

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee  
6 Raymond St. N.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia

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### WE WANT THE VOTE

#### INTRODUCTION--

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has been working in the rural black belt South since the summer of 1961. In these four years, field secretaries of SNCC have lived and worked with the most oppressed and disenfranchised people in the country.

For four years we have organized local people to build their own associations--for voting rights and better living conditions--so that they might begin to have some control over decisions affecting their own lives. In those four years, too, we have learned a great deal about the effectiveness of federal laws and voting suits in correcting injustice and oppression.

1) There is still nearly total denial of voting rights in over 400 rural counties and widespread denial in Southern urban centers. Less than 5,000 Negro Mississippians out of an eligible 450,000 have been added to the voting rolls in the last ten years. This is the typical pace in Black Belt areas.

2) Three civil rights bills have been passed in the last eight years. Each had a section that was supposed to destroy the barriers to Negro voter registration. All failed.

3) Over 70 federal court suits around the right to vote have been filed by the Justice Department since 1957. Only a handful were ever resolved and those resolved had little force in aiding large numbers of people to register.

The residents of the Black Belt cannot tolerate another piece of legislation which does not cleanly break the stranglehold of segregation on the voting procedures and election process. Any new voting must do that!

We urge, therefore, that you support the following amendments to strengthen the proposed 1965 voting bill:

#### FREE ELECTIONS--

The most important amendment to the President's voting bill should be a provision requiring new elections no sooner than six and no later than nine months after the appointment of federal registrars in all areas affected by the bill.

We believe that the precedent for this action is clear and that the constitutional authority of the 15th amendment is sufficiently broad to empower Congress to call for free elections. The Supreme Court has ruled in the reapportionment cases that whenever the value of votes in different districts is unbalanced and unequal, whether because of gerrymandering or population shifts, new elections must be held following a more equitable and democratic reapportionment of districts.

This principle should be applied where there has been systematic and illegal disenfranchisement of huge numbers of people in the South, thereby keeping them from any participation in previous elections.

#### WHY DO WE CALL FOR NEW AND FREE ELECTIONS?

In many of the states affected by the bill, elections will not be held for the next three or four years:

1) In Alabama the terms of all state and some county officials will not expire until November 1966. All others expire in 1968.

2) Georgia county officers will not stand for election until November 1968.

3) The Louisiana general election for county officials will be held in April of 1968.

4) Mississippi county and state officials are re-elected in August of 1967. City officials are elected in May and June of 1965. Mayors and police chiefs who have sanctioned intimidation and brutality will thus be elected to four year terms just as the corrective legislation is passed by Congress.

Will a bill without provisions for new elections in Neshoba County, Mississippi be effective if local law enforcement remains in the hands of Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Sheriff Price for four more years?

We must also urge that a provision be added which insures that Negro voters may place candidates of their choice on the ballot. Attempts by the Freedom Democratic Party in Mississippi to place candidates on the official ballot in November of 1964 were unsuccessful even though the FDP obtained the number of signatures necessary under the election laws.

Can sufficient numbers be registered within six to nine months after the federal registrar is appointed? Yes. With simple registration procedures and adequate personnel, hundreds of people can be registered each day. The mere fact that new and free elections are to be held at a fixed time means that Negroes will see that their votes will count in getting rid of the Sheriff Clarks and their posses.

#### PROTECTION FROM INTIMIDATION--

The problem of intimidation is not dealt with adequately in the proposed bill. The sections on intimidation apply only to those officials who interfere directly with the actual voting or registration procedure. Nowhere is there protection for Negro citizens against economic intimidation--firing from jobs, cutting off welfare checks, withdrawing surplus food commodity allotments, for example.

Nor is there any penalty for intimidation which takes the form of beatings, bomb threats, killing by local white racists. This kind of terror is a matter of record. People who are involved in voter registration activity beyond the act of walking to the courthouse must also be protected.

We urge two steps: First, we suggest that anyone receiving federal grants or loans (farm support monies, government loans, etc.) and who is involved in such acts of intimidation be ineligible for receipt of such funds for a period of two years. Second, we urge stronger and broader criminal penalty sections for the bill.

#### ELIMINATION OF THE POLL TAX--

SNCC joins with 70 other organizations in the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in demanding that all poll taxes be abolished.

#### BROADENED COVERAGE FOR THE BILL--

The present proposed bill does not cover Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, parts of North Carolina and Texas. We support a section as suggested by Congressman Lindsay from New York City which would empower the President to appoint Federal registrars to any area where 50 people submit evidence that they have been denied the right to vote.

We believe that the people who have been victimized should be given an opportunity to petition their government directly for a redress of grievances. The initiative should be in the hands of the people and not dependent on political circumstances or complicated bureaucratic procedures.

#### WHAT CAN YOU DO?--

We don't have much time before Congress acts. Please do the following, today:

- 1) Write or wire your Congressman. Urge them to argue for: new and free elections, increased protection, broadened coverage, elimination of the poll tax.
- 2) Contact your friends and associates to lobby for a stronger bill.
- 3) Send a contribution today to help support SNCC's voter registration and political organizing work in the rural South.