

Santa Barbara SCOPE-----Sussex County, Virginia

Waverly, Virginia is in many respects a feudal town of the 16th century in the 20th century. There is one man, Garland Gray, who owns or finances every business in town. He has such a tight economic grip that he literally runs the town. Gray has kept at least two enterprises from establishing factories in Waverly District since 1960. In this way he can keep the cheap Negro labor supply from going to other factories. He pays \$1.25 per hour and the average pay check for a 40 hour week (take home) is \$50. The county has been listed as a poverty area. When the Negroes tried to organize a union 12 years ago, Gray shut down his mill for 6 months. This broke the union and the people have been afraid to unionize ever since. Most of the Negroes are indebted to Garland Gray in other ways, too. They sleep in his houses, finance their cars in his bank, and buy food on credit at his commissary. The Negro community has no sidewalks, poor lighting, if any, roughly paved rock streets or dirt roads, no sewage for most, poor police protection, only two fire hydrants for 10 streets, and limited garbage disposal. None of these conditions are found in the white section of town. There is a continual state of apathy for the Negro because he has few ways of arresting the situation.

The Negro is kept from registering to vote because of a mandatory poll tax, and the fact that the registrar will only open his books for registering one day a month. In addition, that one day he opens the books, he also closes the office before Negroes get off of work so there is practically no way of registering. In this manner the whites can very subtly keep the Negro suppressed without resorting to violence. Another way the Negro is suppressed

is economically. No Negro has ever held a supervisory job in Gray's Lumber Mill. This is particularly interesting because the white man's work is merely pushing buttons and levers which is considerably easier than the Negroes work of loading lumber, repairing machinery, working the crane, etc. The Negroes have more experience with actually running the mill, however, not with the highest supervisory jobs which require some educational status, than most of the white supervisors. A third way the Negro is suppressed is educationally. He has to go far out of town in a segregated school system to a much inferior Negro school. Although many students graduate from high school, few have had the background to be accepted into college.

In this condition of subtle suppression the Negroes have become greatly apathetic. The SCLC program is working to remove this apathy with voter registration drives, community organization projects, and political education classes. When we first came to Sussex County, Mr. Coulton, Field Secretary for SCLC in Virginia, introduced us to the Negroes of Waverly at a practically "on the spot" mass meeting. The Negroes were reluctant to take us into their homes, but they finally accepted. Our first job was to organize a student group because ~~this is the backbone of the movement~~. It was relatively easy to organize them, since they have no jobs to work on and had nothing else to do. Our first project was to canvas Waverly to see how many could or could not vote. While the students were eager to help, the adults were somewhat cold because of a fear of economic reprisals from Gray. A local grocery man said we could not use his meeting hall for our civil rights work.

This started a chain of reaction within a few days which spread to the whole Negro community. They felt if he would not support the Movement which was trying to help Negroes, then the community was not going to support his store. The boycott was almost 100% effective and it unified the Negro community with a common goal. At a mass meeting a petition was presented to be submitted to the city council for better streets, lighting, fire hydrants, sewage lines, garbage disposal, police protection, and sidewalks. This petition was signed by all the Negroes in Waverly and forty people presented it to the City Council. This was the first time the Negroes had ever confronted the whites in force, and the project originated at a SCOPE mass meeting.

The SCOPE team has also had success in unifying for the first time all six districts of Sussex County into the Sussex County Improvement Association (SCIA). The idea was presented by SCOPE but the actual organizing and election of officers was done by the Negroes themselves. It is not our purpose to set up a SCOPE organization, but rather to act as a catalyst so the Negroes can help themselves. This organization has good leadership and representation of all districts and should be a very powerful organization as soon as the Negro voting strength increases. There are 66% Negro in Sussex County so as soon as the voting power is realized this organization can institute many necessary reforms. It is important to realize that these reforms are all taking place within the basic democratic structure of voting and not by militant demonstrations.