

## HOW NEGRO DEMOCRATS FARED: A SUMMARY VIEW

NOTE: This report is abstracted from a larger document which contains sworn statements attesting to the facts here presented. Copies of this pamphlet can be obtained by mailing two self-addressed stamped envelopes to Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, P.O. Box 2896, Jackson, Mississippi.

This past June, Negroes in several parts of the state attempted to attend precinct meetings of the Mississippi Democratic Party. These meetings, in which all registered voters are theoretically entitled to participate, form the base of a pyramid which culminates in the State Convention. It is in the course of this series of meetings that state party officials and National Convention delegates are elected. In this Presidential election year, the Negro Democrats sought to insure that the state party would remain loyal to the candidates of the National Democratic Party in November. To accomplish this, they pressed for the election of delegates who shared their views, as well as for the adoption of resolutions affirming loyalty to the national ticket.

The amount of Negro activity in the precinct meetings was sharply circumscribed at the outset by the outstanding fact of Mississippi politics: the massive disfranchisement of Negro voters. The climate of fear that pervades the state acted as a further check. A sworn affidavit from a resident of Neshoba County, for example, explains that no Negroes went to precinct meetings there "because it was impossible...to make the attempt...without suffering great economic and physical harm." (Their fears were given graphic point a week later when three civil rights workers disappeared after being released from Neshoba County jail).

The record that follows, therefore, [concerns only a few of the state's 1800 precincts.] But the story it tells is clear nonetheless. The documentation upon which this report is based demonstrates that the refusal to countenance Negro participation in the affairs of the Mississippi Democratic Party is widespread throughout the state; it shows further that the state party's alienation from the national party is deep and pervasive.

In [eight precincts,] Negroes went to their polling places before 10:00 A.M. (the legally-appointed place and time for the meeting) and were unable to find any evidence of a meeting. Requests for information addressed to public officials at these locations were unavailing: in some cases the questioners were told that no one knew of any

meeting; in others they were told that the meeting had already been held, despite the fact that they had been in attendance from before 10:00 A.M. until well after. The precincts in question were:

- 2 - Ruleville, in Sunflower County
- 2 - Southeast precinct of Greenwood, in Leflore County
- 2 - 6th, 7th, and 9th precincts of Meridian in Lauderdale County
- 2 - West precinct of Canton, in Madison County
- 2 - Courtland precinct of Batesville in Panola County
- 2 - Precinct 4 of Thornton in Holmes County

In three places, Negroes found the precinct meetings but were still excluded from participating. In Hattiesburg, most of the Negroes were ousted for not having paid their poll taxes (despite the recently-passed Constitutional amendment on the subject). The precincts were:

- 2 - Precinct 5 in Tchula, in Holmes County
- 4 - Precinct 8 of Meridian in Lauderdale County
- 5 - Library precinct of Hattiesburg in Forrest County

- 3 - In other precincts, notably in Jackson, Negroes were allowed to participate, although in several cases white voters stalled the meetings until well past 10:00 A.M. in an effort to turn out enough additional white voters to offset an unexpectedly large Negro turnout. However, even where they were allowed to vote, Negro Democrats were rarely given the opportunity to present and argue for their resolution on party loyalty. And with only one exception, [that of the 3rd precinct
- 2 - of Greenville in Washington County,] the white majorities at the various meetings overwhelmingly voted down the resolution, generally expressing their disaffection from the National Party in doing so.

It is treatment of this sort which has impelled many Mississippi Democrats to join together in a Freedom Democratic Party which will be open to all citizens of the state, and which will fulfill its obligations to the national party of which it expects to be a part.