

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 Issaquena 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 Issaquena 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..."