

Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee -- Sunflower-Bolivar Counties  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### FOUR CONGRESSMEN JOIN CIVIL RIGHTS RALLY

Ruleville, Mississippi. July 3. Four U.S. Congressmen paid an unannounced visit to a mass meeting sponsored by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Summer Project and the Ruleville Citizenship Club here tonight. The Congressmen, Rep. Don Edwards of California's Ninth District (San Jose), Rep. William Pitts Ryan of New York's 20th District, Rep. Gus Hawkins of Los Angeles' 21st District, and Rep. Phil Burton, of San Francisco's Fifth District, joined in the singing of freedom songs and gave speeches of encouragement to the audience of 125.

The meeting was held at 8:00 p.m. in Williams Chapel Baptist Church; only a week and a half earlier a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the Church, and the Congressmen tonight walked up the still-charred steps. John Lewis, Chairman of SNCC, introduced three of the legislators; Len Edwards, a 2nd year law student at the University of Chicago and a SNCC summer volunteer working in Ruleville, introduced his father, Congressman Edwards. Mrs. Irene Johnson, President of the local civil rights organization, the Ruleville Citizenship Club, chaired the meeting and welcomed the "people we thought would never be here."

Ryan, reform Democrat from New York City, told the summer volunteer that they were in Mississippi on a "mission of conscience." He told the local Negroes, "Today we have been travelling the the state particularly to see the people of Mississippi who are oppressed. Your struggle is our struggle. There is no reason why Mississippi should not join the rest of the nation in living up to the ideals of this country."

Burton, who was just elected to the House in a special election in California this spring, referred to two volunteers in the audience who helped elect him in San Francisco. "We meet again tonight because we have stood for human dignity. We stand with those who say we don't want some freedom someday, but we want all of it now!" He added, "It's going to be a long hot summer -- and it's going to be a lot hotter for the segregationists than for us."

Hawkins, Negro Congressman from Los Angeles, stressed the importance of the civil rights work in the South, saying "I go back with the feeling that what we are doing is insignificant in comparison with what you are doing. We're on the road to freedom; yesterday, with the passage of the civil rights bill, we crossed one great river. But we have many more to go."

Congressmen, p. 2.

Congressman, Edwards, who is staying overnight in Ruleville with a Negro family, said "I am down here for two reasons -- to see my son Len and to lend whatever support I can." He added, "We would not have passed the civil rights bill if it were not for the work begun by the Freedom Riders. We had the chance in 1866-1875 to bring equality to our country and we failed. Now we have a new chance; this is the third American revolution." (Congressman Edwards, a Democrat, is a member of the House Judiciary Committee and helped write the civil rights bill.)

The four Congressmen joined in a standing ovation when SNCC Chairman John Lewis was introduced. Lewis told the mass meeting "The Civil Rights Bill is not the end, just the beginning. Just as the ICC regulations became meaningful only with the bodies of Freedom Riders, it will still take our bodies and our efforts to make this civil rights bill meaningful.

A highlight of the meeting was the introduction of a half-dozen guests from nearby Drew, Mississippi. The SNCC workers in Sunflower County have been concentrating their voter registration efforts for the past week in Drew, which has seen practically no previous civil rights activity. Charles McLaurin, 23, SNCC project director for Sunflower-Bolivar Counties, told the group that the Drew people symbolized a real breakthrough. "We've been working in Drew to overcome the fear and intimidation, and we welcome them. These people will be a light in Drew just as a few were the light in Ruleville a couple of years ago. The reason so many are coming to Ruleville to see what is happening is because that little light didn't go out."

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