

NEWS RELEASE
STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DISCRIMINATION CHARGED AS NEGROES
WIN MISSISSIPPI FARMING ELECTIONS

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI - The United States Department of Agriculture has told the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) complaints charging discrimination and intimidation in county Agricultural Stabilization Committee elections in Mississippi will be investigated.

Joseph M. Robertson, Assistant Secretary for Administration of the Department of Agriculture, told SNCC Chairman John Lewis in a telegram December 4 "all complaints regarding improprieties in the conduct of these elections will be investigated by this department."

Robertson said the Agriculture Department has made "strenuous efforts to assure fair and equitable ASC Community elections in Mississippi."

SNCC workers and workers from the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) helped Negro farmers in twelve Mississippi counties organize to elect some Negroes to the ASC Community Committees, decision and policy making bodies which give extra cotton and other crop allotments to farmers.

In Benton, Bolivar, Clay, Issaquena, Lafayette, Monroe, Neshoba and Warren Counties, farmers voted by mail. In Holmes, Marshall, Madison and Panola Counties, elections were held in special polling places.

ASC Community Committees represent "communities", or small divisions of the farmers in a given county. Each farming county usually has from 3 to 11 communities, composed of one chairman, a vice-chairman, a member and two alternates.

At least five Negroes won ASC Community Committee posts in the December 4 elections. In Camden (Madison County), Negro farmer Luther Honeysucker was elected community chairman and another Madison County Negro farmer was elected an alternate.

In Acona Community in Holmes County, Lanier Smith, a Negro farmer, won as chairman while two other Negroes, Howard Taft Bailey and Eugene Montgomery were elected first and second alternates.

SNCC Chairman Lewis had wired Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman December 3 after eight civil rights workers were arrested in Holly Springs and Canton. Lewis told Freeman in his telegram "the present administration's promises to the Negro people remain only words as long as conditions like these are allowed to exist. (MORE)

Lewis was referring to the following incidents of harrassment:

In Holly Springs, the arrest December 3 of 19-year-old James Batts for false pretenses; the arrest of 23-year-old Stan Boyd for "illègal parking"; the arrest of SNCC worker Frank Cieciora, 25, for impersonating a lawyer; the arrest of 22-year-old Larry Rubin for having "improper lights". Another COFO volunteer, Bob Smith, was jailed here November 30 for "reckless driving" and Boyd was jailed December 1 for "speeding". The recent arrests of civil rights workers were the first in Holly Springs and Marshall County since August 1.

In Canton, Bill Forsyth, SNCC worker William Ware, Madeline McHugh and Thomas Ramsey were ejected from Hawkins Grocery Store, polling place for Community A - Flora in Madison County. Euvester Simpson, 20-year-old Negro SNCC worker from Itta Bena was arrested in Flora for "disturbing the peace in a public place." A white volunteer from Chicago, Ann Darden, was arrested in Community D and held "for investigation." Also jailed were Elayne Delott, 21, for "investigation" and George Raymond, 24, of New Orleans, La., project director in Madison County for "tresspassing." National CORE official Marvin Rich was beaten by two white men after former Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett asked Rich, who is white, "Are you a white man?"

COFO workers reported Negro sharecroppers in some counties did not receive ballots, while white teenagers, ineligible to vote, did. In Benton County, COFO said, as many as 140 eligible Negroes did not receive ballots. In counties where polling places were used instead of mail ballots, large numbers of white plantation owners and large farmers congregated at the polls.

In some counties the mailman who brought the ballots told sharecroppers hey had to fill them out right then and there and give them back to him to be mailed in. In other places, plantation owners told tenants and sharecroppers they had to fill out their ballots in his presence.

The few A.S.C. victories overshadow the fact that in most Delta counties Negroes outnumber whites. In Madison County, Negroes total 72% of the population, yet Negro candidates won in only one out of eight county communities. Negro candidates were entered in six of the counties eight communities.

The A.S.C. Committees, established in 1936 under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, are crucial to small farmers in Mississippi, many of whom depend on cotton acreage allotment for their living. Friday's election of Community Committees means that Negroes will participate in doling out the allotments.

The Chairman of the Community Committees elect County Committees, and County Committees control extra cotton acreage allotment any farmer in that county receives.