

West Point.  
Nov. 23, 1964

Dear Friends,

This is, to be frank, an appeal for money from the members of the West Point COFO Project in Mississippi. As you already probably know, the Council of Federated Organizations sponsored a Summer Project in Mississippi directed toward the registration of Negroes at the courthouse and in the Freedom Democratic Party, a new political party open to both Negroes and whites. Throughout the country students were recruited to work in both urban and rural areas of Mississippi during the summer. But because of the intricacies of Mississippi law regarding registration at the courthouse our first objective was only partially successful. Because a voter must be registered four months before the election, anyone who registered after July 3 was unable to vote in the Presidential Election. In addition, the form for registration is so complex that it is hard for the poorly educated, as most Negroes are, to pass the test. Since we wanted to stage a demonstration at the Democratic Convention around the unfairness of the method of choosing delegates in Mississippi it was decided to concentrate on the FDP enrollment.

Yet the work of getting people to go down to the courthouse, the most basic if the system in Mississippi is to be changed, is still going on. Many students, like myself, volunteered to stay in the state to carry on this long term work. We are operating under many handicaps, not the least of which is that the publicity surrounding the Summer Project has died down, and fewer and fewer people know (or care) what is presently going on in the state.

To be more specific, my project, located in Clay County, in the Northeast of the state, has been functioning without a car, an office, and with very little money. We get \$80 every two weeks and there are five of us. This means that the work of making contacts, of canvassing, of publicizing takes twice as long as it should. We use a mimeograph machine at a nearby college. Since we have no office we have been staying with sympathizers, three in one house and two in another. As a result we have no opportunity to meet and discuss the problems of



the project, except as can be conducted around the conversations of the people we stay with. Even more of a hinderance, we have no place to store printed materials, books, and other propaganda that needs to be distributed in the community. No place for files, typewriters, or desks. If we were gamblers or bootleggers our problem would be an easy one, since there are houses available for rent. But civil rights workers are not acceptable renters. After many times being told that houses were unavailable to us we found a two room shack, with no plumbing that we thought would serve as an office, and as a place to store food and clothing which we hope to distribute. So on several occasions we went to look at it and evidently the police were informed that we were interested. The <sup>electricity</sup> lights needed to be turned on and then we learned that there was a recent city ordinance saying that in order for the electricity to be turned on a house had to have plumbing. And further pressure was applied so that the man was unwilling to let us use it even as a warehouse. So we tried a different tack and got a girl who works in the movement in Aberdeen to come down and pose as the wife of one of the workers. They went to see about a house we had already tried, but the woman there wasn't fooled a minute when they asked for a lease (so they couldn't throw us out when they found out who we really were). ~~People~~ <sup>People</sup> who are property owners are simply unwilling to run what they consider the risk of renting, or even living near, a Freedom House. They are simply afraid of a misdirected (or directed, as the case may be) bomb or bullet. In every case that we've encountered self-interest outweighs any sense of commitment to the movement. But it is such a real necessity that we are located in a place of convenience for the Negro community -- a place where people can come and loaf, and inquire and discuss, and (we hope) absorb the philosophy of the movement. And the response of the people in Smithbottom (where Mrs. Adams lives) has been very heartening when we become acquainted. They did everything to persuade Mrs. Adams not to let us stay there when we came. Anyway.... the housing outlook is dismal and we may have to build one, which will mean a great expenditure of money and energy if we do. In addition our operating costs will rise when we get an office and start functioning properly. We urgently request you to contribute to the success of the West Point Project, and to the Mississippi Project as a whole, by mailing a contribution to me c/o General Delivery, West Point, Mississippi. Perhaps you could make it a regular monthly contribution. Checks should be made out to me, not SNCC or COFO, because

of the difficulty of our cashing those checks in West Point. You could, however, send a check to Jackson, Miss. (1017 Lynch St.) made out to COFO and (hopefully) directed toward the West Point Project, but it will take longer to reach us, if ever it does, since those things tend to get misplaced into other funds. But this is, obviously, entirely up to you and anything would be appreciated.

There is yet ~~another~~ another need that we have, and that is food (canned or dry) and clothing. Clothing is actually more important. First of all, let me correct a misapprehension that you probably have -- namely, that Southern winters (Mississippi, in particular) are warm. It ain't so. It gets bone chilling cold everywhere but on the coast. And the Negroes in Mississippi being poor, winter is a sparse and uncomfortable season ~~there~~. This means children don't go to school because they don't have clothing to wear, and babies cry for lack of warm clothing. We have got to show the people that we are concerned with their problems and the basics ~~are~~ of food and clothing are the best way to do it. We hope to have a great enough response from those of you up <sup>North</sup> ~~there~~ to begin the distribution of these things on a large scale. The best thing you can do is to pool with your friends until you have enough to send down in a truck. ~~Get in touch with SNCC at 100 Fifth Av, NYC to find out how to get it down to West Point.~~ Perhaps the person who sends you this letter could take responsibility for acting as depot.

Another idea/. How about holding a party for the project? If you want to go all out you can contact NY SNCC and get them to send you entertainment, but it is often simpler (if not as profitable) just to pass the hat or charge money for drinks at an ordinary party or ~~small~~ <sup>small</sup> gathering of people (at dinner, say). You can probably think of other more imaginative ways.

As usual, work is slow. Our organizational work -- establishing precincts in communities -- is progressing.....

We shall overcome,

Joel

P.S. To those who receive this original: If you have friends who could be touched (or reached) by this appeal (and I hope you do) please send to Mrs. Jacqueline Bernard, 395 Riverside Drive, NYC for mimeoed copies, whatever number you want.