

Prospectus for an Educational Workshop Program

This summer marked a new phase of the movement in Mississippi. From 1961 until this summer the movement in Mississippi consisted of a small band of workers, mostly native Mississippians, who worked on voter registration. There was no mass-based organization, no community centers, freedom schools, or federal programs. The main task of the movement was simply to survive. There was no national focus on Mississippi, no federal presence; there were probably no more than a dozen FBI agents in the state and they were mostly southerners who worked closely with local authorities. In 1961 Herbert Lee was killed. In 1963 a car carrying Bob Moses was machine-gunned and Jimmy Travis, a SNCC worker, was nearly killed. That same year Medgar Evers was assassinated. Civil rights workers were few and easily marked.

There was almost no restraint on those who would resort to murder to wipe out the movement in Mississippi. Under these conditions it would have been impossible to do more than work on voter registration. Thus, the task of the small group of civil rights workers in Mississippi prior to the summer of 1964 was single-fold: to find groups of individuals who would be willing to risk their jobs, even their lives, by going down to the courthouse to attempt to register. By this means the issue of Mississippi slowly became dramatized. The systematic and ruthless exclusion of Negroes from the franchise was documented and highlighted for the nation.

This summer the movement entered a new phase. Over a thousand volunteers from all over the country poured into Mississippi to work on a battery of programs to meet some of the starved needs of Negro Mississippians--freedom schools, community centers, a theatre and folk artist program, federal

programs, the organizing of a mass-based political party. Prior to the summer there was heated debate among the Mississippi staff whether such a project was advisable. Frankly most staff people were frightened by the implications of such a leap; yet the situation in Mississippi seemed to permit no alternative.

3 As a result of the summer, however, cracks were finally made in the Mississippi iceberg. For the first time in the state there were literally hundreds of local people who no longer feared to become active workers--not just passive supporters--of the movement. Two organizations based in local people emerged and have begun to take root and grow: the Freedom Democratic Party and the Mississippi Student Union. From eight projects and fifty workers before the summer, the movement started the fall with over thirty projects and more than 300 workers. This combination of events--a great increase in willing local people and a vast geographical expansion--poses the challenge of building community organizations on a local level and at the same time developing an ever increasing state-wide consciousness.

The possibility of building real community organizations, of developing community people so that they can assume responsibilities and release energies confronts the movement in Mississippi with immense new problems. As the movement sinks deeper into the community the issue it faces become more complex, the informational needs of organizing become more demanding, and the programmatic approaches become less clear-cut. In addition, as a community develops the role of the organizer in relation to the community