

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1966.

Government's 'No' To Squatters

Over the past two years a trend has been developing within the civil rights movement in the South toward greater concentration on poverty problems rather than conventional civil rights activity. The trend is most pronounced in the cotton country of Mississippi's delta area where poverty is acute. There, civil rights activities have emboldened many impoverished, illiterate Negroes who once were afraid to speak out. The awakened poor Negro is far more radical in conversation and in planning than the middle-class sit-inner of the early 1960's because his needs are greater and he has less to lose.

Last week these pressures were dramatically in evidence in an incident in Greenville, Miss., in the heart of the Delta.

Since last summer Negroes in the area have been in increasingly dire straits as a result of Federal cutbacks in cotton acreage and increasing automation that have erased farm jobs. Some, who were evicted from plantations after waging an unsuccessful strike for higher wages last year, have taken up residence in tents and shanties at "Strike City" near Greenville.

They had hoped to get through this winter with the help of surplus food under the antipoverty program, from the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity.

But the help never came. The state of Mississippi failed until last weekend to set up a discrimination-free administrative board to qualify for an O.E.O. grant of \$1.6-million for food distribution. And the Department of Agriculture has failed thus far to authorize a planned massive food distribution in Mississippi.

Sub-freezing temperatures over the past few weeks have added to the miseries of the occupants of Strike City. Last week, with the cooperation of civil rights advisers from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the National Council of Churches' Delta Ministry, the Negroes decided to take direct action.

On Monday, about 100 Negroes broke into the military barracks at the deactivated and virtually abandoned Greenville Air Force Base, bringing with them mattresses, woodburning stoves and other implements. "It's a whole lot warmer in here," said one young Negro mother with three children, "a whole lot warmer."

The following day the Federal Government dispatched 140 air policemen under Maj. Gen. R. W. Puryear, commanding general of Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, to evict the squatters. "I assure you that if you leave peacefully I will see that your demands are presented in an official manner to whomever you designate—even the President of the United States," General Puryear told the Negroes. They refused to leave.

The general then sent in his air policemen, many of them Negroes themselves, to remove the squatters. There was a struggle and cries of, "These are your people, man!" "Don't fight for the white folks!" But within a short time, the barracks were cleared. The Negroes, some of whom had to be carried out, were released outside the gates of the base.

WHY WE ARE HERE AT THE GREENVILLE AIR FORCE BASE

We are here because we are hungry and cold and we have no jobs or land. We don't want charity. We are willing to work for ourselves if given a chance.

We are at the Greenville Air Force Base because it is federal property and there are hundreds of empty houses and buildings.

We need those houses and land. We could be trained for jobs in the buildings.

WHAT ARE WE DEMANDING?

1. We demand food. We are here because we are hungry. Our children can't be taught in school because they are hungry. They can't even get the food in school because they have to buy it and don't have the money.

2. We demand jobs. We are here because we have no jobs. Many of us have been thrown off the plantations where we worked for nothing all our lives. We don't want charity. We demand our rights to jobs, so that we can do something with our lives and build us a future.

3. We demand job training. We demand that people be trained for things that they want to do and they be paid while they are being trained.

4. We demand income. We demand that poor people be given an income instead of handouts and food commodities. Until we get an income for our families, we want commodities which are fit to eat. The commodities we get now are old and full of bugs and weevils. We want fresh vegetables, fruits, and meat. We want to decide what foods we want to eat.

The federal government tells us to go directly to the state and county for help, but when we get there they don't know what we're talking about.

5. We demand land. We are here because we don't have land. There are thousands of acres here that the government owns. We say we are supposed to be part of that government. We want the clear and the unclear land and we'll clear the unclear land ourselves.

6. We want "Operation Help" to be stopped. We don't want the Mississippi county boards of supervisors to have another chance to decide whether poor people should get food. We don't recognize these county boards because they don't represent us. We want the Office of Economic Opportunity and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to hire poor people to represent us. We, the poor people, want to distribute the food.

7. We demand that Project Headstart schools be started now. We demand that the Office of Economic Opportunity give us the money they promised us last September so that our children can be taught in the Headstart schools.

We are ready now to ask of President Johnson whose side are you on — the poor people's or the millionaires'?

POOR PEOPLE'S CONFERENCE
January 31, 1966

(Issued from the Greenville Air Force Base)

WRITE TO THE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TODAY in support of the people of the Mississippi Delta asking that federal land in Mississippi be made available to those who need it.

FUNDS ARE DESPERATELY NEEDED to provide food and clothing for the poor, tents and land for the homeless. Make contributions payable to:

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY
802 G Street, S.E.
Washington, D.C.
20003