

APR 24 1964

*File
Walker
Sumner*

Dear Sir:

This is one of a continuing series of reports we are issuing on Mississippi. The situation in Mississippi is serious, and we feel these reports require your careful attention. We also need your help. Whenever possible, these reports should be duplicated for distribution to local press, radio and television stations, government officials, church groups, businessmen's organizations, college political groups, and even personal friends. In certain instances, more specific help will be needed. Many of these reports will deal with particular situations, sometimes emergency situations, in which specific aid will be needed -- requesting action from government officials, contacting legal firms, helping arrange for bail money, or even for food and clothing. Sometimes it will be apparent what actions are needed. Sometimes it will be advisable to contact our office directly. Hopefully, through these reports, the realization will grow that poverty and danger are the constant factors in Mississippi -- and that FREEDOM cannot come without your help.

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NB: This report requires especially careful attention. The program of the Freedom Democratic Party has many parts, and it is important to understand how these various activities fit together. It is even more important to realize that these campaigns are not simply four more political campaigns in a year of politics. They are the focus for what is in fact a revolution -- the struggle for political and economic freedom by the Negroes of Mississippi, and by extension of Negroes throughout the South. These candidates are running not only for national office, but to lead their people in a difficult and lengthy struggle on the local and regional level. As the report on harrassment of Rev. Cameron indicates, this program will not be easy to accomplish and will not be free from actual physical danger for the individuals involved.

The needs of these candidates are almost unlimited. They need first and foremost national publicity, so that the effort they are undertaking will not go unnoticed. COFO will be happy to supply more detailed information concerning the candidates, to arrange interviews, or to help members of the press, radio, and television to accompany the candidates in their campaigns. The campaigns, as well as all other phases of the COFO political program, need material support from national church, civil rights, and political affairs organizations. But beyond all this there is a more basic need. The candidates, and those who work with them, need Freedom -- Freedom to live and work and campaign as people live and work and campaign in other parts of the country. Ultimately, this is the responsibility of the entire nation. Only through the concern and actions of national political and judicial officials can Freedom be ensured.

SEGREGATION, HARRASSMENT, AND ARREST FOR NEGRO CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE

Rev. John E. Cameron is the first Negro to run for Congress in Mississippi 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.

FREEDOM CANDIDATES

MISSISSIPPI

For the first time in this century, four Negroes are candidates for national office from Mississippi. One is a candidate for the Senate and three for the House of Representatives.

The four campaigns are being coordinated under the auspices of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella civil rights organization in Mississippi comprising the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), CORE, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the NAACP.

All four candidates are entered in the regular Democratic primary in Mississippi to be held June 2. They are running on what is being called the FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY. If they are defeated in the Democratic party, they will be able to continue their campaigns as Independents in the General Election in November.

The candidacy of the Freedom Candidates is a direct challenge to the lily-white one-party political structure of the state. Only 28,000 or 6.6% of Mississippi's 422,000 Negroes of voting age have been registered to vote. 525,000 whites are registered voters.

All the Freedom Candidates will make Negro voting rights one of the basic issues of their campaigns. The campaigns themselves will serve as the focus for Voter Registration activities by COFO during the coming months.

For those not allowed to register on the official books, there will be a separate program: FREEDOM REGISTRATION. The Freedom Democratic Party has set up its own unofficial voter registration books for the purpose of registering as many as possible of Mississippi's 400,000 disenfranchised Negroes. These books, known as Freedom Registration Books, will be managed by Freedom Registrars appointed by COFO in every county. The Freedom Registrars will have the power to appoint deputy registrars to aid them in covering the county to provide every Negro with the opportunity to register to vote.

Freedom Registration has several purposes. First, it will serve as a mechanism through which Negroes can organize across the state. Secondly, it will be the focus of attempts to get Negroes registered on the official county books.

Thirdly, Freedom Registration will form the basis for FREEDOM ELECTIONS to be held at the same time as the official

elections in June and November. In the Freedom Elections, the only qualifications will be that voters are 21 or over, residents of the state, and registered on the Freedom Registration Books before the election. Whites as well as Negroes will be allowed to vote. Democratic and Republican candidates will be listed together with Freedom Democratic Candidates.

Through Freedom Registration and the Freedom Elections, it will be made clear that thousands of Negroes who are denied the right to vote in the official elections would do so if they could. On this basis, the seating of successful Republican and Democratic candidates will be challenged in Congress and in the Federal Courts on the grounds that a significant portion of the voting-age population has been denied the right to vote because of color or race.

Thus, the Freedom Candidates will serve not only to bring the issues to the people of Mississippi, dramatize voter discrimination, and the atmosphere of harrassment and resistance by the official state apparatus, but will serve as a basis for challenging the rights of the incumbents to assume their seats in Congress.

As a further part of its political program, the Freedom Democratic Party will send a FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC DELEGATION to the National Democratic Convention at Atlantic City in August.

The Freedom Candidates will serve as the titular heads of the Freedom Democratic Delegation. Other delegates will be chosen through a series of meetings on the precinct, county, district, and state levels just as in the regular Mississippi Democratic Party. Unlike the regular party machinery, however, which is all-white, exclusive, and often dominated by White Citizens Council members, Freedom Delegates will be chosen in open meetings in which all registered voters (whether official or Freedom registered), Negroes and whites alike, will be allowed to participate.

At the National Convention, the Freedom Democratic Delegation will attempt to have the Regular Democratic Delegation unseated and the Freedom Delegation seated in its place. It will do this on the grounds that the Regular Democratic Delegation was chosen by undemocratic means and that the Democratic Party of Mississippi has been disloyal to the National Democratic Party.

The Regular Mississippi Democratic Party split with the National Democratic Party in 1960. It did not support the National Democratic Ticket selected by the National Convention: John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. It also refused to support the platform adopted by the National

Convention. The Regular Mississippi Democratic Party candidates in the gubernatorial race of 1963 told the voters that the Mississippi Democratic Party stands for white supremacy and against Negro voting power. The principles of the National Democratic Party make it clear that a State party which behaves in the manner of the Mississippi Democratic Party stands in violation of National Party policy. This is sufficient grounds, according to National Democratic Party rules, to withdraw recognition of the State party.

The Freedom Democratic Delegation will be pledged to support the National Democratic Ticket and the National Democratic Platform chosen at the National Democratic Convention -- as well as being pledged to work for the full and equal rights of all Americans.

FREEDOM CANDIDATES: Below are brief biographical sketches and campaigning programs for the four Freedom Candidates.

MRS. FANNIE LOU HAMER --- running in the 2nd Congressional District against Rep. Jamie Whitten, Chairman of the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Agriculture.

Mrs. Hamer, 47, comes from Sunflower County, the home of James Eastland, where Negroes are 69% of the population. She is the wife of Perry Hamer, a cotton gin worker in Ruleville. Until 1962, the Hamers had lived for 16 years on a plantation four miles from Ruleville. On August 31 of that year, the day Mrs. Hamer registered to vote, they were told they would have to leave the plantation immediately.

Mrs. Hamer began working with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in December 1962 and has been one of the most active workers in the state on Voter Registration. On June 9, 1963, while returning from a SNCC workshop, she was arrested in Winona, Miss., and brutally beaten with a blackjack while in jail. Mrs. Hamer opened her campaign in Ruleville on March 21. She hopes to use her campaign to articulate the grievances of Mississippi's Negroes, particularly in the cotton-rich Delta, the 2nd Congressional District, where Negroes are a clear majority (59%) of the population. Mrs. Hamer constantly tells her audiences that she is only saying "what you have been thinking all along."

But Mrs. Hamer plans to direct her campaign to whites as well as Negroes. It is her thesis that all Mississippians, white and Negro alike, are victims of the all-white, one-party power structure of the state. In her campaign, she explains how Jamie Whitten, from his position on the House Appropriations Sub-Committee on Agriculture, killed a bill to train 2400 tractor drivers. Six hundred of those to be trained were white.

Mrs. Hamer is presently ill in Ruleville (the nearest doctor is 10 miles away). Her condition is provoked and made more serious by after effects of the 1963 beating, from which she has never fully recovered.

JAMES MONROE HOUSTON --- candidate from the 3rd Congressional District against Robert Bell Williams, second in command on the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee.

Mr. Houston, 74 years old, is a retired machinist from Vicksburg, member of the NAACP for over 20 years. He was arrested in 1934 for participation in a rural district meeting called to discuss the new Roosevelt programs. He was arrested again in Jackson in 1963 while attempting to march from a Methodist church to City Hall. In his opening campaign speech in Vicksburg on April 5, Mr. Houston told a crowd of 200-300 people that he would use his campaign to show what conditions for Negroes in Mississippi are really like. He claimed active support in all fourteen of the 3rd District's counties and said that he would represent all the people in the District if elected. For this reason, he said, his election would restore honor and dignity to the state of Mississippi.

REV. JOHN E. CAMERON --- candidate for the seat of William Meyers Colmer, second in command of the House Rules Committee, from the 5th Congressional District.

Rev. Cameron, 31, opened his campaign in Hattiesburg on March 26, addressing an audience of approximately 200 from the back of an open truck. His campaign will stress jobs, education, and citizenship rights for Negroes. In Biloxi, on April 4, Rev. Cameron called on both state and federal governments to provide training for unskilled laborers so that they may qualify for fulltime and rewarding employment. He stressed the importance of a candidate running in the 5th Congressional District who would represent the entire population of the district, rather than only one racial group.

Rev. Cameron is a former President of the National Baptist Student Union (1954-55), and holds a B.S. degree from Rust College and a Bachelor of Theology from American Baptist Theological Seminary. He is a member of the NAACP and a Friend of SNCC.

On April 4, Rev. Cameron was refused entrance to a public forum in Hattiesburg unless he agreed to sit in a section reserved for Negroes. A white minister with Rev. Cameron was threatened with arrest for attempting to discuss the matter with the Chairman of the forum. At present, Rev. Cameron is in jail, one of 66 people arrested in Hattiesburg April 9-10 under Mississippi's new anti-picketing law.

MRS. VICTORIA JACKSON GRAY --- candidate for Senate against John Stennis. Mrs. Gray, 37, of Hattiesburg, is the mother of three children. She was one of the first Negroes to register in Forrest County, where Registrar Theron C. Lynn is under Federal indictment for refusing to register Negroes on an equal basis with whites.

In an opening campaign statement given to the press April Mrs. Gray stressed that "Unemployment, Automation, Inadequate Housing, Health Care, Education, and Rural Development are the real issues in Mississippi, not 'States Rights' or 'Federal Encroachment'." Mrs. Gray's own emphasis during the campaign will be on the problems of education faced by Negroes in the state.

April 12, 1964