulate the improvement of regular public institutions.

#### A. Freedom Schools

The Freedom Schools, aimed at school-age children, would have two basic functions: first, they would offer remedial academic work to improve the verbal and mathematical

abilities of the typical student. They would try, also, to expose the student to academic and cultural influences lacking in the Southern Negro homes and schools, and give a taste of the subjects which they do not get in the regular schools. Illustrating this need, French and typing were by far the most popular subjects in the Mississippi Freedom Schools. Secondly, the Freedom Schools would differ from the regular schools in the presentation of material. The Freedom Schools would make an effort to deal with subjects too "controversial" for the regular schools. The racial controversy is the most obvious area of discussion in this category, but there are other taboos which the regular schools avoid, such as an academic investigation of the theory of evolution. In a "free" atmosphere of discussion, the Freedom Schools would study such things as Negro history, American history, the civil rights movement, and the concept of citizenship in a democracy. Current events would be discussed honestly and on a mature level. Freedom School teachers would find other, individual, ways to supplement the students' school needs.

The Freedom Schools would also study the Southern power structure, including its educational institutions (What is the purpose of Negro schools in a segregated, feudal society? How far are they supposed to go in "educating" a person, and what is this education intended to produce?) The schools would be a logical place for students to talk about what kind of schools the state should provide for all its citizens, and to plan for action which could accomplish this. In Mississippi's summer Freedom Schools, the students offered elaborate plans for pressuring the schools to offer enlarged, updated curriculum, to upgrade the instruction, and ultimately to abolish segregation in the school system. The upshot of this discussion was a projected statewide school boycott, scheduled for some time this year, and symbolic attempts to integrate the white schools in September. The Freedom Schools held a statewide convention for the purpose of writing a platform for a new Mississippi. This platform is probably the truest measure of the Freedom Schools' success. It illustrated the point that the Freedom Schools cannot divorce themselves from the public schools which the students must attend for the major part of their education.

#### B. Preschool Education

This program would try to deal with children who are potentially poor students before they fall behind in school. The preschool program would be essentially a day nursery. It would provide day care for the children of working mothers-- offering supervised rest and play, but also offering basic education to prepare them for school. The areas of study would be reading readiness, beginning writing and vocabulary development. The school would also introduce them to cultural influences beyond the immediate environment. Many children never have the opportunity to paint, to model in clay, or to play musical instruments until they enter school, and even then it is only the better schools which offer this. The program would also include participation in the school lunch program and the school Milk program if this could be worked out with the government, and if we could afford it.

Ideally this would be a pilot program which the school system would adopt, to bridge the gap between the privileged and the deprived children. And it would provide a focus for parents and community leaders to organize and demand that their children be offered these educational advantages.

#### C. Adult Education

Throughout the South, the state has failed to offer even cursory education to Negroes in years past. These people are adults now, and subject to the demands of an industrialized society. The state must be forced to provide basic literacy, more advanced reading instruction, and vocational education to the people it has in the past deprived. This can be done only through a comprehensive and free public

program, but this kind of program will not be offered until there is organized pressure for it and the example of a pilot program which dramatizes the need and shows the possible format for a more comprehensive program.

Evening classes should be offered to adults in the areas of literacy, duties of citizenship, vocational training, and whatever other subjects the people express a desire for. Because they are adults, the people can formulate their needs better than children can, but because they are adults, their habits are more set and they are harder to reach. So far, in the Mississippi project, we have not achieved any real breakthrough in adult education, but we are continuing to experiment with new ideas and materials, and increased efforts to involve the adult students in the planning of the program. The general areas where we are developing programs are citizenship, health education, federal programs and literacy. Vocational training is beyond our reach just now, but we are doing research on how government training programs can be brought to the Deep South.

#### D. Social Services

The centers must go beyond the concept of strictly academic education and try to offer to the Negro people some services which they do not now have, and which they must have if they are to lift themselves out of the economic, social and political bottom. There must be provision for wholesome recreation for Negro youth, to give them a real alternative to bars and street violence. Some community institution must make a first step to deal with housing conditions, with sewage and sanitation in the poor part of town. All of the social blight which characterizes the "colored section" of any Southern town must be removed by united community action, and the community centers can provide the spark for this organization. Other programs which fall into this classification would be the public health program, the organization of farmers' unions, and the already-existing welfare and relief program (food and clothing distribution). As with preschool and adult education, the community centers must encourage, through example and pressure, the development of really adequate public social services.

#### E. Political Education

This is handled separately in our program, because of its importance in the Southern civil rights movement, but there should be no separation in thinking. Political education cannot be separated from other phases of the educational program. Voter registration and voter education are now and will be for some time to come the core of the South's civil rights program, and no phase of the program should fail to relate the social needs of the people to the possibilities of aggressive political action.

### III. Outline of Requirements

Several things are needed to implement this program. Most basically is a center itself. In Mississippi we have found that the typical community has no building suitable for a community center available. A building must be large enough to accommodate the library and various educational and recreational activities, and by and large only churches and lodge halls meet the requirements. This means that we must build our centers, symbolic of building a New South when the old South does not meet our needs. As a rough estimate, we have found that a simple concrete-block, one-story building can be built, with electricity and running water, but without luxuries such as air conditioning and tile floors, for around \$10-12,000 (local estimates vary), excluding land and labor costs. A frame building is roughly the same. The next need is for staff, and that too, cannot usually be provided by the local community. A trained outsider is needed to organize and oversee the program. However, local leadership is emerging in the communities which have

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had centers for less than three months, and the need for trained outside staff may be temporary. The third major need of the centers is for equipment and operational expenses. The local picture is more hopeful here. We have found that the local communities can help significantly with day-to-day expenses. The kind of services so far provided have been volunteer labor to remodel old buildings, free sandwiches for the children, improvised play equipment, donated school supplies, and especially volunteer supervisory help with the children and the library. Regular expenses such as the light bills can usually be absorbed by the voter registration project. Another resource which has proved to be significantly helpful is donations from outside sources. The books for our libraries have come almost entirely from the gifts of people all across the country. Similarly, the food and clothing for the welfare program has been donated. Some progress has been made with the idea of an outside institution--a church group, a labor union, or a Northern civil rights committee, etc.--"adopting" a center, and shouldering its major expenses. This is still in the pilot stage, however; only three centers have been adopted, and it remains to be seen how constant and adequate the support will be. Another resource which has not been used sufficiently is that of local college students. These students can be used year-round in college communities, and in their home towns when they are on vacation.

As a final argument, we can, in this project, discover for ourselves and show the world what kind of society we envision. The center can be an example of our goal in microcosm. The concept of an integrated group of workers applying their brains and bodies to the solution of social problems is needed in America now, to show the average American an alternative to racism, materialism and cynicism.