

Minutes from Alabama State-Wide, Non-Partisan Political
Meeting in Selma, Alabama
February 26, 1966

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Hosea Williams at 10:20 AM.

Mr. Williams:

This is the second of a series of meetings. I would like to give you some background on this meeting. In the past, I was one of the persons that was allowing the Negro people to be robbed, for selfish reasons. One of the reasons that Georgia is so far behind today is because of the Negro politicians in that State. We have not grown to the point where we can say that we are full-fledged citizens.

I think the Negro vote must hang on a tree like a piece of ripe fruit. That fruit will go to the candidate that will give the most freedom to our people. We have been selling our vote for a long time, but we must stop selling it for monetary value. We could have Negro state troopers, barber shop inspectors and Negroes throughout the state capitol; but there was one mistake the Negro politicians made. It was impossible for Governor Sanders to become Governor unless he had the Negro votes. The trouble was that the State was split up into areas with a leader for each and these area leaders had no correspondence with each other. The politicians spoke to each leader separately, so if they lost one group, they still had several others to carry them into office. All we had to do was to unite ourselves.

This is the whole philosophy behind this meeting today. We can do it in Alabama now. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has registered

91,000 Negroes in Alabama since we marched across the Edmund Petus Bridge. I do not want to set up anything for SCLC, I am not here to push SCLC, but I am here to disturb some consciences. You have the vote, and I pray that you do not make the same mistake that we did in Georgia. All we have to do is come together and tell the politicians what we want. The white folks only strength in Alabama is our weakness--that we can not get together. Freedom is coming to Alabama before it comes to any other state in the Nation. If we can find it in ourselves to come together, we will have everything.

Another reason we called this meeting is because whatever we do, we must not begin competing forces with any group that is now established in the State. We are trying to bring together all of the forces for the common good. The purpose of this meeting, the value behind it is not to promote SCLC or to compete with any other established group, but to try to launch a move in Alabama so that the Negro people in Alabama will unite themselves for a common good and tie all of the loose ends together.

I think one of the biggest problems for Negroes is finding a place to belong in order to participate. We have too many organizations now, but you need to do something with those you have now, instead of establishing more. We are at the same point we were eighty-five years ago. We really got tricked. You come to these state meetings and listen to everyone, endorse candidates and then go back to your county and vote for someone else. We must avoid this. Every county should have their say so. It is going to be a job

getting these Negroes together in Alabama because those white people are going to start throwing money around. We should get as many counties as we can together. We might fight in the meeting, but once the meeting is over, everyone will fight like a dog for whatever decision was made in the meeting.

We have proposed that each county would meet and endorse candidates in their respective meetings. Two representatives from each county meeting will go to the state meeting. When the vote is taken in the state meeting, each county will support that candidate. If you can get, say 40 out of 67 counties together as one voice, the politicians will not pay any attention to a single county when they can have those forty forty counties.

We need to invite Humphrey or someone like him down here to speak at a fund raising dinner. I want this understood, I am at your disposal. I don't want any influence or office in this, but I will always help you in any way I can, but I am not looking for a job. As for SCLC, anything that we can do for you we are willing to do it.

I would like to see many more Negroes running for the Democratic Executive Committee. I want you to flood these committee positions that control the policy. We are striving to and fighting for a non-racist system. Therefore, everything we do must be in the direction of non-violence. SCLC is here to give as much help as we possibly can. Some people need financial help to qualify and in some places people need advice.

I hope I have laid the ground work to what this meeting is all about. By bringing all the organizations together we can work out a group that will have

much power. The state representatives to be endorsed will have to be elected in the county meetins by the county people. The same thing is true on a district level. Maybe we can not elect a black man, but God knows, we will have something to say about what man will be in office.

Questions

You mentioned that you though we have enough organizations. What are the means of getting these organizations together ?

Mr. Williams

The answer to this question should emerge out of this meeting. The three strong factors of the group would be the Interview Committee, the Political Guidance and the Patronage Committee. I think that if a person is going to serve on one committee he should not serve on any other one.

The Interview Committee has three functions. The first of these is to determine what the Negro public wants from each of the offices that are open for election (this is done through putting out a questionnaire and individuals making known their wishes and organizations making known their wishes). When all of these demands are compiled, the Interview Committee takes the ones most reflective of the Negro public majority and sets aside one day and takes each office and presents the candidates for those offices with a copy of what the Negro public wants and asks that candidate which one of the proposals he will back. But, if a white politician does not come to us face to face, and talk, I don't think he would even be considered. The Interview Committee can

only make one commit'ment to the politician--that being that the opposition will never come in possession of his interview in order that the opposition will be able to use it against him during the campaign. A third function of the Interview Committee is to compile what data it can concerning the history of each candidate (what promises he made during the last campaign, what promises he kept, what bills he voted for, what bills he voted against, what bills he put in the hopper, etc.). The Interview Committee also takes the results of its interviews and the results of its research and presents them to the Political Guidance Committee.

The Political Guidance Committee has the sole responsibility of recommending to the "egro people who they ought to vote for. They take the research done by the Interview Committee, the interviews done by the Interview Committee, and any other information at their disposal and decides what candidates, in its estimation, the Negro people should cast their vote for. In some cases this information is not revealed to the white community at all; they only find out on the day of the election, by leaflets being passed out by the Negroes. In other communities the Negroes reveal their support to the public they are supporting. Really, I am in favor of the latter, because once you start holding out on the whites, they start acting very vigorously to your secrecy.

After the election is over, the Patronage Committee has the responsibility of seeing to it that each of the candidates supported by the Negro voters keeps their promises and fulfill their obligations.

You speak about the county commissioners. What steps would we go through to get information about these posts and who is elected to them.

The law says that the county has the choice of appointing or electing members to the Democratic Executive Committee. The State of Alabama has a resolution to end this.

The next two hours were spent filling out registration forms and eating lunch.

Dorothy Cotton

The Citizenship Education Department of SCLC wants to provide a workshop where you can learn something about the office that you are running for. A meeting will be held in Atlanta, Georgia on March 15th and maybe extend to March 16th. We hope to have some kind of training in depth about the offices you are running for.

Also, on March 12th, there will be a state-wide meeting on school desegregation in Montgomery, Alabama. You will be receiving a letter notifying you about both of these meetings.

REPORTS FROM COUNTIES REPRESENTED

Wilcox County

<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Registration Figures</u>		<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	
14,000	3,700	4,000	2,000

Five people have qualified to run for public office in Wilcox County: Mr. Lonnie Brown for State Senator; Mr. James Kerving for County Commis-

sioner; Mr. Daniel Irving for County Commissioner, Mr. Walter Calhoun for Sheriff; Mr. James Robinson for Tax Collector. Possible qualifying candidates are: Rev. Smith for Board of Education and Mr. Gordon for the Board of Education.

We hope to have two more for the Board of Education, but they have not qualified yet because they have had trouble in finding out how to go about qualifying. The Democratic Executive Committee says that there are no positions open. In Monroe and Conecuh Counties we do not have enough to carry the election, but possibly we will carry it in Wilcox and Clarke Counties.

Attorney Crzell Billingsley

The best way to get information from the Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee and about the positions open on the Board of Education is from the probate judge. Ask the probate judge to let you see the qualifying forms for the up-coming May primaries. If that does not work, send him a telegram asking the positions that are open and asking for a return from him. If you do not meet with success after this, a law suit must be filed.

While I'm up here, I want to place emphasis on the County Democratic Executive Committee in your county, which is more important than the state committee. To better explain the County Democratic Executive Committee, in Jefferson County we have twenty-seven precincts further divided into 118 districts. You run from the district; this means that 118 persons will be elected for the County Democratic Executive Committee in Jefferson County. You can run for an office and a place on the County Democratic Executive Committee at the same time. This is the committee that raised the qualifying fees in Lowndes County for sheriff. In the districts where Negroes outnumber the whites, no white man would run in those areas. The Negroes were not aware

of the election and then the qualifying people would appoint people to serve in these areas after the election.

If you are running for state representative you should send a copy of your qualifying forms to the Secretary of State and the probate Judge in your district. You must designate in what manner you are running for on the Board of Commissioners or whether you are running for position 1, 2, 3 or 4 on the Board of Education. I think we should try to get as many seats as possible on the Board of Revenue.

Choctaw County

<u>Registration Figures</u>			
<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
4,000	2,500	5,000	5,100

We hope to have a candidate by Tuesday. They have set up an investigating committee to handle this. The County Road Commissioner is the only position available in which we have a majority.

Barbour County

<u>Registration Figures</u>			
<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
5,200	3,200	7,388	7,588

Eleven people have qualified for office: Mr. John Kelly for the Board of Education, Fanny Davis for the Board of Education, Mrs. Clemantine Gilbert for the Democratic Executive Committee, Mrs. Mary Hunter for Democratic Executive Committee, Mrs. Bernice Haslam for the Democratic Executive

Committee, Mr. Robby Jordon for the Democratic Executive Committee, Ms. Mary Marshall for the Board of Education, Mr. David Denott for Sheriff, Mrs. Janice Battle for Tax Assessor, Mrs. Annie Davis for the Democratic Executive Committee and Mrs. Mary Smith for the Democratic Executive Committee.

Bullock County

<u>Registration Figures</u>			
<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
9,000	3,500	2,387	2,300

Two people have already qualified for office: Mr. H. C. Williams for High Sheriff and Mr. Rufus Huffin for Tax Assessor. There are others who will qualify on Monday. The chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee said that there are no places open on the Committee, but I will go back down on Monday and re-check. We have someone who wants to run for County Road Commissioner, but he was told that there are no positions open. We also have someone who wants to run for Tax Collector, but he feels that there will not be enough support.

Butler County

<u>Registration Figures</u>			
<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
4,500	2,300	8,300	7,200

Two people have already qualified to run for office: Mr. Booker T. Lewis for County Road Commissioner and Mr. James Herbert for Sheriff. They have told us that the County Road Commissioner position is not open, but he gave me a copy of the list of positions that are open. They have been threatening the people that go down to register of losing their jobs.

Marengo County

<u>Registration Figures</u>			
<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
7,000	5,300	6,000	6,200

Mrs. Ann Braxton has qualified for Tax Assessor. We will try to qualify three or four more people by Monday, but everyone is talking and no one is working. I think we could get many more people registered before the May primaries.

Autauga County

Registration Figures

<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
3,556	2,470	5,500	

We plan to run two people to qualify for public office: Miss Hadnott for the Board of Education and Mr. Willie L. Wood for Tax Assessor.

Perry County

Registration Figures

<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
5,200	3,700	3,400	3,000

Dallas County

We have not done anything tangible to get a candidate qualified. We have plenty of people willing to run, but the Dallas County Voters League has taken over and anyone else who talks about running is criticized. They have told us that on tomorrow night, Sunday, they will screen out who they want to run.

Registration Figures

<u>NVAP</u>	<u>Total Negroes Registered</u>	<u>WVAP</u>	<u>Total Whites Registered</u>
15,150	11,000	14,000	12,000

Rev. Reese: "We will be running candidates, who will be publicized tonight, for Tax Assessor, County Coroner, State Representative and the County Board of Education.

Mr. Williams

I would like you to give some thought and your views about electing some temporary officers for the organization until, at a future meeting, permanent officers can be elected.

I think this is a good idea on the surface, but I am afraid that the masses of the people would still not be reached by this Confederation.

Mr. Williams

This is the responsibility of our staff, to see to it that massive numbers of local people are involved.

I am very happy to have you offer this invitation because it tears my heart out to see Negro organizations fighting among each other. All these separate organizations are fighting for power and recognition.

I think the idea is a good one because we are not worried about power of organizations, but human nature.

I hope we will endorse this federation. I see it as the one constructive thing that we can do.

It was made a motion and seconded that temporary officers be elected for the Confederation of Alabama Non-Partisan Organizations. The results of these elections are:

Chairman:	Mr. Albert Turner (Perry County)
Treasurer:	Mr. Lewis Black (Hale County)
Secretary:	Mr. Hadnott (Autauga County)
Chairman of the Interview Committee	Mr. Lonnie Brown (Wilcox County)
Chairman of the Political Guidance Committee:	Mr. Willie Wood (Autauga County)

A third meeting will be held in Selma on Saturday, March 5, 1966. Letters will be sent out giving you the exact time and place.