

A Call for Help



—N. Y. Times Map
A FRONT LINE in the struggle for justice, Fayette and Haywood Counties in West Tennessee.

FREEDOM VILLAGE, near Somerville, symbol of courage. Family shown is that of Early B. Williams who narrowly escaped death when he was struck by a bullet from a high-powered rifle, late in December.

FAMILIES WERE TURNED OUT AND BOYCOTTED BECAUSE THEY VOTED

In the southwest corner of Tennessee is a county named Fayette whose southern border rests on the top of Mississippi. In this county, near a town named Somerville, is a group of 22 tents in which 155 people, all Negro, live on land belonging to a Negro farmer. This tent city known as "Freedom Village" sprang up last fall after Negroes in Fayette County had registered for the first time to vote. White land owners began to evict Negro renters and sharecroppers. Unwilling to leave the county that had always been their home, evictees began to camp out, taking their families into tents which were sent in by individuals and groups as soon as the first news of the evictions appeared in the press.

Many Negroes in Haywood County, adjacent to Fayette, had also been registering to vote. As in Fayette, evictions immediately followed. But more of the Negroes in Haywood own their farms, so the evicted families found shelter in buildings on the farms of Negro landowners. On Dec. 30 the Dept. of Justice in Washington obtained a restraining order which temporarily halted evictions, charging that the landowners had violated the new Civil Rights Act. In these two counties are now some 700 families who have been served with eviction papers and subjected to serious boycotts.

THEY CHOSE FREEDOM - What happened when Negroes registered to vote in Fayette and Haywood counties, Tennessee

This 40 minute long-play record is a factual documentation of what has happened in southwest Tennessee. Several people who live in these two counties tell first hand what has taken place. Excellent to play for groups. Order from Operation Freedom address: 1111 Dayton St., Cincinnati 14, Ohio. \$3 postpaid.

MORE AND MORE PEOPLE SEND GIFTS AND LOANS

Once the idea of sending gifts and loans was circulated, numbers of people became interested in participating. Money was made available for plank floors for tents in Freedom Village; floors were laid in February. Loans were channeled to several farmers in order to keep them from losing houses and farm equipment. A revolving loan was developing. People borrowing were glad to sign notes and to pledge themselves to repay when able, so that others might borrow from this fund. Rent money was provided for a courageous white couple who had stood by the Negro registrants and whose business has dwindled to nearly nothing. This manner of meeting the emergency came to be called "operation freedom."

The population in Fayette County is 78% Negro; in Haywood it is 62%. White Citizens Councils, meeting in churches, had put into the hands of white business and professional people the names of all Negroes who had registered. "Boycott these people," was the order they gave, "or you will yourselves be blacklisted and boycotted." Some Negroes who own stores could no longer buy articles from wholesalers, so were forced out of business. Even health services were closed to Negroes.

Asserting freedom in Montgomery had meant riding in any part of a bus. In Little Rock it had meant going to school unsegregated. In North Carolina it had meant eating at lunch counters. In Fayette and Haywood it means registering to vote. The prime motivation among those who became eager to make gifts and loans was that of wanting to help support this assertion of freedom. "We are suffering," said one tenant farmer who had been served eviction papers and subjected to boycott, "but we won't run away." When he received a loan which in the nick of time kept him from being dispossessed of his farm equipment he said in gratitude, "This is a freedom loan."

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FIND WAYS TO HELP

After the first news of the evictions and boycotts had appeared, churches and other groups across the country shipped in food and clothing. More tents were provided. Several individuals and small interested groups went to visit the counties, bringing back news of their experiences. A team of three men from Peacemakers went during the first week in January: Rev. Maurice McCrackin from Ohio, Rev. Ross Anderson from Georgia, and Wallace Nelson from Pennsylvania. They helped one farmer who, because he could not make a payment, was to lose his farming equipment the following day. They went back home to spread the news that financial help should be sent immediately to these families who were suffering loss of houses, jobs, farm equipment, business equipment, and who were unable to buy gasoline and many other items necessary to carry on their work.

"OPERATION FREEDOM" BECOMES NATIONWIDE

Because of a growing interest in this approach which a limited number of people had been making, an organizing meeting was held on Feb. 16. Operation Freedom is now nationwide, incorporated under the State of Ohio. The stated purpose of the group so incorporated reads: "To promote brotherhood especially by helping to secure the economic conditions conducive to the free exercise of civil rights."

All money contributed to Operation Freedom goes directly to the need in these two counties, none of it going to defray expenses of the plan. Operation Freedom has officers and a coordinating committee. But it has no staff. Travel, literature, phone calls and other expenses of this kind are being met by the individuals and groups who have volunteered to work together under this plan of channeling funds to the counties.

At the organizing meetings held in Cincinnati in February, nine residents of the two counties were present: George Graves, O'Dell Sanders, John McFerren, Rev. June Dowdy, Mrs. Betty Douglass, Countee Wilkes, Dudley Sanders, Jesse Jones, Mr. Bowles. They participated in the proceedings, were in agreement with the corporate decisions, and are actively engaged in helping Operation Freedom to function.

Richard Haley, who has been living in these counties for several weeks as CORE'S Tennessee representative, and who was present at the organizing meeting in Cincinnati, has consented to become the liaison person between the two counties and the three-person committee of Operation Freedom. On the basis of the questionnaires which are coming in, county committees in consulta-

tion with Mr. Haley will make requests in the order of need. Operation Freedom will have final decision and will write checks to the individuals on the basis of money available at the time.

OPERATION FREEDOM IS WORKING

Operation Freedom is beginning now to loan at the rate of 2% interest. Those receiving loans sign notes stating their intention and purpose to pay; and their crops are collateral. Where possible all loans are secured by land, houses or equipment. However, Operation Freedom will not foreclose on crops or possessions. Though it is the earnest intention of both the farmers and Operation Freedom to repay loans, such uncertainties as lie in this situation make it impossible to give an absolute guarantee of repayment. In the midst of great deprivation, lack of freedom and unknown futures in these counties, we must all proceed in the spirit of faith and mutual trust.

\$250,000 IS NEEDED IN TENNESSEE NOW

Planting season is here. Almost all of the people involved in the boycotts are farmers. Approaching spring made them sharply aware that without their customary crop loans they would not be able to raise a crop. To get money in the spring for planting and living until harvest and to pay back in the fall is standard procedure throughout the south, and something these farmers have done each year. But this year when they went to the banks, the banks said NO. Somebody has to say YES.

Because government loan agencies work through local county officials, and because the local officials and their backers are determined to drive Negroes out, no help from the Red Cross or Federal agencies has been or is likely to be available. As far as can be determined, Operation Freedom is the only group effort which exists for raising money to assure planting of crops this year.

Of all the needs in these counties at the present time, crop loans are the most urgent. \$250,000 is needed. During and following the planting season there will be a continuing and constant need of loans from Operation Freedom to avoid foreclosures on property and equipment.

FARM OWNERS, RENTERS, SHARECROPPERS - ALL NEED CROP MONEY

Many Negroes own their land. They are not affected by possible evictions, except where they may be called upon to house some of the evictees. But the boycotts, which have come to be more serious economically than the evictions, do affect them. They cannot plant unless loans to purchase seed and fertilizer are made available.

(Continued on next page)

detach and mail to OPERATION FREEDOM, c/o Rev. Maurice F. McCrackin,
1111 Dayton St., Cincinnati 14, Ohio (MA 1-3784)

I wish to participate in OPERATION FREEDOM. I/we enclose check for \$ _____

Please consider this ☐ a gift ☐ a loan to the revolving loan fund.

If you are loaning money to the fund (with the understanding that there is no absolute guarantee of its return) please fill out the following:

- ☐ This loan is for an indefinite period of time
☐ I would like this loan repaid in _____ years

Name _____

Address _____

Date _____ Remarks: _____

Boycotts have cut off all former sources of loan money to those who registered. Renters who registered are, therefore, also unable to plant. Even if the court decides in favor of the white landowners, the only hope these renters have of feeding and clothing their families during the next year lies in their being able to put in a crop. Should the decision be in favor of the white landowners, both renters and sharecroppers will need money to farm whatever land can be made available by Negro landowners in these two counties.

WHAT READERS OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET CAN DO

Some things you can do to help are: (1) Fill out the blank, sending your own gift and/or loan. (2) Order more copies of this folder from the address of Operation Freedom (it will be helpful if you can help pay for these at the rate of \$2 for 100). (3) Circulate this folder with a covering letter of your own to a selected list of contacts. (4) Send to address of Operation Freedom for one of the records - THEY CHOSE FREEDOM - playing it for groups. Pass out copies of this folder; and don't forget to pass the hat. (5) Suggest to churches in your area that they have an "Operation Freedom" Sunday, making it a fund-raising day for the two counties. (6) With one or two others you may interest, announce a sacrificial meal, sending proceeds to the fund. (7) Help to form in your area a local group of Operation Freedom, sending suggestions as well as gifts and loans to Operation Freedom.

OFFICERS OF OPERATION FREEDOM

Rev. Clarence T. R. Nelson, chairman
Prof. David Kettler, vice chairman
Rev. L. Richard Hudson, secretary
Rev. Maurice F. McCrackin, treasurer

Members of Coordinating Committee

the officers and	Virgie Hortenstine
Mrs. Ella Baker	Rev. M. J. Mangham
Gladys Bonner	Eugene V. Martin
Anne Braden	William Mason
Rabbi Stanley R. Brav	W. S. McIntosh
Ernest Bromley	Rev. William K. Messmer
Rev. Lewis H. Deer	Garnell Rosemond
Rev. C. E. Drummer	Dusky Smith
Rabbi Albert Goldman	

March 1961

OPERATION FREEDOM

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Cincinnati 14, Ohio