

CONFEDERATION OF ALABAMA POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Confederation of Alabama Political Organizations (COAPO) was organized by Hosea Williams, Director of Voter Registration and Political Education for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on February 26, 1966.

The main objective is to assure the Negro masses of Alabama an opportunity to participate in the political process.

Mr. Williams said that COAPO was organized to rid Alabama's body politic of racism, whereby an electorate could vote for a candidate on the basis of how he deals with issues involving human dignity rather than emotions.

According to Mr. Williams, "If COAPO is successful, someday Martin Luther King Jr.'s son may be victorious over George Wallace's son in a statewide election, or George Wallace's son may move to Harlem and be victorious over Adam Clayton Powell's son.

COAPO is considered by its elected officials to be the forerunner, politically, of President Johnson's Great Society.

COAPO allows the people at large to make the decisions which will affect them, rather than acquiescing to a select few. "We do not intend to take the government away from the white folks, but we do intend to prove to them that black folks can't mess it up any more than they have already," says Mr. Williams.

COAPO operates at five levels—county, state representative, U.S. Congressional, and statewide offices. The county unit is the authoritative body; each of the other units is subordinate to the county level. This places political control in the hands of the people rather than their leaders.

Each county unit has three divisions: the interview committee, the political guidance committee, and the patronage committee. These committees were organized by each group in a participating county electing two persons to represent their respective organization on each of the three committees.

After a county committee was organized, the committee's representative was elected to represent them on the five levels

of concern. The committees for each of the five levels, then, would be composed of representatives from each county within its electoral boundaries.

The interview committee has the responsibility of implementing the political thinking of its constituents. The committee must go out and cover its entire boundary, compiling what the people think each politician should do for them. Once this information is compiled, each person seeking public office is interviewed as to their stand on the requests and needs of the people. Then the history of each of the candidates is analyzed and attached to the respective interviews.

It must be noted that the only promise the interview committee makes to a candidate is that whatever is discussed between the interview committee and the candidate will be so used that the candidate's opposition will not be able to come into possession of the interview.

The information obtained by the interview committee is passed on to the political guidance committee. The political guidance committee, in consultation with the interview committee, has the responsibility of recommending what candidates are most suited for the job. The decision of the political guidance committee is then turned over to the patronage committee which has the responsibility of notifying the candidate of their endorsement, of the promises, and seeing to it that the politician is kept honest throughout his or her term of office.

COAPO is constructed to demand loyalty and unity throughout the Negro electorate. The organizer has attempted to involve every segment of the community equally—business and professional Negroes, organized labor, unemployed, religious forces, political forces, civic forces and even youth groups.

COAPO is strictly non-partisan and must remain so.

The organizer firmly believes that the greatest mistake that the Negro politicians made 85 years ago was that they allowed the Negro vote to be duped into the party of Abraham Lincoln, thereby allowing all whites to rush into the Democratic Party, causing the south to become a one party system. "This is mainly responsible for the last 85 years of suffering which black men and women have had to endure," Mr. Williams said.

Alabama Black Belt Counties Change State's Political Image

Nowhere in the South is the Second Reconstruction more evident than in the state of Alabama ("The Heart of Dixie").

As a result of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, registered Negro voters now outnumber or rival the number of white voters in about 15 Alabama counties. These counties are concentrated in the state's agriculturally fertile Black Belt area. More than half of 106,000 federally registered new Negro voters in four southern states are in Alabama.

This newly acquired Negro voting power has encouraged 80 Negro candidates to seek public office in 15 Alabama counties.

The counties are: Autauga, Barbour, Bullock, Marengo, Dallas, Perry, Greene, Sumpter, Hale, Wilcox, Jefferson, Montgomery, and Macon.

SCLC Plays Vital Role

In most of these counties, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has played a vital role in getting Negroes registered and conducting political education classes which would rapidly transform them into an informed electorate.

The momentous task of both voter registration and political education was

assigned to a dedicated staff of field workers headed by Hosea L. Williams, Director of SCLC's Voter Registration and Political Education Department.

The first test of strength for Alabama's political movement will occur on May 3, the date of the Democratic Primary.

Political Image Changed

Not even half of the Negro candidates are expected to win according to veteran political analysts. However, they concede that Alabama's political image has drastically changed since SCLC president Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led more than 50,000 marchers from Selma to Montgomery just a year ago.

Alabama Negroes Unite for May 3rd Primary

A modest appraisal of SCLC's voter registration drives conducted in Alabama shows that more than 200,000 of the state's 225,000 registered Negroes reached the polls through this organization's efforts.

In Birmingham and Jefferson County during the past three months, Hosea L. Williams, Director of SCLC's Voter Registration and Political Education Department, registered nearly 40,000 of that county's 60,000 Negro voters.

Grass Roots Organization

Under Mr. Williams' leadership, Alabama's newly enfranchised voters formed a grass-roots organization called The Confederation of Alabama Political Organizations (COAPO).

COAPO, headed by Rev. T.Y. Rogers of Tuscaloosa, is a coalition of all existing civic organizations from at least 35 counties in Alabama.

The organization's sole intent is to mold the Negro vote into a political bloc and insure support of both Negro and white candidates concerned about just rights for Alabama's Negro communities.



T. Y. ROGERS, PRESIDENT OF COAPO

Rev. T.Y. Rogers is a native of Sumter County, Alabama. He is a graduate of Alabama State College and Crozer Theological Seminary of Chester, Pennsylvania. He was class president and an honor student at Alabama State and an honor student and student body president at Crozer. He is present pastor of The First African Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa Alabama, Executive Secretary of the Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee, a member of the Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and President of the Tuscaloosa Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Rev. Rogers' church is the only church in Alabama (black or white) that is a member of the American Baptist Convention. The 31 year old minister is married to the former La Pelzia Rankins of Montgomery, Ala. and is the father of one daughter.

'Man with a Plan'

Hosea Lorenzo Williams is a man obsessed with success. His fellow freedom fighters predict with irony and a great deal of admiration that just one failure would surely kill his indomitable spirit.

They are right. Mr. Williams is the prototype of the dedicated nonviolent warrior that newsmen want to write about and that the forces of goodwill would like to have on their team.

He is flamboyant, even when performing unspectacular civil rights chores such as voter registration canvassing. Segregationist lawmen recognize Mr. Williams on sight, and his record of close to 100 civil rights harassment arrests will attest to this fact.

There is a rumor which closely borders fact that white Alabama politicians would like very much to offer him a high paying state position just to get him out of circulation. But there is a fact which isn't a rumor: Mr. Williams is working very hard to take segregationist politicians out of circulation in the 'Heart of Dixie.'

Politics Without Racism

As head of the Voter Registration and Political Education Department of SCLC, Mr. Williams is the organization's 'Man With a Plan'. His plan is simple and direct: To take racism out of politics.

Since last December 22, Mr. Williams has been in Alabama working hard to change the status quo, and to make the Second Reconstruction a fact rather than a myth. Typical of his confidence was his willingness to take on a voter registration drive in Birmingham, Alabama, and surrounding Jefferson County. He had hoped to put 50,000 new Negro voters on the registration rolls within three months.

However, this Herculean task was not enough to control his energy. So with a small staff of dedicated field workers, he conducted voter registration drives in Alabama's Black Belt counties, and held political education classes designed to create an informed Negro electorate.

He also busied himself with encouraging Negroes to seek political offices for the first time in 85 years. There are 80 Negro candidates, 12 of whom are seeking seats in Alabama's segregated legislature. Five Negroes are also seeking one of the most coveted political positions in the state: County Sheriff.

A Legend in His Own Time

Not content that he is rapidly becoming a legend in his own time, Mr. Williams set up machinery to keep the Negro vote from being split by shrewd politicians. He organized a statewide Negro group called COAPO - the Confederation of Alabama Political Organizations - under the direction of Rev. T.Y. Rogers of Tuscaloosa. Alabama Negroes are now asking white politicians, "What can you do for us?", not "What can we do for you?"

Mr. Williams' work is doing much to take the words 'nigger' and 'nigra' out of the white politicians' vocabulary. For the first time they have learned to say 'Negro' with capital 'N'.

It was by design rather than by accident that SCLC President Dr. Martin Luther King refers to Mr. Williams as one of his top aides. It is common knowledge in SCLC that the 40 year-old Hosea has an inimitable finesse in dealing with white segregationists and the evil system under which Negroes have been relegated to a life of

Mr. Williams was born and reared in Georgia's poverty belt in the town of Stapulugus. This Georgia hamlet, marked by high illiteracy among both Negroes and whites, is an area where grits for breakfast was more of a luxury than a staple foodstuff.

At the age of 18, in a period when he was denied the right to vote in his home state, Mr. Williams entered the army. His background became an inspiration for his militant actions on both the battlefields of World War II and the civil rights movement.

Mr. Williams entered the civil rights struggle in Savannah, Georgia, and by 1964 had turned Chatham County into a dramatic symbol of voter registration and community work. SCLC lauded Mr. Williams' work and in 1964 voted him the Conference's 'Man of the Year'.

It was his outstanding organizational work and inspirational leadership which made the Selma to Montgomery march an historic event in the annals of civil rights work.

Bloody Sunday Day of Infamy

On March 7, a year ago, in Selma, the course of democracy was altered almost to the same degree that its course was changed on December 7, 1941 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

It has been more than a year since the carnage on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where hundreds of civil rights workers withstood a brutal and inhuman assault by Alabama State Troopers and Sheriff Jim Clarke's deputies and possemen.

Blood-Red Clay

It was on March 7, 1965 that millions of persons saw the myth of democracy trampled into the red clay of Dallas County - a clay turned even redder with the blood of democracy's forgotten children.

This blood was later to become the ink with which to pen the first draft of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Negroes of Selma called it Bloody Sunday. Etched indelibly in their memory is the sight of Jim Clark and his men, who tear gassed and clubbed 525 Negroes near the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Americans fortunate not to be there gasped in disbelief at their television screens when Alabama's law officers clubbed civil rights workers and herded them back across the bridge with horses.

Seventeen Hospitalized

When a faint wind blew the tear gas smoke and fumes from the scene, 17 persons were hospitalized and 50 others had to be treated for injuries.

This infamous incident got the Freedom Movement's adrenalin up, and just 20 days later an eloquent appeal to the mighty forces of goodwill from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. brought more than 50,000 persons to Selma to express their indignation.

There were only 1,117 Negroes registered to vote in Dallas County at that time. Now, one year later, almost 11,000 Negroes have added their names to the registration rolls and will be able to vote for the first time in this Spring's election.

Uneasy Racial Calm

There is no longer terror on the streets of Selma, but an uneasy racial calm still hovers over the area and other Alabama Black Belt counties. This was apparent Sunday morning, March 6, 1966 when field workers of SCLC and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee had breakfast at Walker's Cafe, the eatery where the late Rev. James Reeb has his last meal.

The conversation was light among the freedom workers, but it was strictly movement. Everyone appeared to evade discussing what was really on their minds: That they believed that violence will again visit this area as the Negroes test their newly acquired voting strength.

LONNIE BROWN, CHAIRMAN OF CO-A-PO STANDING COMMITTEES



Mr. Brown is a citizen of Camden, Alabama and has been employed as an insurance salesman for the past nine years. He is a member of the Pine Grove Baptist Church in Camden. He has been active in the civil rights struggle in Wilcox County. He is presently running for the Alabama State Senate from the 19th Senatorial District composed of Wilcox, Clarke, Monroe and Conecuh Counties.



**PATRONAGE
COMMITTEE**



**INTERVIEW
COMMITTEE**



**POLITICAL GUIDANCE
COMMITTEE**



Albert Turner
Assistant Chairman of all
CO A PO Standing Committees

Turner is a 30 year old native of Marion, Alabama. He became active in the civil rights struggle in 1965 in Marion, Alabama. Prior to this time he was a highly successful brick mason. With his natural ability as a leader in the black belt of Alabama, Mr. Turner was named SCLC's Field Secretary for the State of Alabama. He is now a candidate for State Representative from the 27th district (Perry, Sumter, Marengo).



Mr. Lewis Black
Treasurer of CO A PO

Mr. Black is a citizen of Greensboro, Alabama. He is the Chairman of the Alabama Human Relations Council, and Director of the Federal Credit Union in Hale County. He is a former teacher who resigned in order to devote more of his time to the struggle for human rights. He is presently running a voter registration drive in Hale County, sponsored by the Southern Regional Council. He is married to Mrs. Mildred Black who is Chairman of the Interview Committee of CO A PO.



Mrs. Sallie Hadnott
Secretary of CO A PO

Mrs. Hadnott is a citizen of Prattville (Autauga County), Alabama, and one of the guiding lights behind the Prattville movement. She is the President of the Autauga County NAACP. Mrs. Hadnott is the spokesman for the Autauga County Voters League. She is a spokesman for Negroes on the Autauga County Bi-Racial Committee. She is married to Mr. James Hadnott and is the mother of nine children.



Mr. William Harrison
Chairman of the
Political Guidance Committee

Mr. Harrison is a teacher in Choctaw County, Alabama. He has been teaching for eleven years. He is a candidate for the Choctaw County Democratic Executive Committee, and a spokesman for the Choctaw County Voters League. He is very active in the civil rights struggle in Choctaw County.



Mrs. Mildred Black
Chairman of the Interview Committee

Mrs. Black is a citizen of Greensboro, Alabama. For the past six years Mrs. Black has been Treasurer of the Federal Credit Union in Greensboro. She is a former teacher who was dismissed after fifteen years of teaching for her part in the civil rights struggle. She is married to Mr. Lewis Black, (CO A PO's Treasurer).



Mr. Samson Crum
Chairman of
Patronage Committee

Mr. Crum is 44 years old. He is married to the former Rosie Lee Huff. Mr. Crum has been a United States Postal Employee for over 18 years. He was active in the Birmingham Movement in 1963 and has been active in the Selma Movement since its onset in 1964. He is now the Chairman of the Statewide Patronage Committee in CO A PO.