

TENT CITIES

LOWNDES COUNTY:

In Lowndes County, people are being thrown off the land because they have registered to vote, have voted in the ASCS elections so important to the rural South, and are now working to organize a third political party in their county, the "Panther Party." The Lowndes County Political Organization is composed of Negroes in Lowndes County who are organizing to "take over the county court house." Law in Alabama requires that any political organization can nominate candidates to run for office in the general election by holding a mass meeting at which the nominees are elected. If one or more of their candidates win more than 20% of the vote in the general election, the political organization then becomes a registered party within the county.

It is under these laws that Negroes in the Lowndes County Christian Movement are attempting to organize their own party. If the legal process is followed, there can be no question of the outcome of these elections---Negroes will hold important county offices and have direct control over the immediate circumstances of their day-to-day lives. But, we are certain that not only will the legal process not be followed, -but that people will be harassed, intimidated, even killed.

Lowndes County is the county where 2,240 whites are registered out of an eligible 1900, a county where two people, Mrs. Liuzzo and Jonathan Daniels, were killed in a five-month period in 1965. Lowndes County is 81% Negro, yet Negroes have no power through the vote, and, until this year, no Negroes were registered in the County. Out of 5,122 eligible Negro voters, 1750 are now registered. All are liable to evictions unless they are independent land-owners, ---very few are.

How Tent City Came About: The S. and G. families lived on the Meadows plantation and were two of four Negroes who voted. They were given a month to get off the plantation. Two Negro families who did not register, still live on the plantation. Mrs. G. was kicked off the plantation, she said, not only because she voted, but because SNCC people were coming into her house. All the people are determined to stay in tent city, and are interested in building permanent homes on the land. They are planning to dig a well.

Where Tent City Is: The tent city is on Route 80, just outside of Lowndesboro, in Whitehall township. It is visible from Route 80, about 100 yards off the highway. The seven tents are in a clearing near some pine woods on one side; on the other, a fence separates the clearing from a Negro-owned farm.

Living Conditions: As of last week, three of the seven tents were occupied. Two families are about to move in. There are fifteen people living in the tents now: one family of three people, and two of six each. Each tent has two beds, a fire of some sort, and a gun. Some of the tents have wardrobes and trunks tucked under the beds. None of the tents has an ice box, and the only water available is across a county road in a neighboring farmer's well. Consequently each of the tents has large cauldrons full of water for cooking and drinking. All three families use one outhouse, which was built on the land after the people moved onto it. The brown and green tents are of the army surplus variety; some have holes in the canvas. One tent has a canvas floor, and the other two have wood floors. Mr. S.'s grandson, 4, contracted hepatitis last week.

Communications: One family has a t.v. set. The only other communications outlet is a two-way radio in one of the tents, which is manned by Mr. S.'s teen-age sons (one goes to school while the other works the radio; the next day they switch around). A loud-speaker hook-up allows all the families to hear whatever comes over the two-way radio, which is connected to the Selma office and several Negro farmers. The nearest phone, a party line, is across the county road in another Negro farmer's house.

GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI:

Over 100 Sharecroppers are moving from "strike city" in Greenville, Mississippi this week, 50 miles away to sixty acres of land they're buying near Mayersville in Issaqueena County. The 100 people were the group from the Mississippi Delta that sat-in at the Greenville Air Force base, January 31. After the sharecroppers were evicted from the Air Force base, they were invited to "strike city" by eight families thrown off the land last May. The 100 families, who are joined daily by other displaced plantation workers, hope to build a new community in Issaqueena County.

Sharecroppers forced off land: The sharecroppers were evicted from farms their families had worked for generations because of rapid mechanization of farm work and because black belt Negroes are registering to vote. Mrs. Unita Blackwell, SNCC staff member, said, "This is a freeze out." A Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party spokesman said there is a concentrated effort to get Negroes off the plantation.

Although there has been a large movement of Negroes to the cities during the past twenty-five years, the movement has recently been accelerated by what some term a plan. The Mississippi Employment Security Commission reports that even semi-skilled jobs are on the decline: "Of 26,000 tractor drivers living with their families on Delta plantations, 6,500 will be jobless by spring."

Federal Government Attacked: Desperate, and with no land or jobs, the sharecroppers at a February 1 press conference, declared they "have no government." The people demanded the Federal Government guarantee: "food, jobs, job training, income, land;" they further demanded that Operation Help---the Mississippi state food distribution program---be stopped and that Operation Headstart be initiated. When asked by a reporter if they considered themselves bound by the Federal Government, Mr. Isaac Foster, a resident of Tribbett, Miss., said, "We must start building a new country, with our own laws, our own enforcement...Our goal is leading away from depending on the system for anything. And I would like to say that every poor person that will come is welcome."

Poverty Program Attacked: The Federal Government's poverty program is also under attack by Negro farmers. The median income of Negroes in the Delta is \$456 a year (USDA report, 11/64). A family of five without a breadwinner (or whose breadwinner is unemployed) must live on \$627 a year in general assistance (about \$12 a week). The Federal Government says a family of five making less than \$4,000 is living in poverty. Reverend Arthur Thomas, director of the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches, criticized the Mississippi food distribution program. The program is based "on the untenable assumption that welfare agencies and county boards of supervisors will act in a nondiscriminatory manner..." Striking out at the total poverty program, Mrs. Ida Mae Lawrence said, "You know, we ain't dumb, even if we are poor. We need jobs. We need food. We need houses. But even with the poverty program we ain't got nothing but needs..."

GREEN COUNTY, ALABAMA:

In Green County, Alabama a tent city similar to those in Lowndes Cty., and in Greenville, Miss. was set up recently. Two families, totaling twenty-five persons have already moved into the tent city, and they are expecting others to join them.

NEEDS:

The people in tent city need portable refrigerators, portable toilets, firewood, wood to make floors for the tents, bunk beds, folding beds, non-perishable meats and fruits, non-prescription medical supplies, disinfectants, and toilet articles. If you plan to send articles to any of the tent cities, please notify the Atlanta office first.