

[cc, May 1966]

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

EMERGENCY BULLETIN: PRIMARY ELECTIONS

A recent outbreak of violence in Mississippi has caused grave concern for the fair and open carrying out of the first balloting by a significant number of Mississippi Negroes in this century. Yesterday, a fifteen year old youth was shot in the hip while on the way to an election rally for Rev. Ed King, MFDP candidate for the Democratic nomination from the Third Congressional District. On the same day, a member of the MFDP Executive Committee was beaten by a highway patrolman while on his way to Jackson. In Quitman County, the Klan has reorganized and his distributed leaflets warning Negroes to stay away from the polls. Klan activity has increased in Leflore and Pontotoc Counties. The harassment and arrests of Rev. Clint Collier, MFDP candidate for the Democratic nomination in the Fourth District, has not abated.

Campaigns

This outbreak of violence follows the most vigorous campaign efforts that Mississippi has seen in years. The six MFDP candidates have spoken before citizens' groups across the state. In these speeches the candidates spell out support for such programs as reform of the jury system, reform of welfare laws, immediate integration of the schools, equal opportunities in jobs, extension of Medicare, and control of the poverty program by the poor. The results of the campaigns can be seen in the effective grass roots support of the candidates and an upsurge of both Negro and white registration.

The MFDP candidates in the June 7th primaries are:

U.S. Senate: Rev. Clifton R. Whitley, 32, chaplain and professor at Rust College, Holly Springs. Educated at Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Rev. Whitley was an MFDP delegate to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. The Senate seat is presently held by James O. Eastland.

First Congressional District: Dock Drummond, 76, a retired plumber from Kosciusko. The seat is now held by Rep. Tom Abernathy.

Second Congressional District: Ralthus Hayes, a farmer from Tchula will oppose Rep. Jamie Whitten.

Third Congressional District: Rev. Edwin King, 30, the chaplain at Tougaloo College, is seeking the seat held by John Bell Williams. Rev. King was a delegate to the Atlantic City Convention and is the MFDP's National Committeeman.

Fourth Congressional District: Rev. Clint Collier, 56, is seeking the seat being vacated by Prentiss Walker. Rev. Collier was a public school teacher until he lost his job because of civil rights activity.

Fifth Congressional District; Lawrence Guyot, 26, chairman of the MFDP, is seeking the seat held by William Colmer. Educated at Tougaloo College, Mr. Guyot served as a SNCC field secretary before heading the MFDP.

Legal Attack

The MFDP has asked that the date of the primaries be postponed because so few Negroes have been able to take advantage of the Voting Rights Act and register in sufficient numbers to make the election meaningful. Based on the precedent of the Sunflower decision which voided elections in Senator Eastland's home county, the suit argues that since only 27% of the Negro population is registered, no valid election can take place. The case was argued before the Fifth District Court and appealed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which held a hearing on June 27th and has now asked that both sides file briefs.

Need for Federal Presence

Due to the recent violence in Mississippi and the irregularities of the Alabama primaries, the MFDP is apprehensive about the conduct of the primaries. The Justice Department has been called upon to guarantee federal protection to citizens soon to be casting their votes and to place federal poll watchers in counties that presently have federal examiners. The MFDP has also called upon Senators, Congressmen, and representatives of civil rights and community groups to be present during the June 7th primaries to further guard against voting irregularities.

The MFDP calls upon its friends in the North to join us in Mississippi on election day to serve as poll watchers. (Mississippi law requires only that poll watchers be authorized by a candidate.) If you or your organization would like to serve contact the Jackson MFDP office, 507½ North Farish Street, Jackson, Mississippi, phone (601) 582-9312, or the Washington office, so that proper credentials can be issued.

Further, the MFDP asks that you:

1. Wire Attorney General Katzenbach demanding that federal observers be sent into every county in Mississippi to afford protection for Negro citizens who will be participating for the first time in the electoral process, and secondly demanding that federal poll watchers be sent into every county where this is authorized by the Voting Rights Act and that these people closely scrutinize the conduct of the elections.
2. Wire Chairman John Bailey of the Democratic National Committee demanding that they send a delegation of national Democratic leaders to Mississippi to observe the carrying out of the primary elections that the state Democratic party is administering and that the DNC appeal to the President to use his influence and appropriate powers of the federal government to guarantee open primaries in Mississippi.
3. Wire your Senators and Congressmen asking that they urge the Justice Department to guarantee free and open elections in Mississippi on June 7th.

May 28, 1966