

Personnel

Eartise Crawford- SNCC work-study  
Greg Finger - self-sufficient  
Milton Pickett - SNCC work-study  
C.O. Chinn - CORE task force

George Raymond (CORE task force- project director) has been out of the county for most of the last month/ and a half- at Mt. Beulah for the Freedom Corps training session, at Indianola for the Freedom Day there and in Hanksin County, organizing the Goshen Springs-Brandon march. Jo Ann Colman (CORE task force) has moved to the Philadelphia area to set up a fourth district office. Phil Sharp (CORE task force) and Judy Hampton (CORE task force) have moved to Jasper County. Bill Forayth (CORE task force) is leaving for New York June 3 to arrange marketing for the sewing firm and to plead with his local draft board. There is no office manager in Canton at the present time.

ASC elections

I plan to go into the elections in some detail, because I think the tactics used by the white community demonstrate a second level attack- completely within the rules of the handbook and yet so organized as to split the Negro vote (when there is one); I think we can expect a lot of this all over the state next December.

Greg Finger, before he left for the North at the beginning of May- two weeks before the counting of the ballots- and Bill Forayth worked on the re-elections in Communities "E" and "F". The preliminary work consisted of going over what records were in the office from last December's elections and sorting out what was needed. Eartise Crawford informed us that he and Eric Orr had gone to the state ASCS office in September of 1964 and that Mr. Daniel in the office had informed them that 40% participation was the minimum. (This was important for the organization of a boycott aimed at having the elections thrown out for insufficient participation-obstructionist tactics). On the other hand, we had Barbara Lindsay's minutes of a conversation with Madison County ASC office manager, Robert Hodges, of November 18, stating that there was "no set percentage" to ensure validity. We presumed the 40% figure but wrote the state office about it. We studied the ASC handbook 1-CA and came up, once again, with the question of eligibility of wives.

On April 28 Bill Forayth went to the ASC office to talk with Hodges. Interestingly enough, there was a committee meeting in progress. Since the two committees had filed no names on their own for the ballots (and the period for nomination by petition was up), I assumed that this was a policy-making meeting. Roy Caves from the State Committee was there, and Hodges, he and I talked for a while. We discussed poll-watching and the eligibility of wives. Caves informed us that the state committee had determined that a wife would not be eligible even if she performed "85% of the actual labor." We hope to get a different ruling from the USDA before the next election- perhaps the Southern office could check on it, too. I asked about the availability of information on the number and percentage of voters and was informed that it was a matter of public knowledge. Caves at this point interjected with "It's of no help to anybody, so..." before Hodges shut him up with a sharp look.

On May 3 Greg and I went up to the office again; we had a look at the lists of eligible voters, on which there were 398 voters for Community "F" and 403 for Community "B". Both were increases of some sixty voters over last December. By May 14 this had increased to 425 eligible voters for B and 424 for F. Interestingly enough, the lists we saw had addresses on them- Hodges had assured us last December that there were no such lists. We asked for copies of the lists for the two communities. We encouraged voters who were not on the books to go up to the office to get ballots, which, I think, is largely responsible for  $\frac{1}{2}$  such of the increase, which points out the past inefficiency of the office. We learned that last December showed 43% participation in "B" and 65% in "F".

On May 4, the day the ballots were sent out, I wrote a letter to Mr. Sullivan of the State office to explain our position. I stated that we were planning to boycott the election and hoped to invoke 1-CA par. 78.5 B concerning invalidity of elections because of insufficient participation. I pointed out that there was no definition of insufficient participation, but we assumed the state committee would base its estimate on previous percentages for each community- an attempt to draw the state committee into a written statement of its policy on this paragraph. Secondly, we protested the application of 1-CA par. 34 A in such a manner that the Negro community was put in the position of having its representatives chosen for it by the power structure. (It had become clear some time earlier that the white community would attempt to split what they thought would be a massive Negro voter turnout and at the same time prove their responsibility by nominating large numbers of Negroes. As a result, there were, in "B", nine Negroes and five white men and, in "F", ten Negroes and five white men on the ballot.

The answer from the state committee on May 10 was, as might be expected, politely hostile ("your group", "interference by non-farmers," etc.). Mr. Sullivan mentioned that USDA's report which commended election officials and stated that the minor irregularities which occurred in other areas could not have affected the outcome of the elections. On the question of eligibility of wives, he stated that a person "must have a distinctly separate business interest in the crop or livestock production... she must perform individually and separately from her husband as tenant or sharecropper." Surprisingly to us, Mr. Sullivan cited a recent directive from Washington which we had heard nothing about- stating that Negroes must be placed on the ballot in at least the same proportion as there are Negroes in the community.

I seem clear to us that the major reason that there were any re-elections in Madison County at all was because we had access to more support from the North than other counties which had the same experiences. Early in April, we sent out a newsletter to the North (150 congressmen who voted against the seating of the Mississippi congressmen and approximately forty other contacts) explaining the action of farmers from every community in deciding to boycott the election (this was before we knew what the two communities would be). We pointed out the risk the farmers were taking and the fact that the investigators were late and largely incompetent (one had to have the rules of the election explained to him and asked for the spelling of such words as "Illinois"), which explains in part why they were

Evans and Percy Jones. Community "B"'s was similar, except that we had not the opportunity to get some of the nominees to sign. The May 1 Madison County Citizen also carried an article urging people not to vote. Most of the canvassers covered their areas, sapped out in advance, thoroughly and enthusiastically. We checked up on them as often as our lack of transportation and skeleton staff permitted.

On May 14 two women from community "B", Revelia Rouser and Leora MacDonald, were instructed as to the provisions for counting ballots in a mail election; they and I went to the ASC office to watch the counting. In Community "B" there were some 205 votes cast for 45% participation, although thirty of these ballots were not certified properly and were declared disqualified. Mr. Trigg from the state committee said that "votes cast" included disqualified votes. There were over forty Negro voters by my count, most of whom voted for at least one white candidate as well as one or more Negro candidates. The percentage of participation in this election in "B" was actually higher by five percentage points than during last December, which was disappointing but understandable in view of the high percentage of "Toms" in the community.

In "A" there were also over forty Negro voters among the 194 ballots cast for a percentage of 46% - down almost twenty percent from the December election. Some of those who voted were Roosevelt Williams, Charlie Branson, Henry Rayford, Coleman Branson, Emmett Branson, Percy Mack, R.P. Branson, Luster Wright (one of the signers of the leaflet), Robert Branson, Sr., and Fannie, Gus, Perry, Barney and Frank Lockett. Emmett Branson, supposedly one of the supporters of the campaign, went around his area of the community urging people to vote, although he was fully aware of the decision of the community.

These forty voters in each community were sufficient to put the percentage over 40%, although no Negro voter received more than 16 votes in either community.

Those present at the counting included, besides ourselves, State ASCS Director C.W. Sullivan, Assistant Director D.L. Triggs, Roy D. Caves, County Agent R.L. Smith, County ASCS office manager Robert Hodges, county ASC board chairman H.L. Deves, Jr. (from "B"), vice-chairman Thomas L. James (from "B"), regular county committee member James A. Cook (from "C") and the ubiquitous secretaries, Mrs. Sims and Mrs. Barrow.

The day after the election I checked on the percentage of county-wide mail elections for 1963 and 1964; 1480 voters out of 2911 eligible for 51% and 1624 voters out of 2911 eligible for 56% respectively.

Although there is little hope for action at this point, we are going ahead with the petitions and plan to send phot-copies to Washington and the state committee. In July we hope to start work on next December's election.

Madison County Sewing Firm

This group of nine women and one man, Mrs. Dessie Harris, Mrs. Blanch White- treasurer, Idema Levy, Arnie Lee Boyd, Geneva Watts, Devirdye Cain- secretary, Maggie L. Douglas- chairman, Ruth Eva Smith, Vinnie Mae Davis and Mr. Moses W. Davis originally formed to provide Negro women now working in white kitchens in town a chance to make a decent living for \$4.25 an hour by sewing garments. Meetings have been held regularly with lawyers from Jackson.

The group had originally planned to set itself up as a partnership; the following is a summary of some of the by-laws drawn up informally after a meeting on May 24; meetings shall be held not less than once a month; each partner shall share equally in the profits or losses of the partnership- except as otherwise ordered at a partners meeting (E.G. funds for capital investment, etc.); no proxy ballots; a manager shall be hired as soon as necessary to oversee the operations, to advise the partners and to hire workers; workers shall be hired without respect to race, religion, color, creed or physical disability by the manager- subject to the approval of the partners; all workers shall be paid in accordance with the current minimum wage law, except such workers as may be paid more (E.G. manager); no more than two persons from a family unit may be hired at the same time; the treasurer deposits all money- all withdrawals shall be by check, signed by the chairman and treasurer;

On May 27 Mrs. Douglas, Mrs. White, Mr. George Washington, Mr. Moses Davis and Bill Greyth drove to Jackson to arrange to have Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. White bonded, since they would be handling the money. There was lengthy discussion with Eddie Tucker, Jack Young and Tom Douglas about the prospects of the firm, and it was decided to wait before setting up. The women have in mind a payroll of 60 by the end of the first year of production (over \$40,000 per year in wages alone), and it was decided that since legal advice will apparently be available, it would be wiser to wait and form a corporation when the time came. A corporation has the advantages of limited liability, better tax features, etc. We found that, although we have possibilities of support- \$2,000 capital, some 24 sewing machines and an offer to sew for Project Headstart- the corporation would not get off the ground at this time. The major problem is, of course, markets. Bill Greyth is going to New York on June 3 and will attempt to look the situation over. The women should have multiple samples of shirts ready by that time- copies of Brooks Brothers, Arrow and sport shirt designs. Meanwhile, we have to take into account zoning and licensing regulations for a commercial venture- which may involve building a building to serve as the factory, exact labor costs for production, cost and supply of materials and production methods. Two of the women hope to be able to get jobs in Jackson garment industries this summer to learn shortcuts, etc., since they know nothing about assembly-line production of garments. A good cutter and a public accountant will have to be hired- the first seems assured.

At this stage, then, the women hope to learn how to sew on a non-profit basis, either for Headstart or for a stockpile of samples until they feel they are ready to start production. They will meet regularly Monday nights until then. Hopefully, they might be able to get a SBA loan through Mr. Foley in Jackson for help of capital.

Public Accommodations testing

Affidavits on the testing in February and April have been sent to the lawyers in Jackson- through Dick Jewett, hopefully, a suit will be forthcoming in the near future. Groups continued testing, and being admitted to Canton Theater (white section), until a few weeks ago, when the theater was shut down for "repairs." It seems to have re-opened just this week and testing will probably resume this Saturday. Meanwhile, there is talk about going into the white park. That will probably happen before the end of June.

Flora Community Action Program -confidential

The Flora sharecroppers in Madison County have been talking for some time about the future of sharecropping and remedial action for the problem. It seems clear to everyone that sharecropping as an institution is dying and that within five years cotton production will be fully mechanized. In the past several years the farmers in this area have seen between fifty and seventy-five families removed from the area to make way for pastureland or mechanized production of cotton. The requirements for GAP: concentration of low-income families, unemployment and underemployment, school dropout rates, housing conditions, adequacy of community facilities and services and the requirement for a "permanent increase in the capacities of individuals, groups, and communities to deal with their problems without further assistance" are applicable to the plan that is being formed. Some fifteen farmers of the area have signed a statement saying they are interested in the program. They have done so at the risk of losing what little they are hanging on to now. As soon as the program becomes a real possibility, it seems very likely that would start out as a pilot project would become swamped- the perennial sharecropper cry of "land" would be sufficient of itself.

The basic outline of the program includes buying sufficient land to house the families and grow crops (through FIA), building adequate housing (with running water- again FIA), establishing what kinds of crops can be grown on a minimal amount of land by families used to cotton and corn farming (truck farming, for example), and providing for the building and staffing of recreational facilities and a health clinic for the area. The plan would provide farmers with an independent income (thereby by-passing the near-horrible task of organizing sharecroppers in the area now), break the cycle of poverty now existing and perhaps provide a pilot project for attacking the sharecroppers' problem before they complete the exploited-useless-removed process. The farmers in the area feel that a Free Labor Union is not sufficient for their needs, since it would only attempt a solution within the present framework, itself destined to obsolescence.

The problems that will arise immediately ~~and~~ require: knowledge of new crops, marketing research, capital of assurance of paying back FIA loans on the land and the buildings and working through a private educational institution to bypass possible state veto and to eliminate the need for the formation of a ~~trust~~ non-profit corporation to handle the funds (Tougaloo?). Problems that will have to be worked out are the broad representation requirements and the necessity for secrecy before the plan is approved since disclosure

might cost the farmers what little they have. We should keep in touch with Louis Mitchell in Washington, write Jack Wasserman of the National Sharecroppers' Fund, and write immediately to various extension services and research departments in colleges (e.g. Land Grant College in Starkville, Tuskegee Institute, Miss. Federated Co-operatives in Jackson, and the Agriculture Dept. Extension Service) for accurate information on costs and marketing. We will have to obtain land somehow in Flora- perhaps through a front out of state. When some sort of rough plan is ready, we will write Ted Berry and Harry Bass in Washington for technical advice in drawing up the plan. We should check on this, but the area must be within the specified poverty-stricken area that need not produce 10% of CAP funds.

### Surplus Food

Early in May Reverend McKee received a letter from the NCC, informing us that because of its action, surplus food would be distributed starting June 1. We immediately put out a leaflet to make sure people understood that the program was installed under pressure rather than as a gift from good Mr. Charlie and that the program would have to be operated in full accordance with the Civil Rights law- whatever that means. On May 20 the office sent a letter back to Art Thomas of the NCC, complaining that the man hired (Steve Rimmer) was being less than courteous to applicants, that no jobs had been or were to be given to Negroes under the program and that the Welfare Department was requiring prospective applicants to take a form to their boss to have signed. Apparently the dividing line is \$145 a month, but people with relatively new cars (no matter how much has to be paid on them and no matter what the financial status of the applicant otherwise) or substantial FHA loans for the operation of farms were ineligible. They were requiring applicants on welfare or social security to bring them the checks, so they could so they could prove their statements. We understand that in October a food stamp program will begin.

Related to this, we have been taking affidavits from people concerning welfare, hopefully as material for a suit against the county.

### Farmers' Co-op

By hook and by crook the co-op managed to totter another few steps; they are planning to build a gin- three and a half miles north of Canton. In the process they succeeded in alienating most of the farmers in the South and West part of the county and many of the businessmen in Canton who were going to invest. We can do nothing with Otha Williams and they are still breaking a fair number of their by-laws. We feel tempted to pull a Pontius Pilate.

Road Protest

At the county convention last winter one of the main complaints from each community was the state of its roads. Two communities are presently involved in petitioning. It was their idea, as they looked ahead, to try to cobble the entire county around this issue. Their plan was to pick a road in each community that has and has had for some time a fair number of Negro taxpayers living on it and that is in remarkable wretched state. Three petitions have to be signed by each person- one for the beat commissioner (if the road crosses a beat line, then the protest to the beat commissioner will, of necessity, be split), one for the county board of supervisors and one for the records. By June 30 all communities should have handed a petition to the appropriate beat commissioners. This means immediate meetings and action to get the petitions signed. The board of supervisors meets early every month- the petitions should be ready to go to it for its July session.

In the meantime canvassers should try to get between six and eight people from each community who are willing to demonstrate, hand money or property to back them up and an idea of what kind of demonstration each community wants. Sometime near July 15 we should have a meeting of all the communities concerned to decide this and beginning in August the demonstrations on courthouse square.

W. H. Foyth, Jr.