

## It Will Be a Hot Summer in Mississippi

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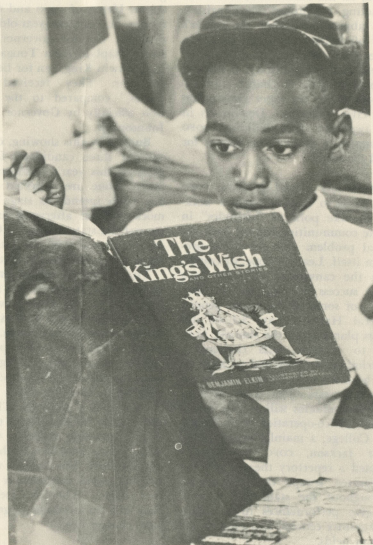
FOR some weeks, civil-rights forces and the state of Mississippi have been maneuvering in preparation for a summer confrontation. The civil-rights groups, united in Mississippi under the name of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), have announced plans to bring at least a thousand college students into the state from around the country. The state officials declare themselves firmly committed to maintain law and order on the one hand and to thwart COFO on the other.

Neither side is certain about the strategy of the other; neither seems entirely certain of its own. The COFO leaders talk of a peaceful program of political education for Negroes, while anticipating violence (and perhaps, in a way, desiring it, as a means of bringing in the Federal government). The state officials, with drastic new laws and police build-ups, hope by a show of force to keep up their harassment of civil-rights groups, keep down the violence, and keep out the Federal government.

College students are already being screened at the major recruiting centers at Yale, Harvard, the University of Illinois, Oberlin College, the University of Oregon, Stanford University, and the University of North Carolina. They are to staff the programs of what is blandly called the Mississippi Summer Project. This will include possibly as many as fifteen Freedom Schools, concentrating on remedial and political-science classes for Negro high-school pupils and dropouts. Enrollees will be shown how to start school newspapers and organize student governments. There will be cultural programs in music and drama.

Community centers, with less formal programs for all ages, will be set up as long-term projects. They will provide job training and health education, and will serve as places

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This young man using the Greenwood SNCC library will be among thousands of Mississippians to benefit from a massive summer project.

where Negroes can gather for meetings or recreation. The programs started by the Freedom Schools will be continued after the summer, staffed by full-time COFO workers and volunteers from the Negro communities. The National Council of Churches, in co-operation with COFO, plans to establish a number of its own centers in the Delta area, at an

estimated cost of \$50,000. Two COFO centers are already in operation. In Meridian, Mike and Rita Schwerner, a young married couple from New York City, have transformed dingy second-floor doctors' offices into a pleasant five-room center with a 10,000-book library, a Ping-Pong table, a sewing machine, several

typewriters, a phonograph, a movie projector, and drawing materials for children. The programs appear to be running smoothly. The Schwerners estimate that 150 people have used the center since it opened late last winter. They report no unusual harassment from city officials and are now busy setting up a system of block captains for canvassing Negro neighborhoods for voter registration.

In the tough Delta town of Greenwood, on the other hand, arrests for picketing to protest voter-registration abuses have kept the center's staff off balance, and the programs have been slower in developing. There is a large library, a nursery with three girls in charge, and off-and-on classes for voter registration and civic education. Downstairs in the two-story brick building, *cofo* maintains a distribution center for used clothing.

**A**MONG its special projects, *cofo* plans to employ summer workers to take polls of "attitudes" in white communities, toward both the racial problem and the *cofo* program itself. Leaders hope, of course, that the canvassers will also have some success in changing the attitudes of some of the white people. Several Harvard Law School students plan to join the summer project to prepare suits challenging discriminatory laws and to assist in the legal work resulting from the expected arrests. Ten Yale Medical School graduates will set up health clinics. In co-operation with Tougaloo College, a mainly Negro school near Jackson, *cofo* has already formed a repertory theatre with an integrated troupe that will travel throughout the state this summer to give performances in churches, community centers, and even in the cotton fields.

But *cofo*'s chief purpose—and the one most controversial in Mississippi—is to work on voter registration. Negroes constitute forty-two per cent of the state's population of two million, yet have only 25,000 registered voters. Despite sporadic efforts by the Justice Department and voter-registration work by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Mississippi has lagged far behind the rest of the South in

the fight for the franchise. Two years ago, as a result of growing frustration among SNCC leaders, *cofo* was formed with SNCC and the other civil-rights organizations—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—in order to co-ordinate the effort in Mississippi. Last August it ran a mock "Freedom Party" election in competition with the state's gubernatorial election. President Aaron Henry of *cofo* and the state NAACP, a forty-two-year-old Negro druggist, ran for governor, and a white chaplain from Tougaloo College, Edwin King, ran for lieutenant governor. They received 80,000 "votes," compared to the 125,000 won officially by Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr.

Buoyed by this showing, *cofo* has entered three candidates for Congress in this year's Democratic primary. None are expected to win, but *cofo* intends to stage another mock election afterward and then contest the state's ballot in Congress on the ground that the state's voter registration was discriminatory.

To the state's officialdom, voter registration represents the most direct threat to the white power structure; to the Negro leaders, it is a prime source of frustration. Despite voting drives and work in preparing Negroes to pass the stiff registration tests, the registrars have been widely effective in blocking them.

"There is a kind of 'This is it' philosophy for Mississippi this summer," according to Peter Countryman, former president of the Northern Student Movement, which is helping recruit students for the summer project. "There is a feeling that they will do anything to get significant change now."

#### Plans for a Summer

To direct the summer project, *cofo* has designated Robert Moses, a twenty-nine-year-old New York Negro with a master's degree in philosophy, who has been in charge of SNCC's operation in Mississippi since 1961. A soft-spoken former mathematics teacher, Moses has a reputation as one of the best civil-rights organizers and strategists in the country. His leadership is vital to

the daily direction of *cofo*'s state operation.

As the representative of all groups, *cofo* has overcome the competition that plagues civil-rights groups elsewhere, and finds it easier to attract the support of national agencies such as the National Council of Churches. Its leaders hope that the Federal government will find it easier to justify intervention with lawyers, money, and programs when *cofo* demonstrates the need. It is also expected that the broader-based effort will bring Federal marshals or troops more quickly should they be necessary.

In taking on the toughest of the segregationist states, where Emmett Till, Mack Parker, and Medgar Evers died, there is widespread repetition of the slogan "Crack Mississippi, and you can crack the South." It provides a rallying cry that expresses both the strategy of the project and its attractiveness to younger recruits in the civil-rights movement.

The full-time *cofo* workers, clad in dungarees and living on subsistence pay (food, lodging, and ten dollars a week), work long and frantic hours, stoically submitting to arrest and harassment and, occasionally, physical harm. One detects a tight in-group feeling of careless rapture among them, and an attitude of indifference to critics within and outside Mississippi.

**T**HE *COFO* HEADQUARTERS in Jackson, a one-story white masonry building in the Negro section, has interior walls of plasterboard covered with posters, maps, newspaper clippings, and progress reports from all over the state. On one wall under the red-crayon title "The Opposition," there is an array of newspaper clippings with background information on state and local government officials. Leaning against a wall in another room is a tall green blackboard that carries chalk reports of police action in various towns ("Hattiesburg—Pete Stoner in Jail"). Key staff people moved in and out, on their way to or from other towns where mass meetings were to be held and plans discussed. The four office telephones were kept busy, but always with the possibility that the lines were tapped. There is also a suspicion that much of the mail is

opened. Hence, very little of importance is discussed outside the closed executive-committee meetings.

The branch offices have even more the atmosphere of unarmed outposts in hostile territory. Only in Meridian, where an unofficial biracial committee has kept down the tension, was the community center comparatively relaxed. In Greenwood, harassment has created an atmosphere of suspicion. After several arrests recently during voter-registration demonstrations, the office became a confused center of activity as workers tried to find out who was in jail and on what charges. Affidavits were taken from Negroes who had been at the scene.

At times like this, there is no certainty that help will be sent. Jackson headquarters will be notified, and there will be attempts to get lawyers (there are reportedly just four lawyers—all Negroes—in Mississippi who will take civil-rights cases). In case of mass arrests or arrests of key leaders this summer, cofo plans to call in other leaders immediately from outside the state.

"If real money comes through," said Moses, "it'll be one kind of program. If it doesn't, it'll be another." Along with an estimated \$50,000 the National Council of Churches will put into the Delta, cofo is trying to raise an additional \$100,000. Sncc is conducting fund-raising drives at a number of colleges (Yale is trying to raise \$15,000), and appeals are being made to the New World, Taconic, and Field Foundations, which have donated in the past. The college students coming to Mississippi are expected to pay their own fare and expenses (about \$20 a week), though there may be scholarship grants for needy Negro students from the South.

Cofo leaders are less worried about attracting a sizable number of volunteers this summer than about screening them. With the strong emotions involved on both sides, there will be danger, Moses said, in accepting anyone who greatly misunderstands himself, the movement, or Mississippi. At the orientation session in Berea, Kentucky, the latter half of June, there will be concentration on, as Moses put it, "recognizing our own attitudes and the attitudes of the people here." Eco-

nomics and educational differences between Mississippi and the areas from which the students come will be studied and Mississippi's laws analyzed. Nonviolence will be an important subject for training. "In Mississippi," said a free-lance photographer who has been observing the Mississippi scene, "you don't even go limp when they arrest you. You co-operate, brother."

The screening process will serve to eliminate types of people who could hurt the program. Professor John Maguire of Wesleyan University in Connecticut, who is recruiting students for the summer project, has explained: "We are largely worried about two types: those who are looking for a new kind of 'kick,' sexual or otherwise; and those evangelical souls who will arrive in Mississippi with no more understanding of the situation than to turn their eyes skyward and say, 'Lord, here I am.'"

Moses candidly admitted that much depends on what the Federal government does. Critics suggest that this means the students will be used primarily as bait for intervention by Washington. On the cofo application forms, students are advised to have access to money for bail, and are asked to list names of persons to be contacted should they be arrested.

In the cofo strategy, even staff people are occasionally used as pawns. Recently one cofo worker, an M.I.T. graduate known not to drink, was arrested on a charge of drunkenness. The fine was only \$40, but the worker remained in jail for a week while cofo pleaded vainly for Justice Department intervention. "We'll wait until Saturday," said field worker Jesse Morris, "and if nothing happens by then, we'll pay his fine." Morris explained that the summer workers will be expected to let cofo make such decisions if they are arrested.

### The Counterplans

The strategy on the state's side appears to be equally hardheaded. The prospect of cofo's student invasion has provoked extensive political and police preparations. Governor Johnson has been working to unite racists and moderates behind him. In his inaugural address in

January, Johnson called for an end to hate and violence and an increase in understanding, reminding Mississippians that they are a part of the Union. In March, he asked the legislature for an increase of from 275 to 375 in the number of state highway patrolmen, and additional powers to employ them in maintaining order. The governor told the legislators: "If we allow these invaders to succeed in their dastardly scheme; that is, if we allow them to commit violence or to provoke our own citizens to violence, we will be guilty of a very costly error." There was plenty of room at the state penitentiary, he declared, for "overflow prisoners."

Besides increasing the patrol, the legislature passed several measures aimed at restricting cofo's operations this summer: a bill to permit municipalities to "lend" fire equipment and personnel to each other to quell civil disturbances; a "quarantine" bill that permits municipalities to restrict movements of citizens "when there is imminent danger to the public safety"; a bill making it a felony to circulate material that encourages boycotts; and a bill to prohibit picketing or demonstrations when they "interfere" with entrances to public buildings or with the "free use of public streets or sidewalks."

This last law, already used to arrest nearly fifty pickets in Hattiesburg, is being challenged in Federal court. But the constitutionality of these laws has caused little concern at the state capitol.

THE JACKSON police force is being expanded, but Assistant Chief M. B. Pierce insisted that the complement of men is simply being brought up to "regular size." He says the force has 390 men, and Jackson newspapers have reported a dozen being added. Mayor Allen Thompson reportedly bought two hundred shotguns last year and has ordered fifty more. Shotgun mounts have been installed in squad cars and on motorcycles. Three flat-bed trailer trucks have been converted into paddy wagons and two city trucks into troop carriers. The crowning piece of weaponry is an armored car called "Thompson's Tank." It has twelve-gauge steel walls and bulletproof windows behind which are seats for

ten men with shotguns, tear-gas grenades, and a machine gun.

Deputy Chief J. L. Ray said that all this is just good business for a city the size of Jackson, and that none of it is aimed at civil-rights activities this summer. "If a man goes berserk and barricades himself in a building," said Ray, "this car [the tank] will be the safest way for the police to do their job and get him out." Ray believes that this will be the quietest summer in three years if COFO workers stick to their program of schools and community centers. "Spread them across the state," he said, with a wave of his hand, "and a thousand ain't so many." Ray said that "harassment" is a word being grossly overused by civil-rights workers in Mississippi. "Every time one of them gets arrested for anything," he argued, "they call it harassment."

The most ominous question for Mississippi this summer is, "Who will be protected, how well, and by whom?" There is no clear Federal policy on intervention in civil-rights matters, and it is not known how far COFO will push to force it or what Mississippi will do to prevent it. Though both Henry and Moses said that no demonstrations are planned, it is apparent that picketing will play a role in voter registration. "We are definitely not interested in filling up the jails this summer," Henry said. "But who can say there won't be some marching around the courthouse?"

Some state officials argue that the extensive preparations and armaments could just as well be viewed as a means for protecting COFO as persecuting it. It is known that the Ku Klux Klan is reorganizing in southwestern Mississippi, a troubling fact both to the police and to COFO.

**W**ILL the summer project succeed? It is certain that the invasion of students will leave an indelible mark on the state, either as the start of a massive and continuing Negro political-education program or as an eruption of violence. A great many arrests could cripple the program, according to Moses, but he maintains that anyone who thinks it will be stopped underestimates the spirit and commitment of the movement.



A SNCC worker (right) canvasses for potential voter registration applicants. Several hundred college students from across the nation will join him in vote drives to be conducted.

The ambitious project described in this article is the culmination of three years' work by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Robert Moses, Mississippi SNCC director who heads the summer project, went into McComb in the summer of 1961 and initiated a pilot voter registration project there which set a pattern for later drives. The program included: preliminary exploration, contacts with local people, workshops on Mississippi's tortuous registration test, canvassing for potential applicants, and finally, the often dangerous trip to the registrar's office.

In the winter of 1962 SNCC workers helped draft a plan for combining local civic groups from across Mississippi, which had formed in response to vote drives, into a statewide alliance known as the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). A mock ballot campaign in the fall of 1963 attempted to enlist for the infant federation the assistance of other national organizations working in that state.

Because the bulk of SNCC's resources and recruitment has been aimed at the Mississippi Summer Project, the organization will move its national headquarters to Greenwood for the summer. In addition, SNCC will provide most of COFO's staff personnel, volunteers and funds for the massive operation.

The Mississippi Summer Project takes money. It takes cars, pencils, paper, telephones, office equipment and hard work.

We have been working three years.  
We need your help now.

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