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MERIDIAN PROJECT REPORT

(Jan 15 - Feb. 11) [1945]

CURRENT STAFF

George Smith, Jr. Project Director
Joe Morse, Director of Political Programs
Eric Weinberger, Director of Community Center
Frank Wright
Judy Wright
Sam Brown
Wm. Knighton
Mrs. Catherine Crowell
(other local people)

PROJECT DIRECTOR'S REPORT

We are now in the process of turning all of the responsibilities over to the local people, (such as bills for rent, utilities, etc.) This problem was talked about in a committee made up of local people. The question was: should the office be closed and the staff move out into the community until the community finds a need for a central office and can support one; or should we keep the present office, and move the community center into the other side of the office, which is now living quarters for two of the staff. The decision was made to move the two staff people into the community and move the Community Center into the office building--with local people taking responsibility for the financial upkeep of the office. xx

At present we have five paid staff members in Meridian: Joe Morse, Frank Wright, Judy Wright, Eric Weinberger, and George Smith Jr. It has already been agreed upon to move Frank and Judy into Newton County. Eric Weinberger, along with two of our local women, will run the Community Center. Local people have already begun to work out in the rural area of Lauderdale County, and they are doing a very good job. Local people are also working in the Meridian City area to try to organize the town. We are having problems with the Uncle Toms of Meridian, but we are trying to overcome them. We have begun to have workshops at least twice a month for the local people along with the staff...to try and educate them more about the movement, political action, how to organize the community, and some of the other problems they may be confronted with in canvassing.

MERIDIAN COMMUNITY
CENTER REPORT

The center is being moved from 2505½ 5th St. to the back rooms at the COFO office at 513 25th Ave. The main purpose of the move is economy, but additional gains will be that the office is attended 24 hours a day and therefore has much less of a theft and vandalism problem than the center does at its old location. The new quar-

ters will be smaller and can be more thoroughly supervised by one person than the old. Storage room for the tons of unused equipment has been rented (part of the old quarters) for five or ten dollars a month, final price not yet set. The move is expected to be completed within one or two weeks.

*any far
transfer*

FREEDOM SCHOOL

Freedom School activities have virtually ceased to exist. During the Fall we were able to secure the thirt floor of a former Baptist Seminary and fixed up several classrooms and a library. Due to heavy homework, afternoon jobs and chores, and the early hour of sunset, the students' response was small and sporadic. Since that time, classes have been stopped altogether, and we have now begun pushing for small evening get-togethers in the homes of various students. We don't see any hope of reviving a full time FS program until the summer.

The MSU os also in a very unhealthy situation at this time. Our three strongest keds have all gone North to school, but the real problem is that this group has no real idea of why it is in existence, and ~~mm~~ is continually floundering over peripheral problems of membership and organizational structure, rather than the basic one of purpose.

*MSU
Staley 10/2
math 9/2*

NEWTON COUNTY PROJECT

The Newton County Project got under way last week, when on Feb. 3, George Smith, Mrs. Catherine Crowell, and I made contacts with people in Newton and Decatur, the county seat. We made arrangements to speak at various church services during the next few weeks:

Feb. 7- Hickory Methodist Church
Feb 14* Newton Methodist Church
Feb. 21- Decatur Baptist Church

Decatur seems to be the best place to set up any kind of permanent HQ. It is the county seat, it has a tight, self-contained Negro community, and we have found some very strong people there. There has been virtually no voter registration activity in the area, but the people we spoke to are ready for VR classes, a Freedom School, and are very interested in getting into the several shirt and chair (all Northern owned) factories in Decatur.

An FDP structure was set up by Bob Gore this summer in Newton, but it was apparently allowed to die out. Those involved were all NAACP people and all active before Bob arrived, but we have not had a chance to talk to any of them yet.

*factory
names
address*

WELFARE WELFARE

The welfare committee consists of five local women. We have a committee of two to canvas all neighborhoods that seem to have quite a number of children and talk with the parents to see if the ~~children~~ ~~screening~~ ~~school~~ ~~and if~~ ~~it is because of a~~

children are in school, and if not, why. If it is because of a lack of clothing, we try and give them clothing so that they may stay in school. We also talk to the parents to get them to register to vote if they have not already done so. We try and find all elderly people that can't come to the Welfare office, and if they are in need of clothing, we pack a box and send it to them. We are going out into the rural areas and helping the needy families, those that are not able or do not have ways or means to get to town. And by going out into the rural areas we can help people not only as far as clothing goes, but we plan to teach them how to register and vote. The people in rural Lauderdale seem very anxious to get registered, and we think that by having something to offer them like clothing, they don't feel afraid to try to register or vote--in the event that they would lose their job if they would try to register to vote.

Mrs. Catherine Crowell

STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT

We have approximately 25 people on our steering committee, and we meet every Tuesday night at 7:30, with about 10 or 15 in attendance. Our activities are as follows: teach voter registration classes of two or more in the COFO Office and in private homes; test eating places cafes, drug stores, variety stores; ~~and~~ attend any ~~any~~ meeting of COFO that is not primarily for the staff members, such as state and county workshops. The welfare committee, headed by Mrs. Chaney, distributes clothing, shoes, etc., five days a week. Two or more go into surrounding areas to talk to people in churches and homes, urging them to register and try to pass the test.

*what success
in terms*

Mrs. Carter

POLITICAL REPORT

The political activity on this project has been rather diversified during the past three weeks. Basically, we have been doing four things: preparing for the city election in June, participating in the PDP Congressional Challenge, canvassing the city to interest people in federal programs, and contacting people in Rural Lauderdale County.

what progress

The preparation for the city election has been done mostly by talking to different persons in the community. The problem here in Meridian is that we have very effective "Uncle Toms". There are some four Negro political groups here.: The NAACP, run by the Negro businessmen with an interest in keeping the status quo; the Crusade for Voters, a group of people who have been working for some 10 years on registration and who are not yet ready for real militant action; the PDP Executive Committee, right now largely women, and with no really vocal leader; and the newly forming Lauderdale Democratic Club, an attempt by 2 or 3 individual Negro businessmen to "work in the Democratic structure that we have in the state"-- actually a move to create chaos and disunity among the Negro people of the city, probably suggested to these "Tom" businessmen by the "Good white folks" of this community.

Since the PDP is not really strong here now, the only chance to come out of this election with a Negro city official is to work with one or all of these groups. The problem is that the PDP will have to back a less militant candidate than it would like, in order to have the support of most of the "Negro community. Up until now, the PDP has been seen here as a protest group with little or no actual power. This image was altered somewhat when the depositions for the Congressional Challenge were taken last week in the County Courthouse. People from these other groups saw that the PDP did actually have some power in the form of legal backing and good organization and knowledge of exactly how Negro people in the city were being treated in regard to registration.

The PDP will probably do the best job if it can work with Crusade for Voters. This group, unlike the other three, has no legal backing and yet controls the largest number of Negro voters in the city. If the PDP can show this group that it can provide the necessary legal backing and the power to challenge an election, it may be able to work very closely with the Crusade for Voters. Between now and election time, I would not be surprised to see another Negro political group start up to disunify the Negro community even more. The PDP is trying to get all of the information about election procedures now, but is experiencing much difficulty in getting to talk to the election commissioners of the city. The PDP intends to keep trying and will challenge the election if they can prove they were not allowed to participate in it. Even if the NAACP and the Lauderdale County Democratic Club try to get a candidate in the running through "Uncle Toms" and local lawyers, I suspect that they may be left holding the bag when the deadline for the nominations is here. I don't think the power structure here intends to have a Negro councilman even if he is an "Uncle Tom". The PDP is the only group with real election challenging machinery.

W.M.
good

The Congressional Challenge hit its highpoint here in Meridian on Friday, Feb. 5, the day the depositions were taken. There were about 20 friendly witnesses to testify. The circuit judge in this area, Judge Seville, permitted the PDP to use his courtroom. This was a move by the liberal element in Meridian to make the city look good. Most of the testimony concerned the delaying tactics of the registrar of this county. Many people took the registration test, had their names printed in the paper, only to find out when they went down to see if they had passed, that their applications "couldn't be found". Also many people testified that they had waited many hours on Oct. 20, 1964 to write the application. This type of testimony is not as strong as the actual physical violence that exists in many parts of the state, but these delaying tactics discourage the potential Negro voter just as much as the violence in other counties does. The people in Meridian were very surprised to see that they were actually able to confront the local lawyers and have good lawyers to support what they said. We must wait patiently now and see what steps the 5 congressmen will take to try to prove that no discrimination exists. It is possible that they will recall all of our witnesses and intimidate them with their past personal records. We expect that the congressmen will also call up some "Toms" to testify that there has been no type of discrimination.

Since our last report we have divided the city into four sections. One local person is responsible for canvassing and organizing each part of town.

The South Side is perhaps the hardest part of the city. The reason for this is that the people there are very poor and very afraid. However, they are quite interested in what COFO is attempting to do. People in this part of town are very interested in how we could help them receive the proper amount of welfare. Some have recently been cut down and others have never received any aid. Some of the women have shown an interest in starting sewing classes. A meeting is planned in the South Side in the near future to talk about welfare problems and registering to vote. People often express fear of being cut off the welfare rolls if they participate in voting and do not want to come to any meetings at the COFO office for the same reason. Barbara Moss and Sam Brown are currently working the South Side together.

The East End of the city is being worked by Mrs. Agnes Smith, William Knighton, Joe Morse, and Judy Wright. This section of town has some very poor areas but the people seem interested in seeing COFO and the FDP function in the city. While canvassing, we do not push any particular program but ask what people would like to see us work on. Many people are planning to attend a rally at Tougaloo to set up a Freedom Radio Station on February 14. It looks like a busload will go. There has also been quite a bit of interest shown in ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the Job Corps film which we have shown in several homes in the East End. This Job Corps is part of President Johnson's Anti-Poverty Bill. Approximately 25 teenagers have filled out and sent in a card asking for information. They have received a letter stating that when the program gets under way, they will be notified and interviewed by some representative of the government. This is all that has come of the film thus far. If there is a film strip projector which is not in use in the CORE Southern Regional Educational office, we could put it to good use. The projector we now have is being rented for ~~xxxxxx~~ \$1.00 per day. We will have to return it this week. We are wondering here how the program will be administered. If it is administered by Southern whites we can expect some discrimination. "It's hope the government has more sense. Greg Kaslo has also been using the projector and filmstrip in Clarke County and has indicated that the response to the film has been very promising.

The mid-section of Meridian, called by the citizens "Redline", is headed by Mrs. Crowell and Mrs. Chaney. Most of their work has been registration work—teaching people to fill out the registration form and arranging a time for them to go down to the ~~xxxxxx~~ Courthouse. They are explaining to most people the functions of the FDP and how it operates. They seem to be making some good progress.

The West End is being organized by Mrs. Carter with the help of Freddie Watson, Frank Wright, and Myrtle McCarthy. Most of the work in this section of town has been with registration and our welfare program. Quite a few people were interested in working with us to get the welfare department to give them what they should by law receive. Approximately ten people from the West End have gone down to take the registration test in the past two weeks. Many people in this end of town are willing and have signed the school integration petition. Actually there are very few people in the city who are afraid to sign the petition if it is explained properly. A fair number of parents are signing the petition.

*Copy of
petition*

Rural Lauderdale

Mrs. Chaney, George Smith Jr., Joe Morse, and I are now working in the rural part of Lauderdale. We've set up classes on voter registration, and we've talked to a number of people who seemed very interested in both this and in our welfare problems. The objective is to eliminate all fears, and to give the people knowledge of their civil rights...to spark enough fire in them for them to want to work once more for their hard-earned freedom. In the future, we plan to work in Collinsville, Toomula, Russell, Kosciusko, ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ in Lauderdale County, and we hope to include other places.

Mrs. Agnes Smith.

TESTING

We are preparing a suit against all the restaurants in the Meridian city area--trying to show that there is a "pattern of discrimination". We have only found two restaurants right in town which will serve Negroes: The Toddle House and the Chicken Treat.

We had tested all these restaurants once, but many of the people who wrote the affidavits are no longer in Mississippi, (and one batch of affidavits seems to have been lost in the mail on the way to Jackson.) Since those who write the affidavits will have to testify in court, it was necessary to retest about 18 restaurants this past week, using only local people who have no intentions of leaving. Testing was completed today, and as soon as the affidavits are all typed, they will be sent to the Jackson Legal Office, to the Justice Department, and to the Civil Rights Advisory Commission.

Judy Wright.

Financial Report Jan 14-Feb. 9th

Received:

contribution through George Smith.	125.00
donations.	56.47
project budget.	50.00
donation, Gail Falk.	.14.84
partial repayment of loan to Chaney family.	5.00
donation, Joe Morse, Frank and Judy Wright.	.75.00
donation, Marjorie Henderson.	10.00
loan to Jim Collier repaid.	.44.89
donation, through Louise Kabat.	10.00
donation, through Mark Levy.	5.00
donation, Mr. Whitfield.	1.00
project budget.	.60.00
donation, Joey Gemain.	.1.00
	1
	\$478.20

Expenditures:

Ellis, reimbursement for travel expense.	7.25
Gunther Frentz, trip to Canton.	8.00
phone calls.	.80
loan to Preston Fonder.	15.00
taxi, Gunther Frentz.	.65
food, George Smith.	.75
loan, Sam Brown,	5.00
stamps.	3.00
mop and floor brush.	9.55
folder for George Smith.	2.25
Preston Fonder.	35.60
to Mrs. Heidelberg, info for loan to John Lewis.	5.00
envelopes, and typewriter for Freedom School.	6.55
postage.	6.50
Miss. Power Company, bill for office and community center.	25.90
Meridian Water & Department.	16.19
loan to Jim Collier (repaid)	44.89
loan to Louise Somlyo.	6.00
parking tickets.	2.00
gas company service.	25.90
postage.	1.00
new locks.	2.45
stamps.	1.50
stamps, pens, other office supplies.	11.30
bank charges (previously not entered in books).	7.39
current bank charge,	1.50
Meridian Star.	.95
to Joe Morse for parking ticket.	1.00

phone service.	.53
postage.	1.00
office supplies...	.40
postage.	1.00
ball point pens.	1.00
Meridian Baptist Seminary Fund, for utilities.	21.00
for testing restaurants.	5.00
	<u>279.63</u>

C

receipts	458.20
expenditures	<u>279.63</u>
	178.57

O

bank balance	
1/14/65	86.29
petty cash	
1/14/65	<u>19.70</u>
	<u>204.56</u>

.....what present assets should be

P

bank balance	
2/9/65	288.71
petty cash	
	<u>12.85</u>
	<u>\$291.56</u>

.....what present assets are

Y

\$291.56	
-204.56	
	<u>7.00</u>

Please don't ask where this came from.....