

Overview of the Political Program

Voter registration, the process of getting or attempting to get Negro names on the voting rolls throughout the state, remains the cornerstone of the COFO political program.

The voter registration program is threefold:

- 1) Contacting local residents. This is done largely through door-to-door canvassing and mass meetings.
- 2) Preparation for registration. This consists of teaching people to fill out the complex Mississippi registration application (including instruction in interpreting various sections of the Mississippi constitution).
- 3) Taking people to the courthouse to register. This confrontation is usually the most difficult part of the work. In Mississippi in some counties no Negroes are willing to attempt to register; in other counties Negroes will only go to the courthouse in large numbers; in yet other counties only apathy prevents a large Negro registration.

Federal action in the form of suits by the Justice Department is playing an increasingly important role in voter registration activities. A federal circuit court decision in May, 1964, eliminated the need for residents of Panola County to fill in the constitutional interpretation and duties of a citizen questions on the registration application. So far the registrar seems to be complying with the court order; an intensive registration drive in Panola county could serve as a model for the rest of the state.

Over the last year the COFO political program has expanded in scope and now includes many phases besides voter registration. These programs are grouped under the general heading of political education.

Particularly in this election year emphasis is being placed on introducing the Negro to some form of political party activity. In April delegates from all over the state selected a temporary State Executive Committee for the Freedom Democratic Party, thus marking the organization of the party. This executive committee will act as the steering body for the party until a permanent executive committee is chosen during the party conventions this summer.

The Freedom Democratic Party is attempting to unseat the Mississippi Democratic Party delegation to the Democratic National Convention this summer. The Mississippi Democratic Party delegation to the convention is chosen through a series of conventions (precinct, county, congressional district, and state) which are held during June and July. The Freedom Democratic Party will hold a parallel series of conventions, select its delegation, and try to be seated at the National Convention.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is also sponsoring a Freedom Registration. This registration consists of filling out a simplified registration form--a form with only residence requirements. Freedom Registration books are open freely to people of both races. Any Freedom registered voter can participate in the Freedom Democratic Party affairs. This summer a drive will be made to register at least 300,000 people under Freedom Registration. This will show the great disparity between the desire of the Negro to register and his actual freedom to register; roughly 25,000 Negroes are on the State of Mississippi registration books at the present time.

In August the Freedom Democratic Party will sponsor a Freedom Vote, a primary vote open to all Freedom Registered persons. Included in the ballot will be the names of Negroes who ran for U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate in the Democratic Party primary this June. This June primary was open only to people registered under Mississippi law; the August vote will again indicate the Negro's great desire to vote and will point up his exclusion under existing laws.