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May 7, 1965

Dear Friends of SNCC:

This mailing is about Sunflower County, Mississippi. On April 10 an injunction was issued by the federal district court providing that people who wanted to register and who could pass age and residence requirements and who could read and write should be registered. The injunction, issued by U.S. District Judge Claude Clayton, ordered Registrar Cecil Campbell "not to use any qualification for registering Negroes which is more difficult or complicated than used for whites." The injunction will be in effect for one year.

Judge Clayton ordered the registrar to process no less than four applicants at a time, and to review past applications under the new qualification. A monthly report must be filed with the Justice Department and the Court giving specific reasons for all rejections.

Reaction to the injunction in the white community has been pathetic. While hundreds of Negroes have been registered, whites were also urged to get themselves registered. The Enterprise-Tocsin, Indianola's newspaper (of April 29) declared:

"Many negroes are registering over the county without being required to pass any sort of examination...That is a Court Order, we understand. Now, are we going to allow apathy on our part to turn this decision of electing our City and County officials over to the colored race because they are more interested in who those will run (sic) Cities and County in the future? Well, if you don't open your eyes as to what is going on, that is exactly what is going to happen, and much sooner than you think...If you are qualified to vote and don't accept this responsibility, then you have only yourselves to blame for what happens in future elections. DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN. Go and Register yourself and protect YOUR RIGHT as a GOOD citizens."

Meanwhile, some of the "GOOD" citizens of Sunflower County were busying themselves making making Molotov cocktails for Negro homes and stores and for the Freedom House. They didn't miss their targets. Police harrassment and intimidation of Negroes from white citizens has increased. The white community appears to be using all the old ploys to keep Negroes from registering to vote.

The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party attempted to have municipal elections delayed so that newly registered Negroes could vote in the May elections. Suit was filed in federal court but was turned down by Judge Clayton on technical grounds. MFDP lawyers intend to refile the suit.

We think it is important that all these things be considered in connection with LEJ's voting bill. What good does it do to for Negroes to have the right to vote when there is no police protection from the people who harrass and intimidate them? What good does it do to register if you can't vote in an election?

Is what is happening in Sunflower County, Mississippi, the same thing we can expect to happen in the rest of the black belt when the voting bill is passed?

For Freedom,

Margaret Lauren
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