

[Aug. 23 - 28, 1964]

Federal Programs
Canton, Mississippi

August 23, 1964

WEEKLY REPORT

Principle concern of the Federal Programs is the Farmers' League and the Chamber of Commerce. As a necessary adjunct to both is investigation of health and welfare on the federal, state and county levels. Judy has assumed the health and welfare work and girl Friday duties of the Federal Programs office.

The meeting at Tougaloo was enlightening in that it revealed how little has been done in other parts of the state. One of the main deficiencies was a lack of communication and coordination on a state-wide basis. With the appointment of Jane Adams as coordinator this problem should be eliminated.

Before the Farmers' League meeting on Wednesday, Bill and Eric talked to Mr. Hodges, head of the county A.S.C.S. office. The reception was cold, but important information concerning the A.S.C. election was given. At the Farmers' League meeting held at Pleasant Green Church, the election of the Board of Directors was held. Eric explained the coming elections and their significance. Milton explained who is qualified to vote in the election and the need of organizing canvassing sub-groups. Mr. Claude Moore, Vice President of the League, gave an impassioned speech on farmers' grievances and the need of concerted action. The meeting was attended by ninety-three people. At the end of the meeting, membership cards were sold; the present count is fifty-six paid members.

Sharon and Eric went to Jackson to tour the Federal Building. Visits were made to the S.B.A., Labor Department, and A.S.C.S. offices. Valuable technical information was gathered in the first two offices; in the last an informal meeting was held with Mr. Daniels. He was very helpful in giving a detailed explanation on the A.S.C. county election procedures. Mr. Daniels' cooperation is a breakthrough that can be accredited to pressure we applied in Washington. While in Jackson on Thursday we contacted Rachel Brown and discussed opening up new areas. A call was placed to Benton where there is a large number of independent farmers who are easily organisable. The effort there will be directed by Peter Cummings, but he will not be back in Mississippi until mid-September.

We returned to Jackson on Friday to discuss the League's problem with the L.C.D.C. The Farmers' League is going to charter in order to engage in economic activities, i.e., a coop cotton gin and supply house. The Chamber of Commerce is going to incorporate to provide an economic framework for a proposed shopping center. Since the legal problems were fairly complex, Eric invited Jim Sobieski, an L.C.D.C. lawyer, to explain the procedure to the pilot committee from the Chamber of Commerce. At the same time Eric engaged two lawyers to speak at the Farmers' League meeting

to explain the basic civil rights and to answer questions on chartering. Friday evening was spent preparing the large mailing for the next farmers' meeting on Wednesday.

Saturday morning after the Madison County Movement meeting, the Board of Directors of the Farmers' League met to discuss the A.S.C. elections and examine various economic proposals. Mr. Williams carried the meeting and his proposals of a cotton gin and general supply store were accepted by the Board. Land survey and acquisition is the next step.

In the afternoon Eric, Judy, Chris and George Johnson went to a picnic on William Harris's farm. Seven or eight farmers were introduced to the Farmers' League idea and said they would come to the meeting. Judy interviewed some of the women on medical and welfare needs; she has been working on this all week in the rural areas.

Federal programs is concerned with effecting in concrete economic terms the spirit of unity that formed the League and the Chamber. The League should grow substantially from the A.S.C. election experience. The chances are good for an integrated county committee. The organization that will win the election will solidify the League. Next will be the cotton gin coop. While the A.S.C. organization is going on, never will be made to tie up land for the gin.

The Chamber of Commerce suffers from ambivalence and fear of the whites. It will be hard but important to get the community committed to group action. Classes will be set up in bookkeeping and other management skills. These will be needed by the men who will direct the shopping center. The past week has presented problems with the principle member of the Chamber being absent. Mr. Robinson, like Mr. Williams in the League, is the key to the present Chamber. His absence is widely felt.

The area of Federal labor law violations has not been investigated. This means checking the industries in the Madison County area as to contracts, the nature of their trade (intra- or inter-state), and if they comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act (minimum wage, time and a half for overtime). This information is difficult to get, but not impossible.

Since Sharon and Martha have evacuated Federal Programs we will need an additional person. We need someone to take up part of the work load of the Chamber, which is on shaky legs, and to help in the A.S.C. elections. The person will also have to be familiar with the entire operation and be able to handle part of the large correspondence. When activity picks up on the A.S.C. elections, there is a chance that some of the Federal Programs people will be arrested or temporarily made inactive.