

SUNFLOWER COUNTY

Ruleville is the headquarters of civil rights activity in this county. It is some 23 miles from Indianola, the county seat and birthplace of the White Citizens Council. Senator James Eastland maintains an office in downtown Ruleville and his plantation is at nearby Doddsville.

Ruleville has been considered a hard core segregation resistance area. In one incident in September, 1963, three houses were shot into and two girls were injured. Ruleville has been the scene of frequent jailings, economic reprisal, and police harassment prior to this summer.

The Movement in Ruleville is strong. The Ruleville Citizenship Club has about 100 active members - chairman Irene Johnson, co-chairman Mrs. Mary Tucker, secretary Mrs. Rebecca McDonald, and treasurer Mrs. Leonard Davis. The Ruleville Student Action Group is about 40 strong; chairman Mr. James Conley, co-chairman Miss Ota Doss, secretary Miss Bobby Cannon, treasurer Miss Bobby Ford. Ruleville also has the distinction of being the hometown of Mrs. Fanny Lou Hamer, Negro leader and congressional candidate.

Sunflower County has one of the lowest percentages of Negro registration. Though 13,524 Negro citizens are eligible to vote, only 1.2% of them (161 to be exact) were allowed to register before 1961. Since then only 70 to 80 people have been allowed to register although extensive efforts have been made by the Negro people. There are people like Mrs. Gussie Hicks who has been down to Indianola 13 times. One week in February, 1964, over 400 people went down to register. Federal litigation against Sunflower County for discrimination in registration was filed January 26, 1963. The case is expected to come to trial in September.

The Ruleville Chamber of Commerce claims over 200 to be employed by its three factories, and that there is "no labor competition nor union disturbances"; and that there are "low taxes". Not one Negro is employed by Ruleville industry. Employment for the Negro is mostly seasonal farm labor (cotton chopping and picking) and domestic work. This work yields 3 to 5 dollars for an 8 to 12 hour day. The average income for the Sunflower Negro falls between 400 and 600 dollars a year. Many are unemployed or underemployed. In Sunflower County agricultural employment (primarily Negro jobs) decreased by 5,598 from 1950 to 1960; non-agricultural employment (primarily white jobs) increased 1,251 in the same period. Many need medical care that they cannot afford. Housing is mostly deteriorated or dilapidated. Only a few houses have running hot water, although most in-town have flush toilets.

Civil rights work has begun in Indianola (the birthplace of the White Citizens' Council in 1955) and Drew this summer. Drew Negroes were told "SNCC workers are afraid to come here"; in the second week of the summer project, SNCC workers canvassed Drew on four successive days. The assault on Indianola began in the third week of the project.