

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
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SUNFLOWER COUNTY: A PROGRESS REPORT

COURT UPHOLDS DECISION

The decision of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals invalidating last year's municipal elections in the town of Sunflower, Mississippi, and tentatively voiding the elections of five other towns in the county of Sunflower was recently upheld by all seven members of the Court when they refused to rehear the case. Thus, Fifth District Judge, Claud Clayton has only now to order the date and procedures of the new elections in the town of Sunflower and to determine whether the parties that represent the other five towns in the county are proper plaintiffs. MFDP lawyers expect that these parties will be acceptable and that the municipal elections in five other towns in Sunflower County will be voided.

This decision has sparked a hope that reaches far beyond the confines of Sunflower County. The possibility of breaking the hold of racist politics in Mississippi has resulted in an intensive campaign in the town of Sunflower and a new hope for Negroes across the state of Mississippi. MFDP sees a victory in Eastland's backyard as the starting point for the state congressional and senatorial campaigns in the state.

COMMUNITY ACTION

Presently, work is concentrating on the little town of Sunflower because new elections are virtually guaranteed there. In the past three weeks, great strides have been taken in this Delta town of 650 persons. Negroes have registered in sufficient numbers to now make up a voting majority. Members of the MFDP have stated their interest in running for municipal office. Plans are now being made for an informal primary for these candidates. Meetings and workshops are held every evening. Some of these take up Negro History and teach literacy. Others discuss the workings of a municipal government as the candidates want to take office with a through understanding of their duties.

In preparation for the elections, Sunflower MFDP members took a census of the Negro community in order to understand fully the problems of the community and to have an accurate picture of their voting strength. The census reveals how desperately the town needs a representative government that is sensitive to the problems of the community.

It was found that 40% of the Negro families interviewed were on welfare and that the monthly income of this group averaged at \$52.45. 70% of the adults interviewed were unemployed. Of the 30% who were employed, the median income was \$24.33 a week. It was found that the median number of school years completed by Negro adults in the town of Sunflower was 4.8 and finally that of the 133 families interviewed, 43 own or are buying their own homes.

POVERTY PROGRAM PROBLEMS

Despite the efforts of the Negro population of Sunflower County, Congressmen, and friends in the North, the mandate to alleviate the poverty testified to by the results of the census presently lies in the hands of a poverty board that hired the former chief of police of Indianola, Bryce Alexander, to administer the program. During the past two weeks, the county welfare department received a grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to institute a job training program for the poor of the county. The Negro citizens of Sunflower fear that their participation in registration and campaign activities will lessen their chance for a job or job training in these programs administered by the same people that have labored for so long to keep the Negro "in his place."

NO FEDERAL REGISTRARS YET

The need for mobile federal registrars has been raised by MFDP members in Sunflower. The voter registration campaign is now branching out to other towns in the county, and the presence of a federal registrar in the local Negro community would do much to overcome the fear that accompanies registration at the county court house. Further, the presence of federal registrars in each community would make clear the government's interest in the registration of Negro voters and alleviate the difficulties of travel to the county seat, sometimes more than forty miles away. The case for federal registrars is simply illustrated by the December voter registration statistics which show an average of fifteen percent of the Negroes registered in Mississippi counties without federal registrars and an average of forty-three percent in counties with federal registrars. Congressmen have discussed this need with the Attorney General and the results of this meeting appear in the enclosed reprint of Drew Pearson's column.

FEDERAL PROTECTION

The need for federal protection of Negroes involved in the struggle to achieve participation in the political processes of the state of Mississippi has been brought home by the beating of Rev. Clinton Collier, MFDP candidate for Congress from the Fourth Congressional District. This incident illustrates the kind of intimidation that Negroes face when challenging the racist political structure of the state. Now that the last "legal" outlet for discrimination has been closed in Sunflower, there is great fear that the racists will turn to violence.

MFDP CALLS FOR SUPPORT

~~This office would be interested in hearing of any response received as a result of a communication with the Attorney General, Sargent Shriver, or your congressmen, concerning Sunflower.~~

The Sunflower Campaign Committee has said that there is an immediate need for food and children's clothing in Sunflower, to provide an alternative to those participating in the campaign, should they lose their job or welfare check. The Committee asks that the food and children's clothing be sent down during the next six weeks so as not to complicate the final days of the campaign. This office should be notified of any large shipments of food and children's clothing shipped to Sunflower so that adequate preparations can be made. The address of the MFDP Office in Sunflower is PO Box 398, Sunflower, Miss.