

Mississippi State Dept. Of Health

Box 1329 Jackson, Miss

Jan 31, 1964

To all Freedom Democrats

I've prepared a short report on the first depositions being taken so that in places where depositions aren't being taken until later this week or next have an idea of what's been going on.

The first depositions were taken on Thurs. in Natchez and were followed by depositions on Fri. in Jackson. In both places the opposition was present with a full team of lawyers and a congressman of the District (John Bell Williams sat through the Natchez hearings on Thurs. in the COJO office and then spent the next two days, from beginning to end at the Jackson hearing). In Natchez we had friendly witnesses and the opposition did cross-examine. The pattern of the cross examination for local people stressed the 1901 election: were you refused the right to register and vote for the election under contest, did you have trouble registering to vote within the last year, were you excluded from a Democratic precinct meeting, did you vote in the primary. Most of the questioning was geared toward showing that this election was on the up and up. It is their argument that the 5 Congressmen did not violate any election procedure, were the valid candidates of their parties and therefore are entitled to sit in Congress. They maintain that they knew nothing about Negroes not being able to register and vote and that they themselves did not prevent anyone from voting etc. and therefore they have a right to sit in Congress.

When they cross examined a staff member they asked her where she was from and since she was from N.Y. how did she know about Miss. She explained that she had been living here for a while and that many people had told her about the state and she had heard about it for years, for example in the Martin Luther King Murder. They then asked how she would feel if they went to N.Y. and heard that Negroes were brutalizing whites. She told them that if they believed it she hoped that they would sit on their convictions and begin to work to legally eliminate it, they then shut-up.

The hearings in Jackson were somewhat different because they were of unfriendly witnesses, Joe T. Patterson, Attorney General, Heber Lauer, Secretary of State, Robert Foreman, editor of the Citizen, director of the Citizen's Council Forum, and public relations director of the Citizens Councils of Mississippi. In all three cases our lawyers had to leave out of them, for example Horton Stavis asked Patterson a series of questions about denial of the right for Negroes to register and vote:

(S-Stavis) (A-Patterson)

- S. Did you defend the county registrars when voting suits were brought by the Justice Dept.
- A. Yes
- S. Will then does your office make an investigation into whether the charges brought by the government are true
- A. No
- S. You or your office has defended the county registrars in the following cases (he then named 60 counties where there have been voting suits)
- A. Yes
- S. Did you ever make an investigation into the charges that Negroes are denied the right to register and vote.
- A. No
- S. You mean you just go to the registrars defense without investigating the charges
- A. Yes
- S. In in any of the 60 Counties where there have been voting suits do you know of one single act of discrimination against Negroes.
- A. There are suits in all 82 counties, under the general suit of the United States against Miss., but there are just charges the Justice Dept't has made they haven't been proved.

- S. well, as the chief law enforcement officer of the state did you ever investigate to see if they were true.
- P. I told you I have never made any such investigation nor do I know of one single case in which Negroes have been discriminated against.

According to Joe Patterson and other members of the state government all is peace and quite in Mississippi and everyone is happy, or if there are any problems they certainly don't know of them.

Mrs. Ruffin of the Laurel F.D.I. will be making a full report on the Jackson hearings which will be sent out.

Freedom

Theresa Del Russo
Theresa Del Russo, for [initials]

P.S. Don't forget, the next state meeting of the JDR will be in Jackson Sun. Feb. 21, at 1:00 p.m.