

SUNFLOWER COUNTY - ACTIVITY REPORT, Monday, Jan. 12, 1965

Six voter registration workers went to Morrhead today to canvass. Our purpose was to get people to go to the courthouse tomorrow in Indianola, with the long range goal of setting up a project in Morrhead. We had been to Morrhead before, but never to get people to register. 325 people cast "freedom votes" here during the "freedom election." During the summer we passed out leaflets urging people to come to Indianola to meetings, telling the importance of voting and urged the signing of freedom registration forms.

We were in town for two hours today. Ten people promised to come to the courthouse in Indianola tomorrow. One lady told me she was plain scared and that's all. Another lady wanted to know what we would do if she couldn't find work as a result of registering. I told her of the food and clothing campaign. One lady told a female worker she was afraid her husband would lose his job. One local girl is working on voter registration.

The ten people will be picked up by us in the morning at 9 a.m. At approximately 1 p.m. tomorrow we will canvass again for voter registration.

There is a precinct meeting tonight in Indianola. This precinct has been going for about four weeks.

- JANUARY 12, 1965:

None of the ten people we expected to come to the courthouse from Morrhead were prepared to go when I came to pick them up this morning. They were all scared. Each had an excuse. One lady's husband told her not to go. One lady was sick; another had to work. A white man in town told an old woman at the "freedom day" not to be involved anymore. This same woman decided not to go to the courthouse this morning. She had been frightened. Her friend who was going with her decided not to go. One lady failed to answer the door.

Two COFO workers were left in town in the morning to get people to go to the courthouse this afternoon. Two people were carried to the courthouse this afternoon. Two people were carried to the courthouse this afternoon. Five of us canvassed until 4 p.m. Six people are supposed to go to Indianola tomorrow. I will pick them up at 9 a.m. They are all women except one. Two of the women are in their early 30's. The others are older. There is potential leadership in the two younger. One, Queen Ester Harris, participated in the Greenwood demonstration this summer. She had been attending mass meetings in Itta Bena. The other is anxious and very literate. She will probably teach Voter Registration and literacy in a couple of weeks. Mrs. Harris had a house, which she rents from a Negro woman; it can be used for V.R. meetings. She is looking for a place for some worker to stay (probably me). If she can't find some other place, someone can stay at her place. We plan a meeting of some 15 - 20 people for Monday. I'm supposed to pick up people tomorrow morning and afternoon to go to the courthouse.

- JANUARY 13, 1965

At 9 a.m. three people were ready to go to the courthouse to register. At 1 p.m. one other lady went. She is ready to get more involved in the movement. Three people canvassed the town the rest of the afternoon. An elderly couple and a man will go to the courthouse on Friday afternoon.

As we canvassed this afternoon we found that people wanted to have a meeting. When they learn there is a test to take, they would like to talk to other people about it and go over the test in a group. This gives a little more confidence. We hope to have a meeting this Monday night.

- JANUARY 14, 1965

COFO meeting in Jackson. I have formed no definite opinion of the meeting.

- JANUARY 15, 1965

Two people from Morrhead went to Indianola to register. One, Mrs. Terry, could be a good contact if she had to be. Her daughter is active and wants to be more active. She (the mother) is over-protective and holds her back a little. I wouldn't depend on this contact right now. An older man, Mr. Drain, went to register also. He had been a year before we came to town. Very literate.

There was a precinct meeting in Indianola and a mass meeting in Ruleville.

Right after the COFO conference in December the Ruleville staff devoted most all its time to the Congressional Challenge. This meant canvassing the town thoroughly and then holding neighborhood meetings in people's homes. These meetings were primarily educational, telling people about the Challenge, about Congress and its functions, and about the FDP. We also used these meetings to organize the Freedom Day in Indianola on January 4th. Before this time we had held similar meetings at the Freedom Center. Meeting in homes has proved much more successful: older people who are interested but who can't walk to the Center are able and do walk to homes near them. So a significant number of people, besides the old faithfuls of Ruleville, have become quite active.

Since January 4th we have continued to work with these neighborhood groups, only this time with the idea of precinct organization. We have divided Ruleville into three precincts, fairly equal in population. Meetings take place once a week for a little more than an hour and are used to discuss further Challenge and FDP activities, to talk about voter registration, and to make plans for getting down to the courthouse. Each precinct has its chairman who is responsible for keeping track of who's gone to register and when they should go back to see if they've passed, and to collect copies of the voter registration test that each person takes. A local woman, Mrs. Mary Tucker, has begun to do the teaching at these meetings. Mrs. Tucker has been to the SCLC teacher-training course and uses their workbook to teach from. People seem to enjoy the classes: they sometimes become, depending on what's talked about, a second Sunday School class. The only problem here may be that some of the younger adults may be driven away. But classes haven't been held long enough yet to tell about this.

In addition to precinct meetings there is a weekly mass meeting every Friday night. And when movies are available we have been showing them on Wednesday night.

One problem which has caused much dissension is the food and clothing distribution. This has been left in the hands of a local committee, elected at the mass meeting. But in spite of all the problems, people are trying hard to work out a plan which will please everyone. ~~Decided-is-a-agg-of-the~~
~~rules-last-recently-adopted.~~

The people of Ruleville have decided to build a Community Center. There is a Community Center Board, elected at the mass meeting, which made the decision and then presented it to the mass meeting. It looked for awhile as if we were to be evicted from the present Center, because of pressure being put on the owner. So the Board thought that if we had our own building we wouldn't have to worry about things like this anymore. The community raised money toward the land which has now been purchased. In a few days the Board will meet and decide on building plans. We expect the construction cost to be paid primarily by northern groups who have already contacted us. The construction itself will be done by local people. It turns out that at the last minute we were not evicted, and we'll be able to use the old Center until June,. Hopefully by that time enough of the new Center will be up to use it.

Ruleville is a pretty well organized town. Local people are taking responsibility for just about everything. The problem here is the despair and subsequent apathy of some people who have been working hard for over two years and who don't see any change. Some people have been down to register fifteen, eighteen, even twenty-three times. The names added to the voter list after the Justice Department suit against the county registrar were some relief. We're expecting the suit to end in a few weeks with the elimination of the literacy test, and this may encourage people and boost their morale. The Freedom Day in Indianola was a great success, but that was in Indianola, and many people in Ruleville didn't see it. It looks like there may soon be picketing of the library here in Ruleville, so this may serve as a rallying point for some.