

April 23, 1964

TO: James T. McCain, Director of Organizations, CORE.  
Richard Haley, Director of the Southern Office, CORE.

FROM: Judy Benninger, Task Force, CORE.

SUBJECT: Dunnellen CORE, a report.

On April 21st and 22nd, at the request of Patricia Due, Field Secretary in Florida, I attended an executive meeting and mass meeting, respectively, of Dunnellen CORE in Dunnellen, Florida. Because of the peculiar nature of the Dunnellen group and my own personal interest in the group, I feel that I should send in this report immediately. The president of Dunnellen CORE, Mr. John Bestick, will be sending Mr. McCain a check for \$10, a list of officers, and a request for affiliation this week. For this reason the report seems relevant.

Dunnellen, Florida is a small town of approximately 500 Negroes and 500 whites, located about 170 <sup>miles</sup> south of Tallahassee, 40 miles east of Gainesville and 25 mile east of Ocala, Florida. Last summer Betty Wright, a FAMU student and member of Tallahassee CORE returned to Dunnellen (her home town) after the first summer session and personally organized a group she called "Dunnellen CORE". She organized the group along the lines of Tallahassee CORE, conducted meetings in the manner of a southern CORE mass meeting, and assisted the group in planning projects geared to the CORE program. CORE Rules for Action were strictly adhered to, and the spirit of the group was the CORE spirit, as I interpret it. At the time I was living in Gainesville, and through Zev Aelony met Betty Wright and began commuting to Dunnellen with friends to attend meetings there, social events, etc. Zev's arrest in Dunnellen prompted Pat to go to Ocala (site of the Marion County Jail) to protest this arrest. Zev was observing, as you know, a Dunnellen CORE picket line in Dunnellen.

Dunnellon is in the same county (Marion), as Ocala where the NAACP, under the leadership of Rev. Frank G. Pinkston, has been a very strong and consistently powerful force in Ocala with ramifications in the county. Ocala NAACP, however, although lending great moral support to the Dunnellon movement, restricts its activities to Ocala with the exception of its voter registration drives, in which Dunnellon CORE participates in Dunnellon.

During the summer Dunnellon CORE undertook the following projects:

- (1) the only theatre in town seated Negroes in the balcony and whites below. Dunnellon CORE instituted a 100% effected Negro boycott. The theatre depended on the Negro community for at least 50% of its revenue, and thus closed down for a month. It reopened on a limited scale, showing only three nights a week instead of seven and with poorer quality pictures. To this day, Negroes refuse to patronize the theatre.
- (2) The group picketed all drug stores with lunch counters. As a result, all stools and booths have been removed from all drug stores, and Negroes and whites may eat standing up only in these establishments.
- (3) The white restaurant picketed last summer continues to follow its policy of segregation.
- (4) The group attempted a "swim-in" at a municipal beach located on a river in Dunnellon. As a result the beach is now closed to all. The mayor is now attempting to get Negroes to agree to building a private swimming pool at the Negro high school—financed partly by CORE-raised funds and partly by city and county funds. CORE has refused it on two grounds—it would be segregated and it would be an unusual way of financing a semi-public pool.
- (5) The group is presenting participating in the voter registration project. Two Negroes are running for county offices, and CORE aids in the distribution of campaign materials. A workshop was given this week on how to use the voting machines, sponsored by CORE.

During the summer, the mass meetings were attended by practically every Negro in Dunnellon with the addition of Negroes from outlying areas, Ocala, and integrated groups from Gainesville. Mass meetings often totaled 700 to a thousand people, and weekly collections ranged from \$100 to \$300. The group sponsored civil rights speakers, both white and Negro. Despite the all-Negro membership and the very oppressive white reactionaryism in the area, the group has always been very receptive to whites in the civil rights movement, and has

welcomed whites in a spirit very unusual to these circumstances. This is due, I think, to Betty Wright's acquaintance with the interracial movement in Tallahassee, and her insistence on the interracial nature of CORE, plus the wonderful example of non-violence and brotherhood which Zev Aelony provided while in Dummellen.

On several occasions Mr. Bostick expressed a desire for affiliation and servicing from national CORE. On Tuesday I went to Dummellen to talk with him. That night I also attended an executive committee meeting. Mr. Bostick and I discussed with the group the advantages of affiliation and the discipline imposed upon a group which does affiliate. We discussed the financial arrangements with the treasurer, and the group understands that 10% of its yearly income is to go to national Core. The executive committee unanimously accepted Mr. Bostick's recommendation that the group request affiliation.

Wednesday evening a mass meeting was called. Mr. Bostick explained to the group the essence of our conversation and the executive committee recommendation that the group seek affiliation. I was asked to address the group, which I did, commenting on certain aspects of CORE, the World's Fair protests of that day, etc. The group seemed very receptive to the idea of affiliation and accepted Mr. Bostick's request that he be permitted to write to national CORE this week and begin affiliation procedures. I might add that the mayor attended this meeting. I had heard a number of expressions of hostility toward him before the meeting, and as a part of my speech I indicated my opinion that he should be welcomed, that we wanted everyone to hear our message, and that we were willing to hear anything he might have to say to us. (Previous to this time, the only hostile whites in attendance sat outside the church with guns or tape recorders--they had been repeatedly invited to come in and take a seat. I referred to those invitations and finished by saying that we had nothing to hide, our stand was clear--Freedom, etc.) The group then asked the mayor if he had anything to say. He offered the swimming pool idea which the group politely rejected.

These are the events and circumstances of Dunnellon CORE. There are a few other circumstances which I think I need to mention. As stated before, the initial orientation of this group was completely CORE. Miss Wright conducted workshops in non-violent reactions and stressed the peaceful direct action protest as the best means to attain the goals we are striving for. In general, the group has maintained this attitude. However, Miss Wright left for school in September, and the group has since been led by persons whose experiences with CORE are limited to the Dunnellon experience. No CORE field worker has been to Dunnellon since Zev's time there until this week. As a result, the group has continued during the winter as best it could without outside direction. Until a few weeks ago, those attending meetings had dwindled to the least militant group—the younger people preoccupied with school and lacking identification with the leadership group which is, in general, a middle age group. However, those in leadership positions are very important people in town. Mr. Beatick is a highly respected deacon, and he attends a different church each Sunday bringing news of CORE activities and positions. There are county employees in the executive committee, and also the woman social leader in town. Winter activities have been non-direct action boycotts, which are very effective in Dunnellon. Word spreads quickly there, and Negroes observe any boycott called by the CORE group. As a result, one grocery store is considering hiring some Negroes, and other stores are very upset and now willing to negotiate through the mayor.

However, there is a very violent element in the town which sometimes seeks to support CORE activities through violent short-cuts. Thus Negroes who may be reluctant about participating in a boycott or displaying campaign stickers are often "persuaded" to do so through rough-house techniques. There is a group of young men called the "red shirts" who are attend CORE meetings which acts as a sort of protection agency to local Negroes and out of town whites who are sympathetic. One member of the

of the executive committee operates a very successful Bolita business which provides her with extraordinary power in the white community as well as certain influential "connections" in the Negro community. She does carry a gun, and is very militant. A policeman in Dunnellon who attempted to intimidate her was severely beaten by an unknown group of Negro men and has henceforth restricted his activities with regard to CORE people there. Nonetheless, as a group the spirit is non-violent, and the group is verbally influenced to a great extent by the "brotherhood and love" message of Rev. Pinkston in Ocala. So perhaps the situation is really very common.

Mr. Bostick is going to write a letter to Mr. McCain, as I have mentioned. He asked me to request of Mrs. Das that field workers in program and direct action be sent to Dunnellon immediately. He also wants a workshop program in nonviolence which will be effective before the high school students get out of school for the summer (around June 1st). It is my personal opinion that we should accept Dunnellon CORE and give any assistance we can, if this is within the realm of financial probability. Some immediate servicing would be necessary, however, were we to accept this group as an affiliate. It has so far been a very effective and exemplary group to use the name of CORE, and would be a credit to the organization. In Pat's absence and incommunicado status (Women's Detention Home--NYC), I feel obligated to make this report so that you will have some background information when you receive Mr. Bostick's letter. He is anxious for immediate affiliation, and he wants members of the group to be able to attend the national convention. Therefore I would like to suggest immediate acceptance of this group and subsequent servicing, if financial circumstances permit both.

Respectfully submitted,

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