

Statement by: SNCC CHAIRMAN JOHN LEWIS  
Re: PASSAGE OF THE GENOCIDE BILL IN MISSISSIPPI

Americans view with horror the Nazi extermination of the Jews. We comfort ourselves that such things can never happen here. Yet, right now the State of Mississippi is preparing legislation which would exterminate the Negro people.

A month ago the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) called to the attention of the nation the Genocide Bill about to be passed by the State Legislature of Mississippi. Here is what happened.

On March 11, the Mississippi House passed a bill making the birth of a second illegitimate child a felony punishable by sterilization or imprisonment.

On April 15, SNCC published a pamphlet entitled "Genocide in Mississippi," charging that the sterilization bill is an attempt by the State of Mississippi either to destroy the Negro people or to drive them from the state.

On May 12, The Judiciary Committee of the Mississippi Senate amended the House bill to remove the sterilization clause and to reduce the possible prison sentences from a maximum of five years to a maximum of six months.

State Senator E. K. Collins told the Senate that the amendments had done away with "all the bad features that shocked the country." The Jackson Clarion-Ledger stated: "Some civil rights groups charged the state with trying to foster a policy designed to wipe out its Negro population."

The bill, as amended, failed to pass the Senate by a vote of 26 to 22. On May 13, supporters of the bill prepared for a second round by distributing mimeographed copies of the SNCC pamphlet, "Genocide in Mississippi," to all members of the Senate and House. Supporters felt that they could sway votes by demonstrating that SNCC opposed the bill. The Memphis Commercial Appeal stated: "Legislators were unwilling to permit their action to be considered as being influenced by the Negro civil rights group." Supporters of the bill were successful. The amended bill was called up for reconsideration and passed by a vote of 30 to 16. Ten senators who had previously voted against the bill, voted for it on reconsideration. Three who had previously voted against the bill, now abstained.

Because it was amended, the bill now goes back to the House for reconsideration. The House, as it did before, can insist on a penalty of sterilization or maximum prison term of five years.

If Negroes in Mississippi were permitted to register in large numbers and then vote, this bill would never have been considered. Instead, an all-white legislature dominated by the White Citizens' Councils, is in the process of legalizing Genocide against the Negro people.

Negroes comprise 40 percent of the state population, and in the Delta counties nearly two-thirds of the population.

The whites who control Mississippi politics and economics can no longer dictate to Negroes as in former years. Negroes all over the state are organizing through the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) - which SNCC supports - to register to vote, to obtain food and clothing, to improve their education, to participate in the political institutions of the state. Right now there are three Negro candidates for U.S. Congress and one for the U.S. Senate. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party will challenge the seating of the regular racist Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention.

For Negroes to assert their Constitutional rights is a direct threat to the Mississippi Way of Life. The Mississippi regular Democratic Party, which controls the state, is attempting to defend that Way of Life with the Genocide Bill.

This is why it is imperative to fight for a strong Civil Rights Bill in Congress and free, representative government in Mississippi.

JOHN LEWIS, SNCC CHAIRMAN

"One Man - One Vote"