August 4, 1964


The crew at present numbers over 20. The activities engaged in have multiplied. Since last report, there have been two new missions in Panola County, a new voter registration project, and a new center for African American students in Panola County. The activities have been active in the community, and the crew has worked in almost every strata of the community. Some have been working in the library, cataloging books. Others have been working in the community center, helping to paint and add new siding. Some are working in the school system, helping with the summer project. Others are working with the local community leaders, helping to organize new groups. The crew has been sent into a new mission in a Mississippi town about 10 miles from here on a new project. Formerly, there have been statements made by local community leaders and clergy in the places where COFO and NAC have been active, stating that they should have consulted the community leaders before beginning their work. Everybody was happy, we are told. All is well. They would have cooperated with us, had they been given the chance. Those of you who have been involved in the Freedom Movement probably share my skepticism at statements like this. However, we are eager to take a man at his word. So into this new town, a team has been sent IN ADVANCE of any effort by COFO or NCC. They are working with local community leaders, trying to open channels of communication, to be of help, to seek cooperation, to explain our motives in entering the struggle here. Next week's report will tell us how effective this approach is.

A word about the trip to Batesville: We took 5 men with us. They are now involved in the voter registration effort in Panola County in cooperation with the COFO team already there. Batesville and several other rural communities are in the midst of an agricultural area as rich as any in the north central states. Cotton and cattle are the two main products. From the end of May until now, about 150 have actually registered to vote of some 600 who took the test (compared with about 400 registered voters out of 2000 since January here in Hattiesburg.) The difference...in Panola County, they are not required to interpret either the state or national constitutions. The spirit is good in Batesville. Many able local Negro citizens have stepped forward. As elsewhere in the state, we have discovered that a sizable group of the white citizens are not hostile, but are even privately in agreement with our aims. But they face the problem of harassment and reprisal if they openly support Civil Rights efforts. The Batesville team, both NCC and COFO, have decentralized their operations. Small teams are living and working in virtually every community in the county. The real problem is reaching the Negro workers on the plantations. Last Friday, we witnessed a new and encouraging event. After lunch, about 30 white citizens lined up to register to vote. They were factory workers given time off for this purpose. The local people said that this event was prompted by the large number of Negro registrants. We rejoice in this development. For, as we have said, right and wrong, are not just a Negro revolution. It is a fight on the part of black and white together for equal rights for all...black and white.

Two brief observations in closing. The overall reaction to the murder of the three at Philadelphia is encouraging. Among the Summer Project workers, feelings include deep sorrow, a numbed hatred, deep anger, and a desire to continue on, and among a few...to the warped minds that could perpetrate such a deed. Native white Mississippians feel shocked, shame, and still, the unwillingness to believe that this was done by white Mississippian. Among some, though the y speak guardedly, the feeling persists that these three got what they deserved. And others who for different reasons also speak guardedly, share our sorrow.

Music makes the world go 'round. Miss, is folk singers' paradise. Though we've said little about it, the music is the backbone of this movement. Praise the Lord for those who can express our joys and sorrows, our humiliations and our triumphs in song!

Bob Beuch, Co-director with John Cameron, Hattiesburg Ministers' Project