

by Ned Moore

The bi-monthly voter registration day last Monday in Pike county, Alabama, brought over 200 Negroes to the area's courthouse in Troy, the largest number to be in the structure since it was built in 1952.

With one registrar home sick, the two registrars on duty from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. were only able to process 48 people. Only nine Negroes were able to pass the rigorous literacy test and become registered voters.

The significant point is that so many of the county's Negroes woke up to their right and responsibility as citizens and turned out on this day.

Earlier in the month there was a special five day period of registration and only ~~about 5,000~~ <sup>FIVE</sup> Negroes came to the courthouse for processing during the entire time.

Pike county has ~~over 11,000~~ <sup>over 11,000 Negroes, with some</sup> 5,000 ~~Negroes~~ old enough to register. Yet before last Monday only 519 were registered. The number of eligible voters totals 42 percent, the rest being Whites over 21 years old.

What brought about the new attitude on the part of Pike's Negroes? It was due to hard work by ~~four~~ <sup>EIGHT</sup> civil rights volunteers from various parts of the United States who <sup>had</sup> set up summer headquarters in the county a little over a week before.

Led by Leon Gutherz, a New York school teacher and a White, a Negro ~~girl~~ <sup>girl</sup> from Chicago and Whites from Cleveland and Los Angeles moved into the heart of Troy's Negro community and proceeded to awaken the residents to their rights. ~~Four~~ <sup>FIVE</sup> California SCOPE workers stay in Brundidge, the county's second largest city.

The volunteers work for ~~the~~ Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, ~~and~~ Summer Community Organization and Political Education project, operating in over a 100 counties throughout six Southern states.

Orientation was at SCOPE headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. Gutherz's unpaid group was told by director Hosea Williams ~~that~~ that its mission was to

get the Negroes of Pike registered. The secondary objective was to build up a local leadership body to carry on when the summer was over. His people were told to avoid demonstrations in all but extreme situations.

Winning over the Negroes of Pike proved only a little challenging, for they seemed ready to move. This is not to say that the task was easy. Persuading the Negroes to do what they ought to do took friendliness, honesty and much talking. It took long hot days of door-to-door canvassing and many nights of mass meetings in the churches of cities throughout this agricultural county of 25,000 persons.

The workers still have to contend with <sup>the</sup> centuries old fear of the Negroes of retribution from the Whites, especially in places outside the cities. *economic and physical harm*

A California volunteer, a White woman, lost heart and returned home early after the Negro family she was staying with was threatened with bombing and job loss, and she was <sup>by them</sup> asked to move out.

Actually, the Whites <sup>power structure</sup> of Pike are more afraid than the Negroes. They fear another Selma, with demonstrations that bring on national attention. They also fear economic boycott.

"Whether the Whites like it not," commented Gutherz after talking to Troy officials, "they realize that we have power. We're not going to use it provided we have their cooperation."

As to registration, Gutherz said, "Once they eliminate the literacy test, the thing we have to do is keep the Negroes moving to register. Without the test, the registrars should be able to ~~register~~ <sup>sign up</sup> over 200 people a day. We'll have to have more registration days, then by mid-August we could have 90 percent of the Negroes registered.

"We'll hold classes here for illiterate Negroes to teach them enough reading and writing to be able to register."

He estimated that 3,500 of the county's Negroes are ~~now~~ right now willing to go down and register and added that even more than 200 would have been at the courthouse Monday if his workers had not told them to ~~stay~~ stay home

at 10 a.m. when it was realized that the registrars could not possibly process so many people.

Probably even the registrars could not pass the literacy test, Gutherz remarked, after recalling that <sup>Monday</sup> he noticed them consulting answer sheets just after Negroes took the examinations.

~~Registration in Pike will be~~

Registration will be easier in Pike from now on because a new and simplified literacy test has gone into effect throughout most of Alabama.

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