

MFDP News

January
1966

RESNICK HEARS ASCS COMPLAINTS CONGRESSMAN GUEST OF MFDP

Rep. Joseph Resnick (D-NY), in a press conference in Jackson on December 1, announced that he had found so much discrimination in the ASCS elections that he would recommend voiding the results unless ASCS officials did something to correct the irregularities. The press conference, held at the MFDP office in Jackson, was the culmination of the Congressman's two-day fact-finding visit to the state.

Resnick, a member of the House Agriculture Committee, was invited to tour the state and investigate ASCS balloting by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The ASCS elections determine the county boards which distribute price supported acreage among local farmers each year. His trip, he said, was to check on "reports of fraud, intimidation, and contravening the purpose of the ASCS elections. I was not prepared to see how much of it was going on."

Resnick's tour began in Issaquena county, where he talked with farmers who had been refused FHA loans because of civil rights activities. Negro farmers there charged that sending their children to integrated schools, registering to vote, and participating in MFDP or Headstart had resulted in denial of FHA loans. He also found that Negroes were unable to get loans to convert from cotton production, although the federal government is attempting to cut down on cotton growing.

In Washington County, Resnick visited Tribbett, the scene of the MFLU tent city where strikers have been living since April when they were evicted for demanding \$1.25 an hour. More than 100 people live there and plan to remain through the winter.

In Holmes county, the Congressman met with about 100 farmers and their wives to discuss ASCS elections in that county. Upon
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ASCS BALLOTING OVER FARMERS STILL UNREPRESENTED

Despite heavy voting, only 32 MFDP-backed candidates won positions on ASCS community committees in elections held on December 2nd.

In all, 247 Negro candidates supported by MFDP ran for ASCS office in 21 counties in this year's elections. These elections determine delegates who, in convention, select the county committees that administer U.S. Department of Agriculture price supports and crop allotments.

Of the 32 winning movement candidates, 19 won voting positions on community committees and 13 won the non-voting office of alternate. Holmes and Marshall counties reported winning 6 voting delegates each—the greatest number in any county, but not enough to elect a county committeeman at the conventions, which have from 15 to 24 voting members. In Madison county, 4 MFDP-backed candidates were elected delegate; and in Pike, 3 won. The
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THOUSANDS EVICTED IN DELTA

Throughout the Mississippi Delta, sharecroppers and tenant farmers are being evicted from their homes on the large cotton plantations. Approximately 250 families—about 2200 people—have already moved or have been told that they must leave by the first of the year.

The National Council of Churches Delta Ministry estimates that between 10,000 and 12,000 persons will lose their homes and livelihoods this winter. These families are not eligible for Social Security, unemployment compensation, or any state or federal welfare program. The owners are not required to give prior notice or compensation to those who are displaced.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR

XMAS VOLUNTEERS TO CANVASS FOR MFDP

Approximately 100 college students are giving up their Christmas vacations and semester breaks to work on voter registration in Mississippi for the MFDP as a part of the National Student Association's Freedom Christmas project.

NSA, acting as a recruiting agent for MFDP and four civil rights groups, is sending 100 young people to work on MFDP registration drives in December and January. These students will work in established projects in the counties which have federal examiners. They will be directed by county chairmen and MFDP staff.

The project began on December 21, when the students were given a one-day orientation in Jackson. Students were instructed in the provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Mississippi registration law, the background of the MFDP, and safety precautions. They then went to county projects to work for two weeks canvassing to encourage voter registration.

A second group of students will arrive around January 25 to work during their semester break. These students will also go to counties with federal examiners.

The Freedom Christmas program was initiated because any summer drive would come too late to effect the 1966 elections. Under Mississippi law, voters must register two months before primaries and four months before general elections.

Other groups which are using NSA volunteers are CORE, SNCC, SCLC, and NAACP; these volunteers have been assigned to eight Southern states.

Those interested in applying for the January 25th session should write to Freedom Christmas at 2115 S Street NW, Washington, DC, 20008.

INCIDENT SUMMARY . . .

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Bolivar County: On December 9, six crosses were burned around the county — in Rosedale, Beulah, Pace, and Gunnison. Some were out in the county; others were at the homes of active MFDP members.

Holmes County: In Durrant on December 5, leaflets were posted on telephone poles listing the names of Negro parents whose children are attending previously all-white schools.

Lauderdale County: December 14, 15 shots were fired into the home of Mrs. Enotra Clark, MFDP county chairman, whose two children are in previously all-white schools. One of the children was asleep and the other was studying; both were in the front room. One bullet lodged in the mattress and another in the springs where the child was sleeping and another hit the wall over the head of the other girl.

Adams County: Natchez. On December 9, after having been in the city jail for thirty-six days, Sandy Lewis, age 15, was finally released. She had been arrested by city police when she ignored an order to get off the street. The policemen beat her severely. She was sentenced to 95 days and no action was taken to appeal her conviction although the local NAACP promised to handle the case. Three weeks later the MFDP learned that she was still being held and attempted to put up bond for her. The judge, however, refused to accept bond put up on local property. On December 8, an MFDP attorney was called in and he secured her release the following day.

MFDP SPONSORS BLACK CHRISTMAS

Throughout Mississippi, houses were dark and undecorated for the Christmas holidays as the MFDP's "Black Christmas" program came into effect. The program, a selective buying campaign, is taking various forms across the state depending upon local conditions, but it is a state-wide MFDP project.

In most counties, the boycotts have been directed against the downtown white-owned stores with the specific goal of forcing the hiring of Negroes on the same basis as whites. Meridian FDP has singled out the Win-Dixon super markets, one of the city's largest chains, with the demand that Negroes be hired as checkers and cashiers. This boycott has been about 85% effective.

In Natchez, the boycott is a continuation of one called this summer during the period of mass arrests in that city. The boycott, against all downtown stores, is to call for 12 specific demands — including Negro police, use of courtesy titles, integration of public facilities and schools, and fair hiring practices. The boycott has been so successful that the Citizens Council called for a white "buy-in" by Louisiana citizens to counteract its effects.

Several counties have used the boycott as a fund-raising project, asking members to donate to the MFDP what they save by not buying Christmas gifts.

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learning that Negro wives were not given ballots unless they produced proof of eligibility while white women were given ballots upon demand, Resnick phoned the ASCS office manager and demanded that they be given ballots. The people who had been denied ballots then gave their names to the ASCS manager and were told that they would receive ballots in time to participate in the election.

That evening Resnick addressed a mass meeting in Canton. He told the audience of 300 that he had found the same irregularities in Canton as in other counties. He stated that Negroes had been put on the ballot without their knowledge or consent in order to split the Negro vote, that eligible wives had been denied ballots, that ballots had been mailed to whites who were no longer eligible, and that ASCS records were adjusted in order to justify cutting crop allotments for Negroes.

At a press conference the following day, Resnick told newsmen that he had already reported findings by telephone to Washington and that he would discuss the situation with the White House. Besides recommending that immediate action be taken by ASCS to correct the abuses he had discovered, he said that he would call for a non-governmental commission to investigate ASCS election results and to receive complaints of fraud.

In discussing the problem of the estimated 10,000 to 12,000 evictions that will occur during the winter, he said "Nobody in the state seems to care about it other than the MFDP and the National Council of Churches."

Lawrence Guyot, chairman of the MFDP, was with Resnick at the press conference and announced that the party had invited Adam Clayton Powell and Hubert Humphrey to Mississippi as well.

SHOOTING OF CR WORKER
SPARKS FIRST RULEVILLE PICKET

The shooting of Paul Jackson on November 25th by a Negro policeman sparked the first picket line ever held in the Delta town of Ruleville. Jackson, a 26 year-old voter registration worker, was shot for no apparent reason by Officer Willie Martin, according to witnesses in Ruleville. Jackson has now been released from a Jackson hospital where he was taken for aid.

Seven Ruleville citizens presented petitions to Mayor Charles Dorrough protesting the incident and calling for Martin's dismissal.

When the Mayor would neither answer the petition nor meet with the delegation, the group decided to organize a downtown picket line. Their complaints were: the shooting of Jackson, the Mayor's refusal to talk about local problems with members of the Negro community, unfair hiring practices, and segregated public facilities. The picket line, maintained by about 35 demonstrators, also urged Ruleville citizens to participate in the MFDP Black Christmas boycotts.

Almost two weeks after the petition was presented, Mr. Joe McDonald, who had presented the demands, received the following letter: "Dear Joe -- The Mayor and Board of Aldermen in their regular meeting on December 7, 1965, received and rejected the demands of your petition. The Statute provides the method of selecting officers."

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The MFDP has received reports of mass evictions from Bolivar, Issaquena, Quitman, and Tallahatchie counties. At one plantation near Pace in Bolivar county, the owner gave notice to nearly 100 workers by giving them \$10 each and telling them to go to Florida (where the picking season is beginning).

Although many of the first to be evicted have been Negroes active in the civil rights movement and the MFDP, the bulk have been sweeping evictions of the complete unskilled labor force of the larger plantations. The large owners are retaining only their skilled workers -- operators of tractors, cultivators, and cotton picking machinery.

The Mississippi Economic Council, an association of Mississippi planters and businessmen, has been actively encouraging rapid mechanization of cotton production as a means of spurring Negro migration from the state. Fear of increased Negro political power and of organizations like the Freedom Labor Union has caused many planters to shift to mechanized production. In addition, the federal crop allotments for cotton production in Mississippi have been cut by 35% for the 1966 growing season.

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position of alternate was won in DeSoto, Bolivar, Holmes, Madison, Marshall, and Pike counties.

The MFDP is now collecting affidavits from candidates, voters, and poll watchers to substantiate its charges of fraud in the administration of the ASCS balloting. These complaints will back up demands that the Department of Agriculture invalidate the returns and hold new elections.

The most prevalent complaint was that ballots were denied to eligible voters. Under ASCS election regulations, landowners, sharecroppers and tenants and their wives are entitled to vote and run in ASCS elections. In almost all counties, Negro wives were refused ballots. Landlords often refused to give their tenants and sharecroppers the papers necessary to prove eligibility. And in several cases, ballots for sharecroppers were mailed to their landlords rather than to the voters directly.

Local ASCS officials refused to cooperate with Negroes attempting to organize for the elections. In several counties, workers were not permitted to copy lists of eligible voters. In counties where Negroes were nominated by petition, the ASCS committees put other Negroes on the ballot without their consent or knowledge in order to split the Negro vote. Ballots were mailed to whites who were no longer eligible to vote. Poll watchers were not permitted to see the ballots during counting.

Prior to the elections, many Negroes who were active in ASCS were subject to harassment and violence. In Clay county, a house belonging to Vernon Valentine, who had attempted to run for ASCS office, was burned. It had been shot into some 60 times during the summer and fall while it was used as a Freedom House. Also in Clay County, Mrs. Supora Chandler of Pheba, was visited at midnight on December 3rd by five white men who "advised" her not to serve if she was elected. Although she did not withdraw her name, neither she nor any movement candidate was elected in Clay county although Negro farmers make up about 80% of the population.

ASCS BACKGROUND REPORT

ASCS, the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, is one of the most important federal programs in rural Mississippi today. A U.S. Department of Agriculture program for the benefit of farmers, ASCS combines price supports, acreage controls, acreage conversion, and a commodity credit corporation.

The key units in ASCS organization are the farmer-elected county committees which have almost total responsibility for local administration of these programs as they effect local farmers. These county committees determine the size of the farmer's acreage allotments each year, the producer's eligibility for price supports, eligibility for and amount of loans to farmers under the Commodity Credit Corporation. In the words of a Department of Agriculture bulletin, they play the role of "impartial judge in a variety of cases that come under their jurisdiction.

The selection of these powerful county committees depends upon elections held in December of each year. These elections are held on a "community" basis. Each county is divided up into from five to eight communities. The farmers in each community elect three men to the community committee and two non-voting alternates. The community committeemen of each county then meet in convention and elect the three-man county committees which administer the ASCS program. All farmers, landowners, tenants, sharecroppers and their wives are eligible to vote and run in the December elections. Candidates can be nominated by petition or by the out-going county committee. The elections are administered by the ASCS committee of the past year.

Because of the power and importance of the ASCS committees on the local farm economy and the administration of farm programs, MFDP undertook a massive campaign in 21 counties to organize for these elections. MFDP staff and county officers gathered data on the elections, held workshops, and helped Negroes to vote and to run in the elections. For the results of these elections, see the report on page 1 of this newsletter.

The new address for the Washington MFDP Office is:

802 G Street SE

Washington, DC 20003

The telephone number remains (202) 546-4450.