

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
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A LETTER FROM MRS. DEVINE

January 7, 1966

Dear MFDP members:

As you know, we have been organized almost 2 years and we are proud of our record as an organization. We are constantly mindful and grateful that we are an outgrowth of COFO which did more in 4 years for human rights and dignity than any other organized group in the country.

What was accomplished in the state of Mississippi in the last 4 years is more significant than many people in Mississippi could ever dream. MFDP which is not just another civil rights organization, has become the political voice of the people in the state of Mississippi.

We are the only active party concerned with poverty and progress of the people in the state. The conventions and Congressional Challenges through which we expended all of our energies, financial resources, and people makes us proud of our commitments to ourselves and to the people all over the country, for freedom, equality, and dignity. The MFDP should have a membership of 70,000 to 85,000 people because in fact, that many people filled out the freedom registration forms during the freedom vote. Many of these people are now active in forming precinct meetings, county meetings, and district meetings. It was heartening to see 400 people from all over the state gathered in what was the best convention we ever had. If you were present at this meeting--Jan. 2, 1966--you heard reports from the subcommittee chairmen which included recommendations, progress reports, proposals for the '66 program. You also learned that we are running Congressional Candidates in the Congressional Districts and also running a candidate for the Senate. We have also filed a reapportionment suit which was signed by 114 people at the Oct. 3d Statewide Convention. This suit will be heard within the next 6 months.

No one can deny that all of us have been directly involved in one way or another in getting the 26,000 people registered by the federal registrars. The suit filed by the Justice Department will have these 26,000 names added to the county registration books and will be heard in the next few months.

The poll tax suit is now in the courts, and when proven unconstitutional the poll tax will no longer have to be paid. However, during the Christmas and New Years holidays, the Federal Registrars were accepting payment of the poll tax. As you know, the FDP has stated all along that the paying of the poll tax was unconstitutional. With the addition of 4 more counties with federal registrars, it gives us a total of 19 counties with federal registrars now. (These counties are Madison, Leflore, Jeff Davis, Jones, Benton, Clay, Coahoma, Humphreys, Hinds, Neshoba, Jefferson, Desoto, Holmes, Walthall, and now Simpson, Warren, Newton, and Carroll.) The FDP has been demanding and applying pressure to the Justice Department for all 82 counties in the state to have federal registrars. As great as the need is for having federal registrars, the FDP feels that along with the federal registrars, it is definitely necessary that these registrars be mobile, and the FDP is now requesting from Atty Gen Katzenbach that the Federal Registrars that are now in the state of Mississippi become mobile so that the maximum number of people can be registered.

I assume that you have had personal experience with the FDP in ASCS elections, health and welfare problems, cases of harassment and jailings, some people now have problems because of their being evicted from their homes, school desegregation, registration, and the countless problems that have arisen and continue to arise because of our desire to vote.

Many of our problems that we don't have space or time to mention--like COFO, MFDP has to have a central office from which it can service us. When we think of our needs in terms of supplies, buildings, a WATS line that serves the field, subsistence for office personnel, and the numerous other utilities that it takes to run an office--we arrived at a figure of \$2000 per month. We must also keep in mind that we not only have a Washington office but that we could not have progressed as we have without the use of both offices.

If we think in terms of 85000 members, we must also think in terms of \$85000. This would mean \$1.00 per person a year, and that we could not only sustain the Washington and Jackson office but we would be able to support the various FDP offices throughout the state that are now in need of such supplies as typewriters, paper, stencils, mimeograph machines, and the like.

Many of us have already made our \$1.00 contribution, which has not amounted to more than \$2000. (when we should have \$85000....) I am sure that you understand the problem and the need of the expenses forthcoming in the campaigns and the expenses of operating both offices. Because of the financial slack we have found it necessary to put out a call and appeal to you for financial support. If we are to gain your support it will not be necessary for the FDP to have to eliminate the necessities which are essential to the field. Some counties have made financial commitments of specific amounts and we are in hope that other counties will do the same.

You should use the State Executive Committee more by writing them and informing them of your needs, problems, programs and anything you feel that they should know about, and request of them the action necessary to deal with your programs or problems. You can write the Exec. Comm. in c/o the MFDP, 507½ N. Farish Street, Jackson, and the letters will be forwarded to them.

Freedom,

Mrs. Annie Devine