

SEGREGATION, HARRASSMENT, AND ARREST FOR NEGRO CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE

Rev. John E. Cameron is the first Negro to run for Congress in Mississippi's 5th Congressional District since Reconstruction. In attempting to play a full civic role in his own community of Hattiesburg, Rev. Cameron has had to face:

SEGREGATION:

On April 4, Rev. Cameron tried to attend a public legislative forum. The forum was originally scheduled for an unsegregated courtroom in the annex of the Forrest County Courthouse. After Rev. Cameron and a secretary and two white ministers accompanying him were seated, however, the chairman of the forum entered and said that the forum was too crowded and would be moved to the main courtroom in the Courthouse. The main courtroom is segregated.

When Rev. Cameron and his party attempted to enter the second hall, they were barred from the floor of the courtroom and told that they must sit in the balcony. Rev. Cameron refused to accept this segregated seating, and asked to see the chairman of the forum. The chairman refused to come out to see Rev. Cameron or to allow the latter to come in to see him. When one of the white ministers went in to talk with the chairman, he was threatened with arrest if he did not either sit down immediately or leave.

Rev. Cameron said: "I refuse to go upstairs and segregate myself from the other members of this public legislative forum," and left the Courthouse.

HARRASSMENT:

Rev. Cameron is constantly followed by police cars as he moves around Hattiesburg. This harrassment intimidates Negroes whom Rev. Cameron tries to approach in his Congressional campaign.

On the night of April 3, Rev. Cameron was stopped by Officer Hill of the Hattiesburg Police Department. The first thing the officer said was, "I hope you don't have your license." Rev. Cameron replied that he was sure the officer hoped for this, but that he was not so foolish as to be that careless in Hattiesburg. The officer let him go.

ARREST:

Since January 22, 1964, Hattiesburg Negroes had maintained a picket line at the Forrest County Courthouse as part of a campaign for voting rights. Late in the afternoon on April 9th they were told they could no longer picket, and when they returned on the morning of April 10 police arrested 43 picketers. Rev. Cameron and 7 white ministers from various Northern states were among those arrested.

The picketers were arrested under a new anti-picketing law pushed through the Mississippi legislature to combat picketing activities in such places as Hattiesburg. The picketers have been peaceful and they have accepted a limited area at the Courthouse in which to picket. Moreover, their cause is just -- Forrest County Registrar, Theron C. Lynn is under Federal indictment for refusing to register Negroes. Though the Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful demonstration and the right of all citizens to vote, even a candidate for Congress can be arrested for asserting these rights if he is a Negro in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.