

NEWS RELEASE
 STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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HIGH COURT REFUSES PLEA
 FROM MISSISSIPPI REGISTRAR

WASHINGTON, D. C. - The United States Supreme Court refused this week to review lower court orders compelling a Mississippi registrar to enroll 43 Negroes as voters and to cease discrimination against prospective Negro applicants.

The court let stand a Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision against Forrest County registrar Theron Lynd, charged with civil and criminal contempt.

The United States Department of Justice contends Lynd defied court orders prohibiting racial discrimination against Negro voters. The registrar's attorneys have asked a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals to hold off judgement in the case until the U. S. Supreme Court rules on whether a defendant in such cases is entitled to a jury trial. The test case is that of Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett, charged with criminal contempt for his part in trying to block admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi.

If the appellate panel decides to go ahead without waiting for the higher court's decision and if they sustain the charges, Lynd's attorneys have asked for at least 91 days in jail and a fine of \$301, an appealable sentence.

Lynd's case goes back to 1961, when the Justice Department sued him in Jackson. The Department later won an order from the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals after Federal Judge William Cox failed to issue one. The Supreme Court denied Lynd's appeal on November 5, 1962.

On April 30, 1963, the Department instituted contempt proceedings on the ground that he did not obey the Court of Appeal's order. He was found in civil contempt, ordered to register 43 specific Negroes, to stop requiring Negroes to interpret sections of the state constitution more difficult than those assigned to whites, and to stop rejecting Negroes for errors of their vote applications if they had met certain other requirements. Lynd's appeal of this latest order was denied January 6, 1964.

A Justice Department spokesman said further action against him will be taken when the higher court decides whether he will have a jury trial or not. If he goes to jail on the contempt charges, it will mark the first time a registrar has gone to prison in a civil rights case.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has been conducting a voter registration drive in Forrest County. Only .20% of the voting age Negroes are registered voters there, according to the United States Civil Rights Commission.