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MERIDIAN PROJECT REPORT

October 17 - November 8 [1964]

I am sorry for the delay of this report. Things in Meridian have been fairly hectic, what with the Freedom Day, the Freedom Election and plans for the new office. We had another delay in that our political director spent four days in jail right after the political election. Anyway we will try to have these reports coming regularly every two weeks.

This report will include: A general report concerning the staff and the new plans for the new office, a financial report for the last two weeks in October, a political programs report by Joe Morse and a Freedom School report by Gail Falk. The Community Center Report is absent from this report due to the absence of Elaine Weinberger who is in Connecticut due to an illness in her family.

Staff Report

Our staff has finally settled down to a permanent group or semi-permanent group. They are as follows:

Preston Ponder - Project Director
Joe Morse - Director of Political Programs
Margie Henderson - Political Programs
Gunter Frenz - Political Programs
Ken Slote - Political Programs
Pinkie Slote - Political Programs
Barbara Chaney Moss - Political Programs (local)
Eric and Elaine Weinberger - Heads of Community Center
Freeman Cocroft - Community Center
Frank Wright - Community Center and Freedom School
Judy Wright - Community Center and Freedom School
Gail Falk - Freedom School Coordinator
Sandra Watts - Office

There are 14 staff members (only one of which is a negro) and there is a problem of staff checks. As of now, only four people are on staff - Preston Ponder, Margie Henderson, Joe Morse, and Sandra Watts. This creates the problem of taking money from the staff checks for room and board. It is not fair that only four people should be paying room and board at the Freedom house for everyone else on the staff. Freeman Cocroft and Gail Falk were both supposedly put on staff at the Taggalee Meeting in August. Freeman has just recently returned from his home but Gail has been here since September. Gunter Frenz is supposed to be financed by his chapter of CORE in New York City (Down Town CORE) but has not received a check for almost two months. Ken and Pinkie Slote are very good workers and are currently just receiving subsistence checks from Mississippi CORE. They both come from New York. Frank and Judy Wright were sent by the National Office to work in Meridian for a month and then go to Louisiana. Eddie Moss who was on staff has moved to the Florida Project.

GENERAL REPORT

The Meridian Project has been asking itself many questions since Freedom Day and the Freedom Election. This report will include: Future plans for Meridian, plans for the new office, 4th. district staff meeting report and some general comments.

The Meridian Staff has been seriously re-evaluating its role in Meridian since the Freedom Election. The staff has come to the conclusion that different tactics will have to be used in Meridian in contrast to other towns in Mississippi because of its size and metropolitan atmosphere. Much of the information and procedures that have been formulated in Jackson are for Rural communities and do not apply to Meridian. The staff also felt that COFO has not been in close contact with the local Negro Community. There needs to be more work done in developing grass-roots leaders and community support of COFO. The precinct system which we have been working on has not been effective in developing this leadership primarily because there has been no foundation laid in Meridian to get to the general Negro population. We feel that one of the main problems is that we have not offered any type of concrete program to the people. Due to the liberal atmosphere of Meridian (as compared to the rest of Mississippi) different tactics are going to have to be used to get the local people involved in the Freedom Movement. The main idea we came up with was forming a Steering Committee composed of around 25 to 30 interested and committed local people. These people are the grass-roots type of leaders and not the already established and well-entrenched Negro Leadership. We are going around to talk to each of the names that have been selected for this committee. Two or three staff members are talking individually to each of the persons on the list about the steering committee and what its goals will be. After all these people are contacted and COFO is moved into its new office, a meeting will be called of all these leaders. From there the COFO staff will ask these people what they think should be done in Meridian and what they think will be the best way of going about it. We have formulated many different programs that could be carried on in Meridian ranging all the way from work on School Desegregation to a complete boycott of all stores. These will merely be suggestions. It will be left up entirely to the local people what they think is an important program and how they think it should be carried out. So instead of working on three or four programs at the same time, we will be able to work on one program and make it a success. We also hope in this way to involve those people in the community who can eventually take-over their own programs. We also hope that this will make the local people feel that COFO is their organization and that they should feel free to give COFO their ideas and support. Right now most of the people we have talked to have been very enthusiastic about this meeting.

The New Office

The Meridian Project has been making plans to move the political office into another building. The lease is in the process of being drawn up. We have rented the bottom floor of a building just across the street from our present location. The bottom floor has been divided into two long narrow rooms. One side of the floor will be used for a Freedom House where the male staff members will live and one side for the political office. We are going to paint the inside and the outside of the office as well as build petitions for the political office. The main idea behind this move is to move the political office away from the confusion of the Community Center plus have a nice, clean place where local people can come to discuss programs and problems. The rent for the bottom floor of this building will be \$50.00. The Freedom House side of this building will be divided into three parts; a living room, a bedroom and a kitchen. Plumbing facilities are already in the building. We have a refrigerator and a stove that used to be in the Schwerner apartment, as well as adequate beds. We are asking the local people for donations of any furniture they might have. Right now everyone is involved in plans for this office and we feel that it will give the COFO Project in Meridian a big boost.

Fourth District Staff Meeting

On Thursday, the 5th. of November there was a district staff meeting in Meridian. The main problems discussed were the transportation problems in each project and the financial problems, the plans for the retreat in New Orleans and the general area in which COFO is moving. It was decided that each project would have to send in a report of what it had accomplished and what progress or errors had been made in that particular area to send into Dick Jewett before the retreat over Thanksgiving so that it could be mimeographed up for the retreat. It was also discovered that each project was having much the same problems with direction and purpose. Many topics were brought up which will be discussed in New Orleans.

General

During the Freedom Election, on Friday October 30, five workers from the COFO office were arrested for distributing leaflets concerning the Freedom Vote. Four of these people were volunteers from Oberlin College and one was a staff member, Margie Henderson. The five people were taken to jail and charged with distributing leaflets without a permit and held under \$50 bail. They were bailed out that same afternoon and since then their cases have been removed to Federal Court.

On Monday, November 2, Joe Morse was given a ticket for running a stop light which he did not do. At his

hearing on Wednesday, November the 4th. he pleaded not guilty to this charge and even had a witness to testify that he stopped at the sign. The judge, however, did not see things his way and fined him \$10.00 plus \$2.00 court costs. Joe refused to pay the fine and spent four days in jail serving out his fine. Since that time I might add there have been no tickets given out for violations which did not really occur.

Sandra Watt

FINANCIAL REPORT

This report is for the last two weeks in October. October 17-31.

Received

October 19	COFO budget money	\$90.00	\$118.35
October 20	loan from Jim Collier	10.00	29.00
October 28	collection from Mass Meeting	18.35	<u>\$147.35</u>
* October 23	Louise Herney repaid part of her COFO loan	\$118.35	

The balance in the bank Account for October 17 was \$5.03

Expenditures:

October 17

Cash for office gas	\$ 3.00
Gas	1.77
Lillie Chandler - School Money	5.00
Office supplies	1.00
<u>October 18</u>	
Gas	2.00
Food	1.00

October 19

Margie Henderson - repaid for loan for Gunter Prentz's bail bond	13.00
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October 20

Gas	2.00
Gas	3.00
Key for office	.45
Food for Jackson Trip made by staff	1.00
Repaid loan to Collier	10.00

October 21

Transmission fluid for car	3.00
Gas	2.00
Gas	2.00
Cash for Jackson trip	1.50

October 22

Mimeograph paper	6.00
Office supplies	1.36
Greg Kaslo - repaid for loan of bail bond	10.00
Dyess Garage - repair on Chrysler	14.05

October 23

Bandaides	.65
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October 27

Mimeograph paper	\$ 8.36
Gas	1.00
Dimes for phone	2.00
Postage (Clark County \$ - Office \$3)	6.00
Gas	2.00
Mississippi Power Co.	12.01
Mississippi Valley Gas Co.	2.13
Food for Mrs. Devine	1.46

October 28

Gas and Food to take Mrs. Devine home	2.00
Gas	4.55
Mimeo paper and tape	4.59
Driver's license for Ken and Sandy	3.00
Gas	5.20

October 29

Gas	1.00
Gas (Clarke)	1.50
Gas	2.00
Food	2.00
Gas	2.00
Money for phone	5.00

Balance in Bank - \$7.84

\$151.58

The expenditures do not equal the amount of money received since many people put their own money into some of the expenses. This money is in such small amounts that it does not pay to list it as money received. Thus many times the petty cash is increased by some private money from individual staff members.

The money spent on gas has now been stopped due to the acquisition of a new credit card. Also the car that was used for Clarke County and the car that was used for the Freedom Election got gas on the office budget.