

THE STATE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Lily-white concept.

The latest statement to indicate the Party's intention to maintain exclusively white control and white participation in Party affairs, came on Sept. 14th.

On that date Mississippi's Governor, Paul Johnson, told a Press conference at Sea Island, Georgia (where he had gone to mull over problems with other Southern Governors) : "there is little indication that there will be any activity toward integrating the next delegation from Mississippi to the National Democratic Convention" ¹

Central to the Party's policies is that one limiting the Negro vote in the State. Johnson referred explicitly to this when he said that illiterates would be refused the right to vote in Mississippi "so long as the Federal Government discriminates against this state on voting qualifications." ²

Johnson was not speaking idly. Early in September the State initiated legal action to disenfranchise voters registered by Federal Registrars. Miss. Attorney General, Joe Patterson, filed injunctions in four Mississippi counties - Madison, Jones, Leflore and Jefferson Davis - to strike illiterates from the State's voting rolls. ³

Gov. Johnson insisted that the injunctions applied equally to black and white illiterates, but the insistence was misplaced since very few whites (on any comparative basis) would be affected.

Its clear, however, that the injunctions would affect large numbers of Negroes. By September 14th between 15,000 and 20,000 illiterates had been registered in the four counties - Madison, Jones, Leflore and Jefferson Davis.

and
What Johnson, /Patterson were doing in effect was to reaffirm their belief in the :

"cherished traditions of Mississippi and our beloved Southland, and pledge anew our allegiance to the true principles of the historic Democratic Party of Mississippi... the party to which we have been devotedly faithful."⁵

Early in the summer a special session of the State Legislature repealed some sections of the 1890 Constitution, with the result (theoretically) of guaranteeing the vote to who could read and write. The Legislature included a provision in the voting legislation that would allow it to re-introduce qualification for would-be voters, at some date in the future.

If Federal enforcement of the 1965 Voting Rights Act proved ineffective then the State (and the Party) would feel free to again write literacy requirements into the Constitution - that, clearly, was the thinking of the State Legislature.

As a tactic it was evidenced by the role of the State's top officials in the weeks preceding the Referendum (Aug. 17th) in which the people of the State were to vote on the Constitutional Amendments.

The leaders in both Houses of the Legislature came out strongly for their acceptance ; no Party functionary of any importance suggested otherwise. What lay Behind such seeming overall support for a piece of legislation which would liberalise voting laws ? The New York Times (June 24th, 1965) suggested :

"The purpose of such legislation in this Segregationist State has been set forth in this manner by Gov. Paul Johnson Jr. : It would put Mississippi in an advantageous/legal position to challenge the Federal Voting Rights Bill, which is designed to remove obstacles to Negro voting."

The State acknowledged there would have to be an increase in the number of registered Negroes, but the State would do the job, not the Federal Government. The price had been paid by the Referendum - as Southern gentlemen they had made their side of the bargain.⁶

But even if there was going to be more Negroes registered the Party had no room for them. Let them vote Democrat and no more.⁷

Gov. Johnson amplified on this subject at Sea Island : "The Negro will probably be casting his vote for the Democratic Party any time he gets a chance. That will probably be his only role at this time."⁸

And then to a matter of the utmost importance ; Johnson replied to a questioner that the Mississippi Democratic Party had made no move to encourage Negro participation in Party affairs.⁹

What he was saying, Mr. Bidwell Adam, chairman of the State Party, put another way on June 1st, 1964. :

"The Mississippi Democratic Party is dedicated first, last and always to segregation. We've always been that way, and I don't see any changes in the foreseeable future.."¹⁰

At 71 Mr. Adam has seen many dogs baying at the moon. The thought occurred to him during the interview (June 1st) when he was asked about Negro candidates for public office : "Did you ever see a baby cry for the moon ? My sons and grandchildren : I've seen them many a time out on the porch reaching for the moon. And I've seen dogs baying at the moon."

One-Party tactics :

The State Party has both denied Negro participation in its affairs (see Appendix A.), and independent political organization.

Two tactics were used by the State in trying to prevent official recognition of a party loyal to the principles and platform of the National Democratic Party.

The State first denied registration of the M.F.D.P. as the official Democratic Party of the State (about July 24th, 1964) on quasi-legal grounds, and then proceeded to file an injunction enjoining the MFDP from using the word "Democratic" in its title. The same injunction also sought to prevent delegates of the MFDP from attending the National Democratic Convention at Atlantic City.

The basis for the first tactic lay in a State law which said that a party which wished to become registered, had to announce its meetings publicly (through the Press and radio)

Heber Ladner, Secretary of State for Mississippi, refused to consider registration of the MFDP as an official party until the first cycle of meetings had been completed. The mass media - newspapers, radio stations - refused to take ads from the MFDP because it was not a registered political party.

In several other respects the State had already moved to quash any attempts at political organizing; and gone one step further in limiting Negro participation on Juries.

Repressing political action.

On June 11th, 1964, Bill number 52057, or the "Criminal Syndicalism" Bill, was signed into law by Gov. Johnson. Passed expressly to combat activities by extreme-right groups and civil rights organizations, the Bill prohibited the teaching or

advocating of "any political or social change" in Mississippi. Any violation would be considered as a felony.

The law has never been used against "white extremist" groups. Only once has it been used as the basis for a criminal charge. Twenty-four Negroes were jailed last November in Magnolia (Pike County), charged with "criminal syndicalism". They had been arrested after they gathered outside the bombed house of a Negro in McComb. The case was removed to Federal court, and has still to be heard.

House Bill 64, or the "Curfew Law" as it was called, passed both Houses and was signed into law, June, 1964. It granted municipalities the right to establish curfews without formally declaring martial law. The Bill was introduced by Rep. Irby Turner, Humphreys County, a member of the Citizens Council.

The Bill passed through both Houses without opposition despite the fact that U.S. courts have held curfews covering adults to be unconstitutional.

Mr. Turner's Bill became a reality this summer. During the first week of September the Mayor of Natchez, Mr. John Nesser, ordered a curfew in the town from 10 in the evening to five in the morning.

The ordinance was ostensibly put into effect to prevent racial conflict, following the bombing of a car belonging to George Metcalf, local president of the N.A.A.C.P.

Acting on the ordinance, units of the National Guard made several arrests while they were stationed in the town. Almost all those arrested were members of the M.F.D.F.

The curfew effectively limited political action in the town ; Negroes were either afraid to come to meetings, or left well before the end so as to get home before 10pm. The fact that the curfew (in a modified form) is still in force after nearly a month, points to its use as political device.

The legal corollary to these "repressive" Bills, was the passage of Bill 937 to limit and reduce the number of Negroes on Mississippi Jury lists. Stripped of the right to organize politically, the State was making it even more certain that the Mississippi Negro would find no relief in the state courts.

The State's reaction to political demonstrations, 1965

The Party's mouthpiece, the Jackson Clarion Ledger and Daily News, responded to the demonstrations in Jackson during June by labelling them as "racial protests".

The Party would not recognize that their essence was political ; predictably its Press congratulated the subsequent actions of the Jackson police and the State Legislature.

The demonstrations turned on the right of the State legislators to meet at all. Since the members had been elected by roughly half the franchise - at the expense of the disenfranchised half - their elections were illegal.

The fact that the Legislature had not to consider changing voting laws was , in itself, secondary.

Both Houses of the Legislature were panicked by the marches on the Capitol into adding further legislation of the books, specifically to forbid picketing of the Capitol, the old Capitol Building, the Governor's Mansion , and other state government offices.

The City, with full connivance of State authorities, arrested a total of more than 1,300 people - the vast majority on an ordinance that the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled, on June 30th, to be unconstitutional.

Accounts of police brutality during the arrests and in jail, have been documented by the Justice Department ;^{for} the final act of the State was to dissuade, if not by arrests, then by beatings and discomfort, anyone who challenged its political structure.

- Mike Higson. Sept.
65.

1. Jackson Clarion Ledger, Sept 14th
2. Ditto.
3. Ditto
4. Jackson Daily News , Sept. 14th.
5. Platform and Principles, Miss. Democratic Party
6. Jackson Clarion Ledger, Oct. 1st - Johnson's rection to further Fed^a Registrars.
- 7 and 8. Jackson Daily News , Sept. 14th.
9. Jackson Daily News, Sept. 14th.

Appendix A. taken from M.F.D.F. brochure, August 1964.

an abstract from a report of last year's precinct and county
Conventions

During June, 1964, the Democratic Party of the State conducted precinct meetings , for the purpose of nominating delegates to the county conventions.

Below is a partial report of what happened to those Negroes who attempted to take part in the precinct meetings.

In eight precincts (in 6 different counties) Negroes went to their polling stations before the time legally designated for the precinct meetings (10.00am) but were unable to find evidence of a meeting. Inquiries addressed to public officials proved futile: some officials denied knowledge of any meeting, others claimed that the meeting had already been held.

In three precincts (in 6 different counties) Negroes found the precinct meetings, but were excluded from the meetings. In Hattiesburg, Negroes were told that they could not participate without poll tax receipts despite the recent Constitutional amendment outlawing such provisions.

In ten precincts (in 5 different counties) Negroes were allowed to attend the meetings, but were restricted in some way from exercising their full rights: some were not allowed to vote, some were not allowed to nominate delegates from the floor, others were not allowed to take part in choosing those who tallied the votes. In several meetings the Negroes were unable to introduce their resolution calling for loyalty to the ational Party , in others they were unable to bring their resolutions to a vote.

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