

June 13, 1965

Dear Friends:

A large demonstration has been planned for tomorrow June 14, in Jackson. Paul Johnson has called a special session of the legislature to deal with the voting bill as well as the challenge. It is the feeling here that the legislature will attempt to change the voting requirements just enough to keep out the federal regulators. The protest is to alert the federal government that Mississippi is just trying to avoid complying with the voting bill and that anything the Miss. Legislature does will be designed to maintain things just as they are now. Because of this demonstration, and the special session that was only announced last week, the orientation meeting has been postponed until after Monday. Since there is a need to get as many people into Jackson on Monday as possible the volunteers have been sent out into the counties to help the staff people work. This has been probably the best orientation that we could have. This is all to explain why on our third day in Mississippi we are in Bellzoni, Humphries County, in the heart of the delta.

In the very few days that we have been here we have already learned more about this state than through all the reading and listening we have done before. For people who have not been here, as civil rights workers, there is little way to completely understand the extent of the things here. On Friday we were driving from Waveland up to Mt. Beulah, just west of Jackson, where the orientation was moved. In a town just south of Hattiesburg, Wiggins, we were involved in a slight accident with a pickup truck driven by a white. No one was hurt, and only the COFO car was damaged. For two hours we felt what it is like to be a worker here. Our car was integrated and people came from all around to see us. There was a little talk about pulling us out of the car but nothing came of it. It was just A MATTER OF WAITING WHILE THE POLICE AND THE MAYOR (something missing) time deciding whether to let us go or not. They finally did and we continued on.

After an evening of discussions it was decided that the volunteers would go out into the counties to canvass with the staff people. On Saturday we drove up here with the COFO and MFDP staff. By two o'clock we were out on the street working. Nancy was working with two FDP women and one male staff person. I was with the other two COFO staff, a local person and an SCLC worker. After being on the street for about five minutes the police were already following us. Finally they stopped and called me over. They wanted me to identify myself and I asked why. Since we were in the Negro part of town and I was white they wanted to keep track of me. After that we were able to canvas without them following us. The canvassing was very difficult and doing this we came into contact with the extreme fear that is felt by the people here. They know what we are talking about, they knew why we are there and they go along with us until we ask them for a commitment of some sort. Will they come with us to Jackson, will they let us use their car, will they come to a meeting. Then all the excuses come out to hide the fear. They are afraid as soon as we walk in the door. I find myself getting furious at the thought that in this country people are terrified so much that they cannot go to a meeting, picket or let whomever they please stay at their house. After canvassing we came together to assess the results. There are not too many adults

willing to leave the fields for a day and lose the three dollars that they earn there each day, working from sunrise to sunset.

In the evening we drove out to the home of the Hazelwoods whose daughter works for the FDP. This family had put up the COFO workers when they could not find a house in which they could stay when they first got to Bellzoni. This family lives on Federal property. Mr. Hazelwood is one of those rare people around here who is willing to speak out. This morning I went to his church to give a talk. The people at the church look at him as if he is crazy when he talks about the movement and what the people have to do. But they seem to listen although as of yet their only commitment is to give money. It was very nice spending time with them. On the way back to the office we were stopped by the police, when we were parking the car in the middle of town. I had been driving since I am the only one around here who has a valid license. When I was handing the cop my license our hands touched and he told me: "Keep your filthy hand off me, you bastard." Nothing more came of that, fortunately. When we were going to the house at which Nancy and I stayed for the night, the deputy-sheriff followed us. When he later saw the COFO worker who had been with us, he stopped him and asked where the nigger lovers were staying.

Well, we have some more canvassing to do now and that is about all I have to say. We do not yet know if we will be coming back here to work for the rest of the summer but being here now has been of great value in telling us something about Mississippi. What everything here seems to come down to is fear. The people here are terribly scared and that seems to be the first and hardest barrier to get past. The cops work on this and try to scare us by stopping us all the time and they keep the local people scared by following us and threatening them.

Anyway, greetings from the land of the free.

Gene and Nancy Turitz

Friday Letter

March 1968

Dear Folks:

A large demonstration has been planned for tomorrow morning in Jackson. Earl Johnson has called a special session of the legislature to deal with the voting bill as well as the challenge. It is the feeling here that the legislature will attempt to change the voting requirements just enough to keep out the federal requirement. The protest is to show the federal government that Mississippi is not willing to comply with the voting bill and that anything the Miss. legislature does will be designed to maintain things just as they are now. Because of this demonstration, and the general session that was only adjourned last week, the education meeting has been postponed until after Monday. Since there is a need to get as many people into Jackson on Monday as possible the volunteers have been sent out into the campaign to help the staff people work. This has been probably the best orientation that we could have. This is all to explain why on our third day in Mississippi we are in Belzoni, Humphreys County, in the heart of the delta.

In the very few days that we have been here we have already learned more about this state than through all the reading and listening we have done before. For people who have not been here, as a first sight, there is little to be completely understood the amount of the things here. On Friday we were driving from Hattiesburg up to Mt. Zion, just west of Jackson, where the orientation was held. In a turn just south of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, we were involved in a slight accident with a pickup truck driven by a white. No one was hurt, and only the HRP car was damaged. For two hours we felt what it is like to be a nigger here. Our car was integrated and people come from all around to see us. There was a little talk about killing us out of the car but nothing came of it. It was like a woman or a nigger while the police and the white people were there. They finally did and we continued on.

After an evening of discussion it was decided that the volunteers would go out into the counties to canvass with the staff people. On Saturday we drove up here with the CORE and HRP staff. By two o'clock we were out on the streets working. Korry was working with the HRP men and one male staff person. I was with the other two HRP staff, a local person and an HRP worker. After being in the street for about five minutes the police were already following us. Finally they stopped and pulled me over. They wanted me to identify myself and I asked why. Since we were in the Negro part of town and I was white they wanted to keep track of us. After that we were able to continue without them following us. The canvassing was very difficult and being in the same line contact with the extreme fear that is felt by the people here. They know what we are talking about, they know why we are there and they go along with us until we ask them for a special type of work. Bill kept down with us in Jackson, Miss. they let us see what we can do. They come to a meeting. Then they all the extreme come out to show the fear. They are afraid of us as we walk in the door. It is a relief getting rid of the thought that in this country people are frightened.

so much that they cannot go to a meeting, picket or let whenever they please stay at their house. After canvassing we came together to assess the results. There are not too many adults willing to leave the fields for a day and lose the three dollars that they earn there each day, working from sunrise to sunset.

In the evening we drove out to the home of the Basselwoods whose daughter works for the FBI. This family had put up the COFO workers when they could not find a house in which they could stay when they first got to Bellamy. This family lives on federal property. Mr. Basselwood is one of those rare people around here who is willing to speak out. This morning I went to his church to give a talk. The people at the church look at him as if he is crazy when he talks about the movement and what the people have to do. But they seem to listen although as of yet their only commitment is to give money. It was very nice spending time with them. On the way back to the office we were stopped by the police when we were parking the car in the middle of town. I had been driving since I am the only one around here who has a valid license. When I was handing the cop my license our hands touched and he told me: "Keep your filthy hand off me, you bastard." Nothing more came of that. Fortunately. When we were going to the house at which Nancy and I stayed for the night, the deputy-sheriff followed us. When he later saw the COFO worker who had been with us, he stopped him and asked him where the nigger lovers were staying.

Well, we have some more canvassing to do now and that is about all I have to say. We do not yet know if we will be coming back here to work for the rest of the summer but being here now has been of great value in telling us something about Mississippi. What everything here seems to come down to is fear. The people here are terribly scared and that seems to be the first and hardest barrier to get past. The cops work on this and try to scare us by stopping us all the time and they keep the local people scared by following us and threatening them.

Anyway, greetings from the land of the free.

Gene and Nancy Turitz