

Bay Area Friends of The **STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE**



THE STORY OF COFO (PART ONE)

When the staff and volunteers of COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, met in December to chart the future of the Mississippi movement, it was the largest single collection of civil rights workers ever gathered together (350) in Mississippi. Not only that, but they were working on the largest group of programs any civil rights drive in history has ever undertaken.

THE NAME IS OLDER THAN THE PRESENT GROUP

COFO as it is today began in a Clarksdale, Mississippi Methodist Church in August, 1962, but the name COFO goes back nearly two years before that meeting.

COFO was the name chosen by a group of Negro Mississippians who sought, in 1961, an audience with the then Mississippi Governor, Ross Barnett. Thinking that Barnett would turn down a meeting with representatives of the older, established civil rights organizations, they used the name COFO to negotiate the release of arrested Freedom Riders.

Among the organizers of the 'first' COFO were Medgar Evers, slain NAACP field secretary; Dr. Aaron Henry, State President of the Mississippi NAACP Branches; and Carsie Hall one of Mississippi's four Negro lawyers.

COFO BORN AGAIN

The group became inactive after that meeting. In January, 1962 Robert Moses, head of voter registration in Mississippi for SNCC, and Thomas Gaither, Mississippi CORE representative, wrote a memo proposing that the civil rights groups working in the state band together to register the state's Negroes. Moses has been working on voter registration in rural Mississippi since August, 1961. His experience told him that discrimination in Mississippi would only yield to an all-out unified attack by as strong a force as possible. COFO was revitalized.

A COFO proposal was submitted to the newly formed Voter Education Project (VEP) of the Southern Regional Council

in February 1962, under the signature of Dr. Henry, then, as now, state NAACP head and head of COFO (press rumors that he has withdrawn from COFO are false). VEP had announced that it would finance voter registration drives in the South, but it did not support COFO's plan until after the August meeting in Clarksdale.

THE FOUNDING GROUP

All of the full-time civil rights workers in Mississippi at that time were present at the Clarksdale meeting, except Evers, whose busy schedule kept him away. CORE's David Dennis (who replaced Thomas Gaither); SCLC's Reverend James Bevel; Moses and Foreman from SNCC, and the ten other SNCC workers then scattered throughout the Mississippi Delta.

The meeting renominated and elected Aaron Henry president and Carsie Hall, secretary. The Reverend R.L.T. Smith of Jackson was named treasurer and CORE's Dennis elected to the Executive Committee. Bob Moses became project director.

The following month a VEP grant enabled COFO to begin work in Bolivar, Coahoma, Leflore, and Sunflower counties where SNCC staff members already had done crucial ground work.

INTO THE DELTA

COFO moved next into Washington County. The entire staff came together again in February, 1963 for a concerted push in Leflore County after the near-

fatal machinegunning of SNCC Field Secretary Jimmy Travis. A food and clothing drive launched in the winter of 1962-63 sustained many of the Delta families victimized because of their participation in the vote drive. Support by Northern college campuses began to solidify.

THE FREEDOM VOTE

After Greenwood, workers moved into Holmes and Madison Counties and made inroads into other Delta areas. A statewide Freedom Vote in the Fall of 1963, organized by regular COFO workers together with volunteers from Yale and Stanford put permanent civil rights workers in the city of Jackson and in numerous other counties.

THE WAR MAP OF MISSISSIPPI

Following the Freedom Vote the Mississippi staff, then numbering about 50 full-time workers, met in the SNCC office in November to make future plans. The state was divided along congressional district lines and a project head elected for each district. SNCC's Lawrence Buyot, now state chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party, was project head in the 5th District, based in Hattiesburg. SNCC worker Frank Smith operated in the 1st District from Holly Springs, CORE staff member Matteo Suarez directed activities in the 4th District from Canton. SNCC's McArthur Cotton reactivated voter registration in McComb - the site of SNCC's first Mississippi project in 1961 - and became 3rd District project director.

Continued in next issue

help • help • help • help • •

LAST MONTH WE ASKED FOR OFFICE EQUIPMENT - AND ARE STILL ASKING. WE ALSO NEED OFFICE VOLUNTEERS. IF YOU CAN REGULARLY COME INTO THE OFFICE, AT 584 PAGE STREET, PLEASE LET US KNOW.

WE NEED JOBS AND/OR ROOM & BOARD FOR RETURNED MISSISSIPPI VOLUNTEERS AND FOR LOCAL STUDENTS HELPING FULL-TIME IN SNCC WORK HERE

CONTACT SNCC: 584 PAGE STREET, SAN FRANCISCO MA 6-4577

MISSISSIPPI STUDENT UNION CONVENES

Negro Highschoolers Organize Themselves

"All the principals and almost all the teachers tell us we got to get an education and that means listening to Mr. Charley. They been talking to him for a lot of years and they been brainwashing us with that talk."

This was Roscoe Rones, the 17-year old president of the newly formed Mississippi Student Union (MSU), speaking to some 50 delegates at the December convention in Jackson. Delegates came from ten cities all over the state. Only a year old, the group was holding its fourth state-wide meeting.

HOW MSU STARTED

The MSU was founded last January by ten high-school students in Hattiesburg who wanted to participate in the Freedom Day Voter Registration drive sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). They did, joining in the Freedom Day picket and declaring a one-day boycott of classes in protest against "the system." Three months later, in April, over 200 students met at Tougaloo College (near Jackson) to organize the state organization.

The second convention was called in August in Meridian. There delegates hammered out resolutions touching on everything from integrated schools, housing and jobs to the paving of streets and sidewalks. COFO fathered the MSU, helping the students with meetings and other organizational work in the beginning. But by last summer MSU was on its own.

BARRIERS TO PROTESTS

At the Jackson convention a shy, unemployed high-school graduate from that city talked about the "system".

"We wanted to protest against the bad teaching at our school — the overcrowded classes, the old books, the lousy food. About 300 or 350 of us were involved in a demonstration and the principal told us that those who took part wouldn't be able to graduate. A few of us got arrested but the principal backed down."

"What's really bad is that I can only think of two teachers who really would discuss civil rights with us ... but never at school. They have to sign a paper about what organizations they go to and they got to be careful or they lose their jobs. Us students even have to sign a pledge when we register that we're not involved in no civil rights stuff."

FEAR BLOCKS LEARNING

Another former high-school student described the fear that permeates the whole school system. He told how his sister was expelled for a month for singing a Freedom song and how the principal threatened him with expulsion when he wore a civil rights shirt to class. In these situations, he said, "parents are afraid of their kids standing up to their

teachers. That's why you just can't learn about the truth in the schools down here. There's just about no one to tell it to you."

During the lunch break, a youngster from Starkville, who had been expelled in November for passing around an MSU petition in his school, talked about some of the problems he had experienced:

"My teacher told me that it would be good if I left town because of my work for the MSU. If I moved to a town 150 miles away from Starkville, the whites wouldn't go that far to burn it down, but my mother's house is right in town ... and she hasn't paid for it yet. I wouldn't want my family to get hurt. I don't care about me."

In the convention discussion delegates told what happened when they tried to register at white schools -- they were either ordered away or never received a reply. In the schools they're attending, when they asked for permission to publicize MSU meetings, they were almost always turned down.

THE BOYCOTT QUESTION

The main item on the agenda was the question of declaring a public school boycott against Mississippi education. A Jackson delegate posed the first objection to the proposal, noting that the schools in Jackson were much better than those in the rest of the state. Besides, she added, *"We might lose what we already have if we join the boycott. And our principal told us that if any of us walk out of school we should just keep on walking and he'll give us some walking papers to carry along."*

Another delegate against the boycott argued that parents would also be opposed to it. To that the Starkville delegate answered:

"We got to talk to parents because they don't understand. Some are like Uncle Toms and all they do is listen to the white man."

The Jackson delegate's strongest argument against the boycott was that most students in Mississippi didn't care. Most of the convention agreed and decided that at least 85 percent of the students in a school should be willing to sign a boycott petition before a call was issued. The state-wide boycott was voted down, leaving the issue to local affiliates to decide when they thought a boycott would be effective in their areas.

MSU'S WORK

This student convention reflected the everyday difficulties of getting an education in Mississippi. In some schools MSU members are regularly asking their teachers to discuss Negro history, civil rights and "what we're doing in South Vietnam." In some places MSU libraries

LOCAL AFFAIRS

IN THE EAST BAY the scheduled evening of concert music are underway. Each concert is devoted to different aspects of the chamber music repertoire. Guests are invited to arrive at 8:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served and the program begins at 8:15 promptly.

For information and reservations, call the East Bay Friends of SNCC, 655-9545 or Phyllis Luckman, 652-9821.

TICKETS ARE AVAILABLE for the last event in the San Francisco Concert Series - Budapest String Quartet, Sunday March 14, 3:00 p.m. Masonic Auditorium. \$4.50 for orchestra seats. Care Mrs. Stanley Wiener MO 1-5829 for tickets.

Anybody in San Francisco want to lend their house for a SNCC house-party? If "yes", call Mrs. Anselm Strauss OR 3-1085.

SCRIPTO'S \$500,000 CONTRACTS UNDER INVESTIGATION

ATLANTA - Scripto, Inc., presently under fire from Negro strikers and civil rights groups may lose 1/2 million dollars in federal contracts.

John Lewis reports that the General Services Administration (GSA), which handles purchasing for the federal government, was reviewing "all of the details" connected with two one-year contracts held by the large pencil company.

Ward McCreedy, Director of Contract Compliance, told Lewis in a letter that "a special review of the firm's compliance with its contract obligations for equal employment opportunity" is underway.

NEGROES ON STRIKE

More than 700 Negro workers at the company have been striking for more than a month. Union leaders vowed this month to continue the strike "until all Scripto employees are offered a wage rate which will bring them up to the maximum 'poverty level' (\$3,000 a year)." The 700 striking workers represent almost 100% of the firm's Negro employment.

have been set up. Members teach in Freedom schools, community centers and help register people to vote in the MFDP elections. In Meridian students protested against the expulsion of two pupils who had worn LBJ buttons to class and were successful.

After the convention Roscoe Jones said of the one-year old organization "... if we ever do get on our feet, we're going to show Mississippi that they've got a fight on their hands. Already some kids have been asking what is the best way for us to get our freedom and what should we do if we could be in the Governor's chair."

BEHIND HEADLINES IN SELMA, ALABAMA

Dallas County [Selma is its county seat] has long had a plantation economy and even today the county is 49.9 percent rural. Two-thirds of the rural population is Negro. Though some industry has come to the area, population growth is almost static. In fact, the Negro population of the county is declining - in 1950, Negroes comprised 65 percent of the population, today only 57 percent.

Median family income in Dallas County is \$2,846 (compared to \$3,937 for the state), but median family income for Negroes is only \$1,393. Median school years completed in the county is 8.8 (compared to 9.1 for the state), but median school years completed for Negroes is 5.8.

Only 1.7 percent of 14,500 voting-age Negroes (242 Negroes) were registered in the county as of September 1963 according to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (Fewer Dallas County Negroes could vote in 1963 than in 1956, when 275 Negroes were registered!) But 63 percent of the 14,400 voting-age white (or 8,953 whites) were registered. (In the two adjoining Black Belt counties, Wilcox and Lowndes, none of the 11,207 voting-age Negroes were registered in 1962 according to the Civil Rights Commission.)

The first voting suit filed by the Kennedy Administration, in April 1961, was filed against the Dallas County registrar. "It sought an injunction against systematic discrimination against Negro registration applicants," according to Burke Marshall of the Justice Department.

Selma is the birthplace and stronghold of the Citizens' Councils of Alabama. The Dallas County council was organized in 1954 by Attorney General Patterson of Mississippi and is partly subsidized by the state and large industries nearby.

... In a full-page ad in the Selma Times-Journal, June of last year, the council said its 'efforts are not thwarted by courts which give sit-in demonstrators legal immunity, prevent school boards from expelling students, who participate in mob activities and would place federal referees at the board of voter registrars.' The ad asked, 'Is it worth four dollars to you to prevent sit-ins, mob marches and wholesale Negro voter registration efforts in Selma?' In October 1963, the Dallas County Citizens' Council was the largest in the state with 3,000 members. A lot of citizens must have thought the four dollars worthwhile.

(reprinted from "Black Belt, Alabama," by Jerry Demuth, in The Commonweal, Aug. 7, 1964)

WATS REPORTS DECEMBER/JANUARY

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1964

NATCHEZ: Staff workers Eugene Rouse and George Bess were doing exploratory work in Fayette, Jefferson Co., 23 miles from Natchez. Due to unforeseen circumstances, they were forced to walk from Fayette back to Natchez. While on the road, they were continually harrassed and followed by white cars and the Highway Patrol, and near Selma, Mississippi, they were shot at (but not hit).

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1964

LAUREL: The phone in Laurel has been continually interfered with. For example after the recent arrests, the project director was unable to make calls for two hours. When she finally succeeded in reaching Foster's father, he was

no one got in to register. During the day, up to 350 people may have taken part in picketing the courthouse ... This is the first time there has ever been a picket line in this cotton-plantation county.

TALLAHATCHIE CO.: Fred went down to the Sumner Courthouse to see about a traffic fine he owed. Since he couldn't pay it, he was put in jail. About an hour later Deputy Sheriff Jimmy Lee Newton came by, and Fred asked him three times if he could make a phone call. During the conversation, Fred said 'Yeah' and 'No' to the Deputy, who said he was accustomed to being called 'Yessir' and 'No sir'. He then accused Fred of jumping on him, and beat him on the head, arms, and legs with his billy club. Fred got out

WHAT IS WATS?

The WATS (Wide Area Telephone Service) line is the heart of all SNCC security and communications. For a flat monthly rate, an unlimited number of calls can be dialed directly to any place in the country - or the state - depending on what line one uses. The Jackson office has a state-wide line, the Atlanta office has the national WATS line. Both run on a 24-hour basis.

A project worker can call in news of any incident, threat or major activity to the Jackson office. The WATS operator there takes down the details and relays it to Atlanta if the event is of national importance. In the case of a threat or incident involving Federal laws, Jackson will notify the FBI and the Justice Department. Atlanta uses its national WATS line to notify SNCC groups around the country.

so angered by the delay that he sent nasty telegrams to the President of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. in NYC and the head of Southern Bell in Atlanta. As a result ... COFO is now obtaining a phone in its office, which the local phone company had previously refused to install.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1964

MERIDIAN: The trials of Freeman Corroft and Luke Kabat for contributing to the delinquency of minors (after they attempted to integrate the Toddle House (WATS 12/3) were held in County Court under Judge Harwell on Dec. 14. The two COFO workers pled guilty and were fined \$200 each, and the kids got off with a lecture by the judge not to be led around by COFO anymore.

Also the precinct boundaries in Meridian have just been changed, so it is necessary to re-register voters - that is, to tell them to go down and sign their names again. COFO is planning to run a candidate for the City Council election in May. The white community is apparently scared of the competition, because they are dismissing their high school students early and having them to out to tell white voters they have to re-register, calling it a 'social studies project.'

MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 1965

INDIANOLA: Residents of Indianola, Sunflower, and Ruleville, about 40-50 of them, attempted to register today. As soon as the first carload arrived, the courthouse was shut down, and remained closed for the remainder of the day, so

later that day when a worker from Greenwood paid his fine

MAYERSVILLE, ISSAQUENA CO. The minister and three deacons of the Moonlake Church here voted not to allow any more civil rights meetings at the church. This decision was made by the four officers without consulting the congregation, which is very angry about it.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 1965

WESTPOINT: Negro farmers from Mississippi's First Congressional District have received letters from their Congressman, Thomas Abernathy, for the first time

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 1965

SELMA, ALABAMA: SCLC and SNCC workers are organizing Selma Negro voters. They have divided the town into 5 wards, are having ward meetings, finding volunteer block captains, doing canvassing, etc.

GULFPORT (VIA JACKSON): On Sunday, a civil rights sermon was given in one of the Negro churches here. After the sermon, twenty people went to Allbright and Wood drugstore, and were served After that they went to Triblett and Day Drugstore, where they were refused service. This is the largest number of people ever to take part in civil rights activity here.

WEST POINT: 11 sets of parents were pressured by their employers to sign complaints saying that COFO led their kids into delinquency, but only one man, who works for the city, gave in. The rest are standing firm with the Movement

ON THE SPOT IN MISSISSIPPI

The following is part of a letter from Ned Opton, written in Palmer's Crossing, Mississippi. Ned is a Bay Area volunteer for SNCC.

"The Mississippi Delta, the northwest section of the state, is absolutely flat, incredibly fertile, hot, damp plantation country. There is no bare ground here: whatever is not planted to cotton is covered by dense woods or high weeds. Negroes are in a majority throughout this area, and perhaps half of them live or work on the plantations under conditions which are said to be as bad now, and probably worse, than during the Depression. The prevailing wage scale for day workers is \$2.00 to \$2.50 per 10-12 hour day, minus 50¢ for bus fare, and a man is lucky to get as many as 190 days of work per year. Those who live on the plantations under "employee" tenant-farmer, or sharecropping, arrangements, are just as poor. The economic situation is rapidly becoming worse, since machinery and chemicals have already reduced by about 80% the amount of hand labor needed to produce cotton, and more automation is on the way. Yet the whites still seem to be thinking exclusively in terms of preserving an unlimited supply of cheap labor. For example, a Jackson paper reported on August 14, 1964 that State Senator S.B. Wise of Jonestown told the 17th Annual Farm-Labor conference in Greenville:

"In addition, Negro labor tended to leave Mississippi as soon as a certain level of education was achieved." Wise said he thought white labor on the cotton farm might be the answer. 'We got to entice these people on our farm.'

Aside from seeing to it that Negroes do not achieve the 'certain level of education' at which they tend to flee the state, two other principal methods are used to keep the people down on the farm. One is to keep them there by threats and physical force on the theory that people cannot run off without paying their debts (in a county where nobody works more than six months in a year, everyone is perpetually in debt.) The other method is to keep out information about the outside world. The people do not know what the outside world is like, or what they would do there, but they do know that they have no saleable skill except chopping and picking cotton.

Because Mileston seat of a Federal experiment in rural Co-ops during the depression is relatively independent of the white economy and pressures, it has been chosen for one of the more unusual efforts A Los Angeles group, principally Abe Osheroff, is building a Community Center with \$10,000 that Osheroff raised among his friends The Center, when and if completed will be 32 by 84 feet, will seat 200, and will contain a

kitchen, two indoor toilets, and sleeping quarters for 2-4 staff.

The big question is whether the Community Center will be completed. A volunteer's car was burned a hundred yards from here early in the summer.... there was an attempt to dynamite the building, but the local citizens' patrol spotted the attempt and scared the men into dropping the dynamite sticks in the road in front of the Center, where the explosion was harmless. Tension has increased markedly with the departure of most of the workers. The people here feel that it is only a matter of time, probably a short time, before the next attempt. The police in nearby Belzoni are a particular danger. Belzoni is the town where Rev. Less, one of Medgar Evers' predecessors, was lynched in 1955. I say the police because the local residents believe that it is the police, not the other whites, who constitute the real danger. For instance, last year when Hartman Turnbow, the local Negro leader, had his house fire-bombed and shot into, the thugs bounced over a ditch in making their escape from Turnbow and his 22 cal. pistol. The next morning the Sheriff's license plate was found in the ditch and returned to him.

Aside from the COFO project, the question in Mileston is whether the Negro farmers will be able to hang on. About ten years ago the whites instituted a policy of no longer permitting land to be sold to Negroes. Any Negro land lost to the whites through taxes or sale is lost forever. The Negroes guard their community with armed men and a road patrol all night every night. The sputtering two-way radio linking our bedroom with Greenwood and Belzoni was a comfort, not a nuisance. How long will people live in such a state? I don't know. Judging from the Delta's past, which for thirty years has been very like its present, it may be a long time."

"They that would give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Benjamin Franklin

WE MOVE IN ARKANSAS

LITTLE ROCK - SNCC's activities in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia grab most of the headlines and news stories. The state of Arkansas is also the scene of integration and voter registration work.

January 3 a new state-wide office was opened in Little Rock to coordinate activities throughout Eastern Arkansas. Under the direction of James O. Jones, 21 year old native of Arkansas, SNCC now has offices and projects in Helena, Pine Bluff, and Little Rock. Jones attended Arkansas A. M. and N. College in Pine Bluff until he was expelled in February 1963 for participating in a SNCC sit-in demonstration. Since then, he has been working for SNCC.

The Reverend Benjamin Grinnage is directing SNCC activities in the Pine Bluff area. He is a Methodist minister, who studied at Philander Smith College in Little Rock before joining the SNCC staff. The activities in Pine Bluff over the past two years have included integration of lunch counters, increased job opportunities for Negroes, and nearly doubling the number of registered Negro voters in Lincoln and Jefferson Counties.

"Outside of Pine Bluff and Little Rock there has not been much progress," Grinnage reports. "The pattern hasn't changed. Negroes still feel that they haven't any recourse because most of it has to depend on local law enforcement. The picture is comparable to Mississippi, except we can vote."

Did You Know That

SNCC has more than 200 full-time staff members working in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and Mississippi.

SNCC has been conducting a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, since February, 1963



FRIENDS OF SNCC IN YOUR AREA



Bay Area SNCC Newsletter is published monthly by Bay Area Friends of SNCC, 584 Page Street, San Francisco

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SAN FRANCISCO	626-4577
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RICHMOND	BE 4-1015
MARIN COUNTY	388-1770
SANTA CLARA VALLEY	292-6161
STANFORD	326-6730
MID-PENINSULA	322-5521
LAFAYETTE - Don Sanford, 1658 Foothill	YE 5-3061
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