

AMITE COUNTY

Everyone is familiar with the history of the movement in this county and the mystique which surrounds it. This makes organization both harder and easier. Harder, because the people remember Herbert Lee and Louis Allen. Easier, because there are contacts (e.g. Steptoe - there are several others) and some familiarity with the movement.

Our strategy is to build an organization of the farmers around some issue other than voting - federal programs - really economic organization. Then, after we have some base, a sense of community and a sense of strength, we will turn to voting. To speak of going to the Court-house in Liberty now would attract about 10 to 20 people, many of whom would suffer severe reprisals - it would recall '61 and we would be paralyzed.

We are working primarily two communities where we have previous contacts. The response has been very good. We began serious work in the county with the Freedom Vote (200 votes). We then turned to discussion of federal programs and to the setting up of four libraries in different parts of the county. Then came the windfall of the Advisory Committee to the USDA. An excellent response. We have held elections and chosen our first county representative and our recommendation for the FHA committee. There were about 25 farmers at the meeting. Those familiar with the county will recognize the importance of this step. Regular monthly meetings have been set up and we are trying to encourage the people to hold informal "workshops" or discussions of their problems in light of some educational material we are preparing. There is much interest in cooperatives. Finally, our plans for organization of the county extend at least through the summer - that is, we are now making plans for a summer program and use of volunteers.

There will be much reliance on local people to do much of the organizational work. Steptoe, of course, is an old hand and should be considered for and as staff - as well as "local people". There are others in the county who are doing "underground" work as our night time freedom of action is severely limited.

Our needs are as follows:

1. Publicity - a pamphlet and nation-awakening campaign on the nature of the county;
2. Legal action - a suit such as was filed in Pike County on the basis of witnesses we were able to obtain;
3. A workable security system in the event of arrests or "late-to-returns", so that we will not call Jackson and be greeted with "Where's Liberty?";
4. An 8 cylinder car - the old Plymouth 6's have lost what guts they had - equipped with powerful (50-watt) radio to be used for work in rural Pike and possibly Walthall, too;
5. A big radio to link McComb and Natchez and all cars in between (Amite, Franklin, Wilkinson, Pike, Adams);
6. A car for Steptoe - he can do vital work but is hampered by the fact he doesn't have a car.

We want to emphasize the pressing nature of each of these needs.

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Note: Clothing distribution has also been used in organization. As Steptoe said, "If you tell 'em clothes, they come running; if you tell 'em vote, they run the other way."

We must procede very slowly in this county - at least until some breakthroughs are made. There have been no major incidents since the end of June and the example of McComb is very helpful. There is some feeling that the Sheriff and friends will be cautious. He has not worn his gun since the beginning of the summer for a reason we are still trying to figure out. We have long-standing commitments in this county and to the people in it. They must be fulfilled - we feel it is essential that we begin now.

Marshall Ganz