

# MISSISSIPPI NEWSLETTER

November 25, 1963

## Editorial

Council of Federated  
Organizations

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI--With John F. Kennedy dead, the Civil Rights movement in America must now consider the probability of a major setback in the progress it has made during his administration. It is certainly true that Mr. Kennedy came under attack many times for his inaction while our friends here in Mississippi and in other parts of the South were lying in jail, being bludgeoned by police clubs, and burned with barbaric electrical cattle prods; however, he was ideally on our side, and were it not for the stultifying American politics (with the worst offenders the Southern politicians who control key positions in the Congress) he certainly would have done more for our disfranchised Negroes and for America. Now we face the prospect of a Southern President controlling the country and change in the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement; especially here in the Deep South where it was bad enough with the President who offered moral leadership but whose brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, was responsible for an inactive Justice Department.

As we review President Lyndon Johnson's career in the Senate, we find that he was responsible for pushing through Senate floor action both the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights bills. This is heartening, but nevertheless one can't deny that he is a Southerner, and where Mr. Kennedy was a liberal, President Johnson is fundamentally a conservative, though not of the Goldwater ilk.

The old problems facing the Civil Rights movement have perhaps increased, and it is up to us within the movement to formulate new strategy to face the years to come. Doubtless Johnson will run for another term, and it is for that time as well as the coming months that we must prepare. However, we must not be too pessimistic, because we have already demonstrated our strength and determination in this struggle for the rights not only for Negroes but for the rights of every American; this is still an American problem which affects every man, woman, and child in America. The country will never be truly great until it can lift itself out of the mire of racial hatred and discrimination. It is still up to us here in Mississippi through diligence and courage to provide the moral leadership for the rest of America to follow, perhaps the appeal to the American Conscience will avail us something . . . someday.

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GREENVILLE, MISS.-- The COFO Conference in Greenville was honored by the presence of Dr. Howard Zinn, former Chairman of the history department at Spellman College, in Atlanta, Ga. He has long been a staunch supporter of the civil rights movement, and has recently published an article about SNCC which appeared in the liberal weekly The Nation. He sat in on both days of the Conference and contributed much to our understanding of the forces which we have to contend with here in the South. He pointed out the two paths which our movement as a revolutionary force may take: the possibility of violence with the attendant bloodshed and the loss of life, or the continuance of non-violence as the guiding spirit of the Movement. In regard to non-violence, he stated something which was in the backs of the minds of all of us, and that is the need to involve the Federal Government to a greater extent than it has been willing to commit itself before. He said, "There should be a special detail of federal marshalls stationed here in the South

to insure that persons attempting to register to vote are not intimidated or molested when attempting to carry out the right to vote which is guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States." He went on further to say that the threat of arrest would sufficiently deter any local sheriff in Mississippi from preventing Negro voters from registering. (It is incumbent on the Federal Government to arrest any official who willfully obstructs any citizen from carrying out his constitutional rights. This is a law passed pursuant to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution: Section 242, Title 18, U.S. Code) The official under arrest would then have to go through the standard channels to secure his release. The main point is that he would be in jail on a valid charge and would have to face the same inconvenience and discomfort that we have to endure illegally, over and over again.

The Greenville Conference also restated the existing COFO Programs (Tougaloo Work-Study Project, Programmed Learning, Citizenship, Home Industry, Federal Programs for Farmers, Research, Library, Scholarship Counseling, Counseling for High School Dropouts, Government Manpower programs) and outlined the needs for two new programs: the Institute for Policy Studies and the Community Centers program.

The Institute for Policy Studies is a program which will be implemented in Washington, D.C., and is primarily a project to train either local people or people who will return to the South to assume positions of leadership, especially in the area of political leadership. The requirements to qualify for this program are: to have attained at least senior standing at college or to have graduated and be qualified for graduate school, and to be willing to return to the South to work in the Movement. Six people are needed. They will be secured jobs in Washington in the offices of Congressmen or Senators and will take intensive courses at night in American politics with the main emphasis on Southern politics. While in Washington they will make many valuable contacts which will assist them to further their political careers and also help them to understand the behind-the-scenes chicanery of Washington politics. This program is for people who live in the South or members of the staff who are planning to remain here as the struggle continues. Candidates for this program should contact the COFO office in Jackson (1017 Lynch Street).

The Community Centers Program will provide an outlet for a number of subordinate needs of the Southern Negro; that is to say that the needs themselves would be obviated if the political issues were solved. Our primary orientation is the franchise and all the other programs are designed to penetrate the Negro community in order to give them an awareness of the political, social, and economic problems that face them resulting from the lack of the franchise and to give them the wherewithall and will to cope with these problems realistically.

The Community Centers will supply basic material needs of food and clothing which have been collected by those sympathetic to our movement and sent to us to be distributed. There has been increasing intransigence in the Southern plantation owner and the other southern whites who feel threatened by any advances made by the Negro. This attitude is especially salient in the very crucial area of the vote as manifested by the reaction to the efforts of Negroes to register which are countered by harassment, violence, murder, economic retaliation, and ultimately eviction. These Community Centers will be able to provide food and clothing for these victims of



Southern inhumanity. The Centers will also provide a focal point for the dissemination of educational and cultural materials to which the Negro community has no access. The other function, which intrinsically is the primary one, is to provide the community with headquarters for political organization. Ultimately, as we saw during the Freedom Election, the whole state must be organized for political action if anything meaningful is to be done to break the stranglehold which the white oligarchy has on politics in Mississippi. Incidentally, the services of the Community Centers will be open to all, with no barriers of race, creed or color. All Mississippians have a stake in the struggle against illiteracy, ignorance, disease and cultural deprivation. As Dr. Silver, of the University of Mississippi so aptly put it, "Mississippi is a closed society," and something has to be done to open it up so that all of its citizens may enjoy the benefits of America.

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HOLMES COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI -- Robert Moses addressed the Mileston Co-op last week and said: "It is going to take a major revolution to get the people free." There is a need for better organization in the state to mobilize the Negro vote. He stated that there are not enough people registered in this state to make a difference. "During the Freedom Vote," he said, "there were more than 200 incidents, and this was in a situation where the votes didn't even count." He called for more canvassing and greater efforts on the part of the local people, pointing out that in Holmes County the Negroes outnumber the whites two to one.

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Notes on the Freedom Vote: This was the first time in history that there was an integrated ticket in the State of Mississippi. This is an indication that the problem of totalitarian government is the concern of all the people, black and white. The campaign committee's invocation of the government's "fairness doctrine" forces the state's television stations to give both Aaron Henry and Rev. King some time on television. This brought the other side of the story to the attention of the public. Prior to this the public had heard only the opinions of the White Citizens' Councils which fan the flames of hatred and intolerance.

There is a need for more communication within Mississippi as well as outside of Mississippi. The Freedom Campaign brought down quite a few people as observers and as participants. The Yale students, numbering 67, were the largest single group to come, but there were people and dollars from Stanford University, at Palo Alto, Calif., and from the College of the Pacific, in Stockton, Calif. These students from the relatively free areas in the country can't help but leave Mississippi profoundly affected by what happened when they were here, not only in terms of the harsh and brutal treatment afforded them by the police, and the white citizenry, but also by the living conditions of the Negroes which they met. Surely the State of Mississippi must have seemed like a foreign, and underdeveloped, country. These students have returned to their respective schools and doubtless they have told others about what they saw and experienced while here in the Deep South. This is one way to focus attention on the government of Mississippi. But more important is the need to communicate and live with the Negro people of Mississippi. Most of our staff is in the field, but in some areas there is only one man in a county and he is a man alone and in danger every waking and sleeping moment. We can't get any more TV time, so the only alternative with the limited staff and funds at hand is to work through the Community Centers. The people must be educated and be made aware of their latent power. They must be encouraged to register, because it is only through the franchise that they will be free.

How to Change Mississippi: Returning to communications, this can be implemented by organizing all the Negro communities and holding meetings at least once a week to discuss current problems. The object should be to encourage the articulation of the community's feelings on all matters pertaining to their welfare as well as to familiarize them with the American political process through intimate discussion of their own ideas in their own terms.

An organized effort must be made to publicize events in Mississippi as they happen; this calls for a more intense use of press releases, more photographs, and a more effective use of propaganda. A method must be developed to involve the federal government to a greater extent. There is a possibility of forcing the federal government to send out special marshalls with the specific purpose of supervising voter registration attempts and elections to assure that there is no interference. Howard Zinn, addressing the Greenville Conference, suggested that the marshalls be notified when the voters are ready to go to the Courthouse, and they, in turn, will call on the Sheriff and warn him not to be present when the voters arrive.

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Freedom Registration: A plan is now in development to organize a Freedom Registration roll. We will try to obtain four hundred thousand Negroes to register on separate registration lists. Then a lawsuit will be filed to make our registration lists the legal ones for the State of Mississippi. (Incidentally, the lists will be open to both Negroes and whites.) The seat of Congressman Jamie Whitten, for example, of the Fifth Congressional District, which is predominantly Negro, would be challenged on the grounds that he does not represent the electorate of his district. Senator Eastland, of Doddsville, in Sunflower County, could also be challenged on the same grounds, for there are only four Negroes registered in Ruleville, which is in Sunflower County.

These are only a few of the proposed methods to effect political and social change in the State of Mississippi. A revolution is needed, and hopefully the people of this State will be able to use the existing democratic methods to make the revolution a reality.

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RULEVILLE, MISS. -- An Example of Mississippi Justice: The case of Elijah Cannon. On the evening of October 23, 1963, Elijah Cannon, a sharecropper from Ruleville, was arrested for the alleged possession of an ice-pick and disturbing the peace. He was sentenced to thirty days, plus a fine of one hundred dollars for the ice pick and one hundred dollars for disturbing the peace, plus twenty-five dollars for his transportation from Ruleville to the county jail at Indianola. The men who arrested him were S.L. Milan, and Mr. Givens. The former is the brother of J.W. Milan, the man who murdered Emmett Till. Mr. Cannon was afforded no trial and neither was he represented by counsel.

Mr. Cannon is the father of fourteen children, and he lives and works on the farm of Mr. Livingston who pays him, as a tractor driver and laborer, fifty dollars each two weeks, from which he deducts twenty-five dollars for a debt which Mr. Cannon owes him. Mr. Cannon has a chronic mental disorder for which he is usually sent to Whitfield for psychiatric treatment. However, Mr. Cannon and his wife have attempted to register to vote. He failed to pass the literacy test, but his name is still on the Courthouse list as a candidate for registration. As a result of his attempt to register, Mr. Livingston has threatened to evict him from his plantation. Mr. Cannon and

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his wife have refused to remove their names from the registration list.

There is a direct relationship between Mr. Cannon's attempt to register and his present dilemma. To verify this, his wife was interviewed by a SNCC field secretary who was told that the overseer on the Livingston plantation had approached Mrs. Cannon with an offer to obtain Mr. Cannon's release if they both removed their names from the registration list. Mr. Cannon was adamant, and is still in jail. The fact is that even if Mr. Cannon was disorderly, the sheriff is thoroughly familiar with his mental condition. Had he not attempted to register, he would have been sent to the psychiatric hospital for treatment the night he was arrested. Mr. Cannon has served his time and remains incarcerated because he has no money to pay his fine. His wife has had to sell two cows and a hog in order to try to meet expenses for herself and the fourteen children. She had to pick two hundred and sixty pounds of cotton per day during the picking season because she was deprived of her husband's earning power. They still face eviction. The COFO group is now trying to raise money to pay Mr. Cannon's fine and secure his release, so that at least he may be able to return to his family.

This is but one example of the inhuman methods used by the white southern oligarchy to suppress the freedom movement here in Mississippi. This same pattern of economic reprisal, eviction, murder, bombings, and beatings, has been used repeatedly in Mississippi in an effort to prevent Negroes from registering to vote. As long as we have people like Mr. Cannon, whose courageous stand should be an example to all of us, we will some day be free.

Clifford A. Vaughns

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