

SOUTHWEST GEORGIA SNCC FIELD REPORT, 22 NOVEMBER 1965

based on tape recordings of Georgia Staff Meeting, 31 Oct. 1965

Projects presently in existence, and personnel attached thereto:

ALBANY, Roy Shields (Project Director); Jim Parry

AMERICUS, Sammie Rushin, Leon Bryant

BAKER COUNTY, Isaac Simpkins, Fred and Ed Anderson

CORDELE, Ramona Lockett

Roving Investigator, Herman T. Kitchens

PROJECT REPORTS

AMERICUS

The Sumter County Movement is mostly inactive, as a group. SNCC folk are going around and talking to local people: they say that they want more registered voters, more Negro candidates running for office (Mrs. Mary Kate Bell ran for Justice of the Peace this summer; she and other ladies refused to vote in segregated lines and were arrested, triggering the demonstrations in Americus and mass marching. She was "defeated", according to the city). People in Americus just want jobs; they're not particular what kind they are as long as the pay is okay.

After the marching, the county took on two Negro ladies as registrars, and at least a thousand registered. Now an average of 15-20 are going down each week to register. The Youth Council (made up of about a dozen active youths; Lonzo Tyson, president) are canvassing people, taking them down to register, and keeping records of those who go down. They're handling the whole procedure themselves. Now they are thinking of ways to pretest the fact that rural students may be bussed 20 miles, past white schools, to get to the Negro ones in the city.

There is a maid's union being formed, with about forty members. Mrs. Reagan, the vice-president went on strike, demanding a raise from \$10/wk to \$22.50. She won her wage increase, because nobody would break her boycott and go to work in her place. The president was supposed to go on strike the next week, but she didn't. The idea behind this strategy is that, if only one lady is on strike at a time, everyone won't be out of work at the same time, and they can help each other. This works because there aren't that many people who are looking for work, and those in the union who were unemployed refused to take Mrs. Reagan's place, because they knew she'd be going back to it in a few weeks.

Now there is a campaign on to boycott Kwik-Chek Grocery Store and Belk's Department Store. Kwik-Chek has just built a brand-new store in the Negro community; they were supposed to hire Negroes as clerks, but only hired one, as a stockboy. Belk's is owned by the same guy who owns the one in Albany, and he refuses to hire Negroes, so he's being boycotted in both towns. Pickets have often been beaten, while cops conveniently disappeared. They were going to have a shop-in at the stores, but it fell through. Now there's just picketing and leafletting with leaflets printed in Atlanta.

As far as schools are concerned, there are about 80 Negro students in city schools. Sammie Rushin and Leon Bryant, the SNCC workers in the city, integrated Georgia Southern Technical and Vocational for the first time this year, in business administration and electronics, respectively. Also there was an SCLC*SNCC boycott of Staley Jr. Hi, which started out as a sympathy protest for Crawfordville, but then emerged as a protest that the only books the students had were biology texts that were hand-me-downs from the white schools. There were about sixty arrests, and then the school board gave in and gave the kids books.

There were Negro cops put on the force for the first time this summer, but lately they've been beating people up and shooting at them. The Sumter County Movement has been trying to talk to them, but they don't come to meetings they say they will attend. They're going to try once more, and if they get no satisfaction from the cops, they're going to go to the city.

In legal action, there was a suit filed against the city and county to enjoin it from interfering with constitutional rights and to protect demonstrators. Our sterling federal district court judge, Robert J. Elliott, turned down our request for injunction, and commended the police for their actions in the demonstrations. He said in his decision, in effect, that he just did not believe the sworn testimony of picketers who were beaten and had no protection.

SCLC came into Americus this summer, in support of the demonstrations. Come the end of the summer they more-or-less pulled out, leaving a good deal of bad feeling among the people of the community, and leaving bad personnel behind. People now want most of those 4-5 SCLCers left to leave. SCLC made all the decisions on marching, etc., this summer, and people were mad, because they had no voice in the planning. SNCC had been bringing folk in on the discussion, rotating the chairmen to build leadership. SCLC folk would stand up and try to take over each meeting. People were ready and marching before SCLC came in, but then they did, and kept saying, "Dr. King's going to come". He didn't come each time they said it, so people got mad, started losing interest, marching dropped from 800 people to 400 on-down, because they lost interest after being lied to.

ALBANY Since the last staff meeting, SNCC and the Albany Movement have run Rev. Samuel Wells for city council. He ran third out of four; but ran a strong race. This summer we had about eight SCOPE folk working under SNCC direction, on a Freedom School and VR work. Over 100 people registered, and both city and county have done away with the literacy test, in spite of initial refusal.

The Albany Movement's main objective now is concentrated on employment. They picked Belk's to work on, because it's part of a nationwide chain. We had kids picketing during the summer; then they went back to school, and now there's picketing just on Saturdays, to stop the rural folk and base personnel from going in. SNCC has been giving such help as has been asked. The owner said he wouldn't hire any Negroes as clerks, and didn't need black business anyway. But a lot fewer people are shopping there now. The Alb. Move. tried paying pickets, since that was the only way they could get enough to come; now they're working on getting maids and unemployed people who need the money to picket. People have taken the leaflets we got from Atlanta, and have organized to hit all Negro businesses, clubs, social organizations, joints, PTAs, and so on, to make sure everybody is constantly aware of the boycott.

This fall there was a special election for a bond issue for an addition to the hospital and a new city-council government building. The Movement held a special meeting to take a stand, and came out in favor of the issue. The vote in black precincts was 10-1 in favor of the bonds, which ~~was~~ swung the election, so the Negro vote in Albany now holds the balance of power. Mr. Chatman, Rev. Grant, and Mr. (Slater) King are now thinking of getting representatives from all the different organizations and groups in the community, and all interested people, to form a political arm of the Albany Movement, that candidates would have to come to and negotiate with, if they expected to get support. Plans are still tentative.

The Dougherty County Resources and Development Association, Inc., the incorporated arm of the Albany Movement, ran a very successful Head Start and Tutoring program (over 1000 kids), this summer, and is now working on plans for a community center, under CAP, and SPRITE (which is a sort of extended Head Start), to get War on Poverty funds.

The Committee on Political Action is concerned now primarily with getting Negro representation on the Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, which is a primarily white group covering the 13 counties in this corner of the state. There are a few Negroes represented in it: Mrs. Goldie Jackson is Secretary-Treasurer; and Attorney King, SNCC's attorney, is working with two white lawyers to draw up organizing papers. The thing has already set up headquarters in Moultrie and is being discriminatory, not hiring Negroes, and so on.

Albany State College, which has been a bastion of conservatism, has gotten a new president, and things are changing there. The people that were in the campus group and the demonstrations we had last year, are now high in the Student Government. They have invited SNCC folk to come and speak this month. Some are concerned about poverty in Albany, so we're giving them information. The Stud. Gov't. furthermore has decided to support the boycott of Balk's, and the spirit of the group was that picketing would be tolerated. For those who are familiar with Albany State in the past, this is amazing. The students there are ready, and it's a good field for work, for recruits, and for a campaign of university reform.

CORDELE Ed and Herman went into Cordele about a month ago on a fact-finding mission. The people they talked to were concerned primarily with school desegregation and policies. 30 students applied to transfer. The board only admitted five girls, all in grades 8-9 (although all grades were covered in the plan), and rejected all the boys. The Crisp County Movement wrote HEW, and funds have been cut off to two county schools with no Negroes. The Board of Education then submitted another plan, but it was too late for this year, so funds may be cut off until next year. One Negro jr. high may be closed down and made into a recreation center, because there are no funds, and no equipment to run it; the kids would presumably be sent to other schools, both black and white. They are waiting on the school board's decision now. The city's deseg. plan was approved, the county's wasn't. They operate the high schools (1 white, 1 Negro) jointly; other grades are separate.

The Movement got the county to start a surplus food program, but it's operated discriminatorily. Five people work there, all doing the same sort of jobs. The three whites get about \$75/week, the 2 Negroes about \$25/week. Also,

Negroes are forced to the back of the line, to let whites go first; they have to use an old, dirty bathroom in back, while whites have a new, clean one; and they aren't permitted to use the phone to call for transportation, while whites can. Complaints have been filed, and Deacon Purca, president of the CCM, is working on the county commissioners to change it.

Now the CCM is trying to set up a credit union, to get local businessmen and local people to pool funds to help make loans and set up new businesses.

Only about 5 or six people come to mass meetings now. And about 12 adults are all that are active, mostly ladies. This is because Ramona Lockett was away for about a month, and Rev. Fullwood's at theological school in Atlanta, and the meeting place was moved so much that no one knew where it was. The kids all dig the CCM, and would be active if we got some sort of program going to involve them. Almost no one likes Aaron Reid and the traditional set of toms.

THOMASVILLE SNCC worked there for about six months, about 1½ years ago. Isaac has gone back since, and feels it would be a waste of time to go back. There is a long-established NAACP branch, and the leadership is firmly NAACP, and we can't get through it. Both Negroes and whites think it's the most liberal city in Georgia, and don't want to rock the boat. An NAACP man, Elijah Hill, is v.p. of COP, and Mr. Thomas works for the Ga. Council of Human Relations. They have action going on the War on Poverty, under biracial leadership, working with the S'Ga.CAC.

DAWSON, TERRELL COUNTY Nobody has worked there for more than a year. Randy thinks we should go back in, because, although it's rural, it's got a lot of industry, and many strong people, who have slacked off because they have no support and no-one pushing them. We could have a good movement if we went back; they just need a little direction. The Bruners in Sasser, and the Edwards in Dawson are still strong people; Carolyn Daniels lives in Albany now.

Roy thinks that we failed to build the legendary "leadership" that we talk so much about in Terrell.

Herman says that people like Mr. Pullum were there doing what they could before SNCC ever came in. There was a strong NAACP, and most of these people are still there. They worked on school integration themselves, and got 11 kids transferred this year, which is fantastically good. There's no problem there now with unemployment. A group of Negro school teachers are running a Head Start program.

MOULTRIE We've been out of Moultrie since June. On a fact-finding trip it was observed: the people had gotten 43 kids in all-white schools. As a result of the boycott in Feb., most of the student's grievances had been met, more-or-less. The classrooms in Bryant High had been repaired, there were 22 new typewriters, new desks and books, more teachers, some landscaping, and such. The Moultrie Progressive Movement contributed water fountains, and had a shrub drive. They formed a bir-racial committee, which didn't work, because the whites wanted to hand down decrees, instead of negotiate. Now the MPM is working with COPA. Mr. Mobley, and Mrs. Molly Thompson are working on the local poverty program. They and other Negroes have a strong voice in it.

About a dozen students are having meetings every Saturday, want to start a newspaper to inform people and protest conditions. THEY NEED A MIMEO MACHINE. 4

OCILLA Randy Battle and John Reddy worked in Ocilla up until September. It too has long-established leaders, who take all the praise and glory, and don't want any initiative to develop among others. The leading group consists of in the main the Davis Bros., Mr. George, Rev. Colquitt. They invited us in to work on VR, Comm. organization, p.a. desegregation, and school desegregation. When the one laundromat in town was desegregated, the city fathers all of a sudden allowed a Negro to put one up in the heart of the Negro community. Then the "leaders" of the Negro community stopped the kids marching to desegregate the theater, because they and SCOPE folk had talked with the county attorney, and he had asked them to stop the test, because the theater owner was sick and almost bankrupt. So they yielded to his wishes. The leaders, the SCOPEs and the city atty. would always get together before any p.a. testing, and the attorney would call up the business and tell them to serve the kids, since it was only a one-shot thing, and after they had left the business could go back to being segregated. The leaders believe in "Give a little, take a little". Mr. Davis is a symbol, and most people don't oppose him, and those that do, he can buy his way around them. The leaders ousted Randy from Ocilla because they said he was "too radical".

About 250 people were registered this summer. There have been no literacy tests for 15 years or so. Just fill out a little card and you're registered immediately. Registration is permanent, but the city books are still only open in election years, and even then only for a total of 20 days, from 30 days before the election until they close again 10 days before election.

13 students applied for transfer to white schools. 11 got in. The Negro school has only about 300 kids in it, no recreation, no phys.ed., not an athletic team. The students petitioned the school superintendent, who said that the school board said the Negro school couldn't afford a basketball team. (of course the white highschool has basketball, football, etc). The kids want a boycott, to protest. A tremendous number of young people just lose interest, and drop out or stand around on street corners.

The population of Irwin County is divided almost exactly 50-50, and the same in Ocilla. By the end of the summer, there were more registered Negro voters, than white. The whites may have moved to counteract this since the summer. Rev. Colquitt ran for alderman in the last city election, this November, unsuccessfully. Mr. Davis asked us for help, and we were supposed to send a worker in. Mr. Davis was to pick him up, but he never showed up. We did send them letters and leaflets to canvass the community with.

There is a CAP Job Corps (started in Sep.), and a Head Start (started in June), now going on, and more programs are being organized. They are run mainly by whites and the Negro "leaders", but they are running only in the Negro community, and that's where they hold the meetings. The officials through whose hands the money flows are all white.

Employment is weak. There are only a couple of mills. Kids leave the county as soon as they can. Even skilled workers make only \$35-40/week, for what are \$200/wk. jobs outside the South.

Reddy thinks it's a waste of time to go back, unless the project can be self-sustaining, so that people will stop living with the Davis family, eating with them, and watching their TV.

CAMILLA. Herman and Isaac worked there for a month or so this summer, and have been in and out since working in Baker County, which is next door. The school teachers, the undertaker, Mr. Carroll, and Mr. Williams, run the town. They want to keep things quiet, think everything is okay now. The rest of the people will talk, a little, but won't take the step to action, or are afraid to; they want the rich people to be in it before they will move. There's a biracial committee made up of the fat-cats. The black members were hand-picked by the whites and carry out the whites' orders.

Herman and Isaac walked around for threeweeks, and the only guy they found who was interested in the Movement was interested in Isaac. Only 2-3 people would come to the meetings they set up, and they could only find a couple of ladies interested. They wanted to do some p.a. testing, which would be good, because a lot of people from Baker shop in Camilla, which is 9 miles away (and crackers from Camilla go to Baker County to beat up demonstrators.

Everybody is mad about the outdoor toilets within city limits that most folk have. But they still think they've got it easy, because the feds have appeared once, about May '65, and got the hospital to desegregate. About 90% of the streets are paved, oddly enough.

There's one deputy sheriff there whose reputation is as bad as Sheriff Johnson of Baker. He beat one man who enrolled his children in the white school, and really hurt him badly. We took affidavits, sent him to Atty. King, who has been pressuring the JD to file suit, which they may do. The deputy also has said to Isaac, "We don't want your kind here", although he hasn't attacked us yet. SNCC will be in and out while working in Baker.

Teachers, etc., are trying to organize a Poverty program.

WORTH COUNTY There are four or five large strong families, the Mellons, Youngs, Hills, Halls, and Fords, who got together and set up the Worth County Improvement League, and then asked for SNCC help. They have been working more-or-less by themselves. They got the first Worth Co. school integration plan shot down by HW, because it was blatantly discriminatory; they got federal funds cut off. So the board filed another plan, and there are quite a few kids in integrated schools now.

The WCIL has been taking a survey of people, their ages, incomes, number of dependents, and so on, in order to draw up a poverty program. They also have a petition circulating now, demanding Negro cops, sewage service, paved streets, fire protection, immediate public facility desegregation, and employment of Negroes in city and county governments and businesses. Mr. Mellon, and Mr. Hill ran as write-in candidates for the APCS election, but were unsuccessful.

BAKER COUNTY has probably the worst sheriff in Ga., L. Warren Johnson. His deputies are all in the family, and each has killed at least one Negro. As a result of demonstrations this summer, there's a court suit against them now, asking an injunction to prohibit interference and require protection of us. Judge Elliott is sitting on the suit like a hen on an egg.

We went into Baker at the start of the summer, to work on VR, jobs, registration, federal aid and poverty programs, school, pa, and courthouse deseg., and recreation for the youth.

WORTH COUNTY, continued. In spite of the rural nature of the county, the people were ready, and had just needed somebody to come in to get things started. Now they are working on getting poverty programs, and have been going to Moultrie and COFA meetings and working by themselves on it.

SCS gave no 30 days notification, so we couldn't run any candidates, and had to have a write-in campaign. There was no public counting of ballots. The county committee put some Negroes on the ballot, but they knew nothing about SCS, and had no idea how they got on the ballot. We've complained to the Dept. of Agriculture. Their representative missed an appointment with SNCC folk; and a state official "investigated" the election by calling up whites, who of course contradicted our story; and naturally he believed them. Gary Betz of the JD is also investigating; he thought that the Dept. of agric. was following its usual pattern of only questioning by calls and letters, and even then only talking to whites.

165 kids applied to transfer. The school board only accepted seven. There were protests, school-ins, and a boycott of the Negro school, until the board "compromised" and accepted 20. The people accepted that. The number is down to 11 now. The Board picked rather weak kids. They've been harassed by students and teachers; all got at least one failing grade the first marking period, although they weren't failing. The people think it's a conspiracy, and are trying to get federal funds cut off.

There is strong leadership in the Miller families and Hawkins families, and people look up to them. There is a rotating chairman at the meetings. We think the people have developed a sense of unity and need for each other; they'll pull together to help other less fortunate ones, share with each other. Some families now though are beginning to think that the Movement isn't moving fast enough, or doing anything (except getting kids in school), or they're tied up in the system. They don't expect an injunction to be handed down, didn't think we could win the SCS election, and so on. They want immediate results, didn't get them, and are tapering off from mass meetings.

A group of people were sent to Washington by the Baker County Movement, to picket the JD to get a federal registrar. They didn't, and were disappointed. Their hopes were built up, then dashed. and so they're losing interest.

EVERYBODY FEELS THAT, UNTIL YOU GET SHERIFF JOHNSON OUT OF OFFICE, YOU HAVEN'T DONE A DAMNED THING.

Also, the high-school kids were the main force in the Movement, and they're back in school. Now the basketball season is coming, and that's all the recreation they have, and they don't want to lose it.

People are even more afraid now that before the summer, afraid to travel the roads to meetings, for fear of the cops. They fear Johnson will strike back, now that the pressure is down (for example, Walt Miller's farm machinery was impounded for debt, although he paid the debt. Now it's sitting on the courthouse lawn).

The main response now comes only for the Poverty Program; with a little left over for distribution of clothes to the needy.

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LIFE EXPECTANCY OF PERSONNEL

Sherrod- gone

Roy- til either June or Sep. '66, then going to school

Herman- ?

Ed- til Sep., to go to school

Samuel- forever

Jim- sometime after Xmas will go to Mexico, for a couple months, then back.

Randy- now in NYC, (on leave of absence?)

Fred- indefinite

Isaac- until army gets him, or, if they miss, until sometime in summer.

EXPANSION We need more people, even just to work the places we have worked. We either have to have more money, so we can recruit more local full-time volunteers, and pay them, or else we will have to snatch workers from other SNCC projects.

We need to know about some of the programs in Ala. and Miss, and bring them here and implement them: credit unions, FLU's, co-ops, music festivals, etc. We must find out about them, because we can't use them or reject them if we don't know of them, and at present we don't.

PROGRAM First, send somebody up to the Research Dept. to compile a calendar for all elections, in each county and city in Georgia, SCS, local, state, etc., for the coming year, so we'll know enough in advance to start work. We'd like the person doing this to be someone from SWGa. to do it, to gain knowledge of the Research Dept.'s working. As it is now, we usually don't learn of elections more than a month in advance, if that soon.

TRANSPORTATION How can we get our raggedy-ass cars back up to Atlanta and get rid of them? All our cars now need new tires and spares. Can we get money to get them?