

July 29, 1965

Dear Friends:

After a long delay here is another letter from down under. Much has been going on around here, but also more and more questions about the movement are coming up, which I suppose is inevitable. We have been working on many projects and some of them seem really beginning to take shape. There are now seven people working in this county. Five of us are summer volunteers. The two other people have been here for about a year. We have been working in Batesville, Sardis & Crenshaw and on some of the plantations. The thing that we have been working on the most is voter registration. As you probably know there is now a new voter registration test which is being used in much of the state. The legislature passed on this test but it has to be voted on is a public referendum on August 17. The attorney general of the state asked the counties to accept the form even before the referendum came up. Many of the counties have already accepted the new test, including Panola, although some have not. The new test is much easier (see the enclosed copy) and people are taking advantage of it. The newspaper reported that across the state Negroes are out-registering whites by about 6-1 and that in Jackson it is 17 to 1. We have been canvassing with the new form and have gotten much new interest with it. Many people become excited when they see the new forms and suddenly feel that they can register. Without having to take people down to the courthouse ourselves we find that they have started to go down to register on their own. More and more people are stopping and asking us for copies of the new forms. Then we are finding out that they are registering. The seven of us have been going up to Sardis & Crenshaw and have been doing a lot of talking in a few days.

The other thing that we haven't talking about in those areas has been school integration. The Federal government has finally ordered the schools to integrate this September or lose Federal funds. The districts have been submitting school plans and the schools in this county for grades 1-4 are being integrated. Of course, it is necessary for parents to take their children down to register them at the new schools. This is to take place in a few weeks. We do not know yet what integration means and what the government will accept as integration. Is it one or two children per grade or twenty or what? What will happen if more children than the white schools will hold want to go there? Will they then send white children to the Negro school? Of course not. So what does it all mean. In North Panola, including Sardis and Crenshaw, the plan came our first, so we started working in those towns on school integration before Batesville. On Tuesday there was a meeting of about 80 people in Crenshaw and last night in Sardis there were about 70. In the Crenshaw meeting quite a few people spoke out which was a good thing in itself. The general feeling, however, was against going to integrate the elementary schools. Their reasons are good ones, and we do not feel in the position to push the people to integrate. Some people get up and say "the door of opportunity is open. We should take advantage of it." The reply is that that is indicative of a feeling of inferiority. That you should not start jumping just because the white man says that it is all right. People want to know why the Negro schools are not fixed up and given better equipment, and materials and not just the second hand ones. They are not sure that in the lower elementary school grades that what their children will learn will actually be better in the white schools. When



people say that if children grow up together, then they always will be able to live together, and others say is it our responsibility to reform the white man? Should it be our job to send our children to schools where the white teachers will treat them unfairly and where they will be subject to the cruelty of other little children? At least many questions are coming up from the community itself. Right now we are not sure what the final decision of the people here will be, but they are going to have another meeting before they have to register the children. Of course, much of the feeling against integration is fear, but that is a real thing. If the people are not ready to let their children do this, then it is necessary to wait until they are ready. It is interesting to see that the kids themselves are very interested in integration. Nancy was telling one woman about the integration who was somewhat hesitant about the whole thing. She had two daughters, one in the second grade and one in the fifth. As Nancy was about to leave the little girl who was going into the fifth grade started to plead with her mother to let her go back into the fourth grade so that she might integrate the school. The plan for Batesville just came out today. It calls for registration in a few weeks. At the regular Voter's League meeting on this coming Monday night we hope that this will be talked about again down here. From the talk that we have already heard around Batesville people are more interested in integrating the schools here than they have been in other parts of the county.

A lawyer was down here recently to start working on an omnibus suit to end segregation in facilities run by the government. Many of the people were excited by this and volunteered to test the various facilities. People have been asking to use restrooms at the courthouse, highway patrol office (where they also used the "whites only" front door and were told to go around to the back), city hall, welfare office, and finally they were going to integrate the state park which is right near here, Sardis Dam. The integration of the dam has been taken over by the young people who have called for a meeting tonight for which they are passing out leaflets around the town. Some of us went up to the white side today to look around and figure out where the best place would be for people to go. The kids want to go tomorrow (Friday). We have been asked not to take part in it so it cannot be said that we have led the whole thing. At this park there are two separate beaches, across the lake from one another. One is Negro and the other is which although out of state whites and workers in this area often use the Negro beach. While we were on the white beach this morning I looked at the set of rules posted by the Army Corps of Engineers on how the beach is to be run and what you can do and cannot do there. The last rule was that there is to be no discrimination due to race, creed, national origin, etc. on the beach. One laughs a little bit when passing the little army place there where there are obviously soldiers who know that Negroes have been systematically excluded from the use of that beach. Right now I am not sure exactly how many people intend to go but people are planning to leave for the beach at two-thirty.

The marketing co-op has been going along pretty well. It has rained a few days this week so the okra is really growing well. They hope to be able to ship out to Chicago sometime next week. There is a good market there (okra for 18¢ a pound) but it is necessary to send up a very large quantity. The co-op has set up workshops in different areas of the county so that the farmers can get together in small groups to hold discussions. Last Friday was the first small meeting out in a community called Rock Hill. Although we expected around ten



people, thirty-five showed up. Our first discussion was one on the purpose of co-ops. It moved to what type of services the co-op should supply, who runs the co-op, what are the members' responsibilities, to the co-op, and, of course, how should decisions be made and by whom. As usual fewer people spoke up than one would hope but the people were interested in continuing the workshops. It was decided that the next time it is held the group should break up into smaller groups of five or six with one of the strongest people in each of the groups. Once again the biggest difficulty is in getting everyone to speak out. We hope that with the very small groups that this will happen.

The last meeting of the Voters' League in Batesville last Monday was an exciting one and the best since we have been here. People who had tested the various public facilities reported on what happened to them. The people were most amused by the stupidity of the whites with whom they had come into contact during the testing. The whites did exactly what they were supposed to do. They told Negroes that there were no restrooms for them and told those who came in the front door of the highway patrol office to get driver's licenses to go around to the back door. At that point they left and now begins our case.

On Mondays and Thursdays, in Crenshaw, students get together for Freedom School. The classes vary a lot with many people speaking in one class and only one or two speaking at the next. For the past few weeks the discussions have been centered around Vietnam. It does not seem to matter where the talking begins, it always gets around to the same point. At the second meeting that I attended we started talking about newspapers since one of the members of the Panola County Student UNION (PCSU) announced that they were going to begin putting out their newspaper, The Panola Freedom Reader, again. Rather than being a discussion purely on newspapers, it was about information and the importance of information. Questions came up like why has not the government given people more information on what is going on in Vietnam? Does this have any connection with newspapers failing to report the brutality that took place in the Jackson jail when we were recently there. Does this have anything to do with the fact that it is so hard to get basic information, like how does one get welfare in this state, or that a plantation owner refuses to let his sharecroppers ever know how much the tenant is getting per unit for his crop, or how much he has spent on fertilizer, food and interest on the money he borrows. The talk also came around to how information is important in making good decisions and how the decisions should be made. Decision-making is also a question which is often raised. This is probably the most crucial question for the whole country. All we can hope is that people all over this country start considering how decisions are being made, what relationship they have to these decisions, and what they can do about them.

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If any of you have questions that you would like us to answer, write us at Box 654, Batesville, Mississippi and we will try to answer them in the next letter.

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Nancy and Gene Turitz



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