

On King

Right after the COFO conference in December the Ruleville staff devoted most all its time to the Congressional Challenge. This meant canvassing the town thoroughly and then holding neighborhood meetings in people's homes. These meetings were primarily educational, telling people about the Challenge, about Congress and its functions, and about the FDP. We also used these meetings to organize the Freedom Day in Indianola on January 4th. Before this time we had held similar meetings at the Freedom Center. Meeting in homes has proved much more successful: older people who are interested but who can't walk to the Center are able and do walk to homes near them. So a significant number of people, besides the old faithfuls of Ruleville, have become quite active.

Since January 4th we have continued to work with these neighborhood groups, only this time with the idea of precinct organization. We have divided Ruleville into three precincts, fairly equal in population. Meetings take place once a week for a little more than an hour and are used to discuss further Challenge and FDP activities, to talk about voter registration, and to make plans for getting down to the courthouse. Each precinct has its chairman who is responsible for keeping track of who's gone to register and when they should go back to see if they've passed, and to collect copies of the voter registration test that each person takes. A local woman, Mrs. Mary Tucker, has begun to do the teaching at these meetings. Mrs. Tucker has been to the SCLC teacher-training course and uses their workbook to teach from. People seem to enjoy the classes: they sometimes become, depending on what's talked about, a second Sunday School class. The only problem here may be that some of the younger adults may be driven away. But classes haven't been held long enough yet to tell about this.

In addition to precinct meetings there is a weekly mass meeting every Friday night. And when movies are available we have been showing them on Wednesday night.

One problem which has caused much dissension is the food and clothing distribution. This has been left in the hands of a local committee, elected at the mass meeting. But in spite of all the problems, people are trying hard to work out a plan which will please everyone. ~~Enclosed is a copy of the rules last recently adopted.~~

The people of Ruleville have decided to build a Community Center. There is a Community Center Board, elected at the mass meeting, which made the decision and then presented it to the mass meeting. It looked for awhile as if we were to be evicted from the present Center, because of pressure being put on the owner. So the Board thought that if we had our own building we wouldn't have to worry about things like this anymore. The community raised money toward the land which has now been purchased. In a few days the Board will meet and decide on building plans. We expect the construction cost to be paid primarily by northern groups who have already contacted us. The construction itself will be done by local people. It turns out that at the last minute we were not evicted, and we'll be able to use the old Center until June,. Hopefully by that time enough of the new Center will be up to use it.

Ruleville is a pretty well organized town. Local people are taking responsibility for just about everything. The problem here is the despair and subsequent anathy of some people who have been working hard for over two years and who don't see any change. Some people have been down to register fifteen, eighteen, even twenty-three times. The names added to the voter list after the Justice Department suit against the county registrar were some relief. We're expecting the suit to end in a few weeks with the elimination of the literacy test, and this may encourage people and boost their morale. The Freedom Day in Indianola was a great success, but that was in Indianola, and many people in Ruleville didn't see it: It looks like there may soon be picketing of the library here in Ruleville, so this may serve as a rallying point for some.