

[Sept. 24-27, 1964]

Tom Ramsey

THURSDAY
~~TUESDAY~~, SEPTEMBER 24, 1964

Arrived at the office a 9 AM, worked an hour and then, from 10 to 11 attended a meeting of the election committee. The main worry expressed by George during this meeting, that the precinct captains had not been properly contacted, proved at the Saturday morning meeting of the Madison County Movement, to be well founded. See report for 9/26/64

After this meeting, went to the County meeting of the Farmer's League. Since this was my first formal contact with the farmer/s I gave a much longer talk than I usually do, touching on my basic ideas about the movement, explaining why I was in Miss as opposed to San Francisco, and relating some of my experiences back home. Although I didn't feel I did too good a job, evidently I made my self acceptable since most of the farmers talked warmly to me after the meeting. We must look for ways to get these meetings out of their present religious context. As long as the farmer/s feel that they are in church we are going to have a devil of a time getting them to question the decisions of their leaders. The stronger people make a suggestion and all the others are too polite to argue with them. Perhaps, in the future, we should attempt to get the League to build it's w meeting place?

At the end of the meeting went to Vally View with their people. Explained to them how block organizations work in a political campaign and how, once the blocks are developed, they can be used to contact the people for any purpose. Emphasized that, if we build correctly at the block level, it will be impossible for anyone to use these people or their organization.

One of the Vally View staff members slept through my talk. This is unfortunate and I single it out as symptomatic of the problems of that organization. They spend so much time fighting and worrying over each other that they have little energy left over for the people.

~~WEDNESDAY~~, SEPTEMBER 25, 1964
FRIDAY

Spent the mornig going around with Eric visiting the local federal officials. He's done an excellent job with these people. While none of them were happy, neither were they unco-operative. Have to keep up the pressure on them as they will, from the white community, be under increased pressure during the coming months as we more and more demand our rights. Hodges I was especially impressed with. He actually went out of his way several times in the conversation to volunteer information.

After the above I went into the field with Nancy Jervas from Vally View. She's the only first rate person we have out there and she should be kept in a position where she is in direct contact with the community. Time after time I observed the close relationships she had developed with the people in her area and, at the end of the day, it was obvious how having this kind of organizer can pay off. I'm confident that our meeting in the 10th precinct will go off quite well. Most important event of the afternoon was the ~~contact with Howard Van Buran.~~ ~~Howard Van Buran.~~ He's a local fellow, with a fair education (high school graduate, Miss style) and a real desire to work. Evidently his sister has been instrumental in Nancy's success since she spent much of the summer riding around with Nancy, introducing her to the local people. Howard and I are going around to all the churches in the area on Sunday. If he turns out half as well as I expect we can train him in block organization and he will be able to work the entire area for us. He has his own car and is free from 1030 AM to 430 PM Mon thru fri and all day Sat and Sun. God Bless Nancy for this one!

In the evening attended a mass meeting at Mt. Zion church/ which served the dual purpose of formally organizing the 15th precinct and introducing the local people to the Farmer's League.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1964

In the morning addressed the Madison County Movement on precinct work. Essentially this was the same talk, though condensed, that I gave to the Vally View People. I think the reception was good. The problem here was that the group did not represent, as far as I could determine from my scanty knowledge of the community, many people of real importance to the movement. Rather than representing the Madison County movement, this group seems to be a gathering of local people from the city of Canton with several outsiders brought in by our staff from the county. But, the people there do not represent the movement in Madison County. This seems to be the best place to reach the people of Canton. Whether or not it is the most effective place is doubtful.

There were only two precinct captains at the meeting, a gentleman from the fifteenth and a lady who is evidently in charge of Canton. Of the other thirteen I saw neither sight nor heard a sound. Since I had been assured ~~that~~ by Mrs Devine that they had all been contacted I assume one of three things: a) the staff did not do its job and not all the precinct captains were notified or, b) they have become so disgusted with these Madison County meetings that they will no longer attend unless we pick up and deliver them or; c) there is little organization remaining from the Summer Project and we have to begin building all over again. It is the latter view that I incline toward. We need to begin canvassing on the block level with the end in mind of finding and developing local leadership for each block. We must begin holding small block meetings in the block leaders home, teaching these people how to run meetings with others who they know and are not afraid to make mistakes in front of. Then, as they are developed and understand how an organization operates on this very basic level they can be moved up and trained in the more complex operations of the area, precinct, and county. But, until they understand and have made habitual in use the skills it takes to operate effectively at the block level they won't (I think) be able to take a generally assertive role in the higher levels of the movement and at the same time be consciously effective.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1964

Spent the morning canvassing for the farmer's League meeting to be held in the 10th and 12th precincts. I'll be interested to see how many of our people show up for this one. Don't have the feeling that we really covered the area as well as we should have. One mistake was in attempting to work through the Vally View staff. Their not equipped yet to organize both for FDP and the Farmers League. Then, my own damn stupidity in not making sure I had a working automobile kept us from leaving until too late to reach all the churches. Several had completed their services by the time we arrived and we were able to contact only those members who had hung around afterwards talking.

Did spend an hour or so talking with the local Roman Catholic priest. He seemed like a fairly nice guy, very conscious that he was pastor to a group of white protestants (in effect) but at the same time, quite willing to talk at length about our program. I think that, given more time, he can draw in to our work. Most important, he promised to distribute some of our leaflets at the school the Church runs for about 120 colored youngsters. When he mentioned that about 30 of his students had been in jail on last year's freedom day, he smiled quite happily. I don't think he was disturbed. Certainly, none of these kids had gotten expelled. His frustration is that most of the youngsters he trains go north almost immediately after graduation. We should try and do something about this as these kids are probably the best educated negro's in Madison county when they graduate.