

# Council Of Federated Organizations

1017 LYNCH STREET,  
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

September 10, 1964

Dear All,

Exhaustion sets in! I do believe that we are all ready for another vacation already. Part of the weariness comes from each of us being responsible for doing so much more than when we had a full staff. Muriel (project director), Valerie (from California; a volunteer) and I have been working madly in the office trying to tie up loose ends from the summer project (mainly the FDP files and the bits and snatches of research we were able to do) so that we can plunge into the winter in some sort of organized fashion. (At the moment there are 7 of us working Greenville -- we three girls and four boys.) The fellows spent last weekend packing up and moving out of both the freedom house and the freedom school. The latter was a real chore as we had a library of over a thousand books set up there. At present both the books and the shelves (which were dismantled) are sitting on the floor of the room below our office which will eventually be turned into a one-room freedom school and community center until we are able to <sup>get</sup> the new center built (which, by the way, is still a long way from being a reality due to lack of funds).

All of this bureaucratic type reorganization has gone on amidst new harassment of the Negroes in Gr'ville by the local school board. Just before the local schools opened, the superintendent announced several new policies. Among them are one which raises the entrance or enrollment fee for each child to \$3.50 (just to get in the door -- and heaven knows that for the kind of education these kids get the school should pay them to go to it); another which demands that any child not living with his or her natural parents must pay an extra \$35 per semester to attend school (this case of having children live with relatives or friends is quite widespread and mainly due to the fact that many families don't have the space or money to keep all their children at home -- which also brings up the question of birth control, planned parenthood, etc -- but the fact remains that if these families couldn't quite afford to keep all their kids at home, they certainly can't afford to pay another \$35 a piece to send them all to school); still another ruling says that no young Negro girl who has had, is having or will in the future have an illegitimate child will be allowed to attend public school (and these children, perhaps even more than the others, should be kept in the schools if at all possible instead of shunted off into a corner as though they had some sort of disease or had committed a capital crime). Looking at this school board action with some sort of historical perspective of life in Mississippi, I can see a certain parallel between this tightening up of restrictions in public education and the gradual increase in impossibility in the voting procedures (or rather registering procedures) within the state. As I think I told you, before the Brown desegregation decision in 1954, registering to vote in Miss. was not much more difficult than in any other state. Then suddenly in the last half of the 1950's white Miss. began to see the Negroes as a menace should they get too much political power through the vote (at that time the population of the state was more than half Negro), so one by one additions were made to the registration rules until the present when it takes 3-6 weeks just to find out whether or not you have passed the written part of the test -- after which one must still pass the "good character" test. Now that token integration

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has shown its race-mongrelizing head, the people of liberal Greenville again feel threatened. They know better than anyone else that the Negroes in many cases will have to scrape and go without in order to raise even the \$3.50 to get their five to eight or even more children back into school this year. Undoubtedly many won't be able to collect this money, which means more kids than ever out in the streets without anything to do but pick cotton. Worst of all it gives the whites again the ~~xxx~~ chance to point that accusing finger at the Negro and say "look, those colored folks don't even send their kids to school -- can't they help themselves?", while the people in the north continue to say "Well, the important thing is education. The Negroes have got to be educated to become first-class citizens, ad infinitum, ad nauseum." How long will it be before white America realizes that it can't ask of the Negro things which the Negro neither has nor can possibly obtain except literally by a miracle? When will white America ever realize that it is not the Negro but we as whites who must prove ourselves to become "first-class citizens", and indeed "first-class human beings? How can we ask the impossible of others and not even do the bare minimum ourselves?

To begin to combat the school problem here in the state and specifically in Greenville we had ~~x~~ one of the lawyers working with COFO come down to our fair city for a couple days -- mainly to talk with ~~lock~~ Negro parents and to put us on the right track. The result has been a petition and resolution both to be sent to the superintendent of schools in Greenville and the county school commissioner. I'll enclose a copy of the resolution so that you can get an idea of what we are ~~submitting~~ <sup>submitting</sup> for and tell me if it sounds "communist" or subversive (which is what it will be called here). As a matter of fact that the resolution is as applicable to most schools in the north as in Miss. Many of the local high school age kids are still working with us -- most of them only go to classes on a half-day basis until November 1 -- this is so that they can pick cotton and earn enough money to help get their ~~xxxx~~ families through part of the winter and go to school themselves.

We've already had several people stop by the office to put their names on our list for winter welfare (the state welfare dept. still hasn't decided whether or not they are poverty cases -- if what I've seen so far isn't poverty, I don't know what it can be called). Fortunately we did have one box of used clothing from the North which came in early as one woman stopped in yesterday all upset because her little girl couldn't go to school until she had something to wear (Greenville is very particular about what its local poor must wear to school) -- so we were able to dig up a couple of little dresses which only needed some buttons and pressing to be wearable. Along this general line COFO is planning to (in fact has already in some areas) set up a fairly extensive program around federal projects, welfare included. As you know, the Miss. state legislature has done a grand job of keeping out of the state any federal projects which might threaten to help the Negro as well as the white (such as retraining for new jobs because of mechanization on the plantations, etc). In other cases the state accepts certain programs but generally keeps the Negroes ignorant of the fact. A case in point, and one of my pet peeves as you well know, is the farm subsidy by the federal government to farmers who don't plant a percentage of their land every year (Senator Eastland rakes in thousands of dollars every year on unplanted fields while the Negro farmers plant every inch they've got and still can't make ends meet).

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This summer some inroads were made into this problem and the primary result was the organization of farmers (mainly Negro but including some whites) on both a very local and county level in certain areas. Their meetings started out as "information sessions" to which COFO people brought pamphlets and literature put out by the federal government concerning its various farm programs. As you can imagine, it was an eye-opening experience for the small farmers to find out what they were entitled to by federal law but which the Miss. legislature and county farm agents had "neglected" to tell them about. The enthusiasm for this has been such that the Negro farmers set up a permanent organization and are ready to go ahead under their own steam. We have one small farm community just north of Greenville, Winterville, made up mostly of tenant farmers, that met tonight and elected delegates to go to the county farmers meeting (to which Negroes have never been invited). Some of them are already talking about trying some form of collective farming or at least cooperative farming (which, at this point, is the only realistic ~~xxxxx~~ answer to their economic problems).

Violence in Miss. <sup>has</sup> is by no means abated with the closing of the summer project. Tuesday evening Merton and Larry were almost killed. The following <sup>are</sup> excerpts from Larry's testimony to the FBI.:

"We left Jackson (Miss.) around 8:30 p.m. driving via route 49E to Greenwood (Miss.). In northern Holmes County, about half a mile from the Leflore County (where Greenwood is located) line on highway 49E the Chevy stopped running. The time was about 10 p.m. We left the car by the side of the road and began walking North along the highway (in the direction of Greenwood). We attempted to flag down passing cars to no avail. After walking for an hour or so, we came to Sidon (Leflore County, which apparently consists of one general store. We hoped to find a telephone there, but the store was closed. We continued up the road. About a quarter mile north of Sidon a car approached us going north. We were walking along the east side of the highway, thumbing. The car slowed to about 20 mph, as if to stop for us. Just as it came opposite us, two shots were fired from the car. Merton and I hit the dirt and were flat on the ground by the second shot, which came a second or two after the firsts. As soon as the car had passed, we ran across the highway to some bushes. In the meantime the car turned around and came back the other way. Just as we got into the bushes, 4 more shots were fired, but neither of us was hit. We went farther into the underbrush, passed through some trees, and came to a small clearing in which was a single grave marked by a white cross. We made our way through the weeds and thorn bushes moving north parallel to the highway. Several cars, or a couple of cars several times, cruised by slowly, some turning onto the highway from the side road at Sidon. After we beat around in the bushes for 45 minutes or so, the thicket we were going through turned into a swamp, and, since there was also water separating us from the road, we were forced to return to where the shots were fired and cross back to the east side of the road. For the next three hours we walked north toward Greenwood parallel to the highway through oat fields, drainage ditches, plantation roads, etc., hiding in the vegetation whenever a car approached. About 3 a.m. we arrived at a dry culvert under the highway about 5 miles south of Greenwood, where we slept till dawn. 't was Gold."

Guess that's enough for tonight. ~~xxxxxx~~ Looks like this will be an exciting winter if it continues at this pace. Hope you are all well.

Love,  
Pat