

The Political Situation

On June 23, 1964, Ray Raphael, Jesse Davis, and Lyn Hamilton attended the county convention of the Democratic Party of Washington County. The meeting was unannounced. A phone call to the Delta Democrat Times at 9:00 AM did not provide us with the information about the location of the meeting. John Childs, reporter for the Times, told Ray that he had called Doug Wynn, Executive Secretary of the Democratic Party in Washington County, and had not been able to obtain this information either. We went to the County Courthouse where we assumed that the meeting might be held. It was revealed in the afternoon edition of the Times that the confusion regarding the location of the meeting was due to the ban placed on courthouse meetings by Sheriff John Durham. He lifted his ban temporarily because he decided that the convention was "A function of government."

A five man caucus, appointed by Doug Wynn, nominated the following delegates to the state convention: Andre Worthington, Mabry Wigley, W.A.Branton, Curtis Belford, Hainon Miller, Ramsey Russell, Jere B. Nash, SA., D.C.Wynn, George Love, W.B.Waits, Dudley Miller, and Tom Pittman. The alternates nominated were: H.A.Merideth, Jr., Frank Carlton, DeLoach Cope, W.J.Caraway, Joe Oglesby, Doug Gardner, K.J.Sweatt, Leo Stevens, Virgil Sandifer, H.T.Cochran, Benny F.Gresham, and Sidney McGough. The slate was adopted without discussion. Mr.Nash outgoing chairman of the party was named temporary and permanent convention chairman.

The five man caucus also appointed the executive committee of the party. Re-elected were: First district, Tom R. Pittman, Leo Stevens, J.A.Oglesby; Second district, Oney Potter, W.A.Branton, Mabry Wigley; Third district, Jere B.Nash, Doug Wynn, Hainon Miller; Fifth district, C.D.Miller, K.J.Sweatt. New committeemen include: Fourth district,

M.L.McIntyre, Wade E. Fisher, Will Abraham; Fifth district, George Hall.

A move was made for adjournment at which point Ray requested a point of information. He pointed out that the Third precinct had passed a resolution calling for party loyalty which was to be introduced as a resolution to the county convention. He asked if these delegates were present and if so that they might have the floor. None of the delegates were present and the resolution was not introduced.

Later I called all the delegates and alternates from the Third Precinct to find out why they were not present at the county convention. I received the following replies:

Mr. J.B.Arnold, delegate, was not at home. Mrs. Arnold stated that he was no longer residing in Greenville. There was no answer at the Greenwood phone number she gave me.

Mrs. H.C.West, delegate, said that she was not notified of the meeting. She had no idea of the time or place of the meeting.

Judge Emmett Harty, alternate, stated that he wanted no part of this [politics], that he had been elected without his knowledge of consent and that he did not even know whether he would vote on the Democratic ticket. He said that he had informed Doug Wynn of his feelings on this matter.

Mrs. Ira Bethel, alternate, was out of town and had been for about two weeks according to her daughter-in-law (Mrs. Ira Bethel, Jr.)

Affidavits were filed by Ray, Jesse, and Lyn re: the county convention.

The resolution in question ran somewhat as follows (quoted from the Delta Democrat Times):

We as Democrats believe that strong political parties are a necessary part of American Democracy...that the National Democratic Party represents the best interests of the majority of the people of Mississippi...

...that the delegates from this precinct be instructed to go on

record, if they are ultimately selected as delegates to the National Democratic Convention, as supporting the party platform and persons selected to be the party's candidates...

It also asks that the precinct delegation bring the resolution to the county convention, the county to the state, etc.

The above resolution was proposed by Mr. Charles Williams (a Negro member of the Greenville community) at the precinct meeting.

The Bi-Racial Committee, 1963

Under the instigation of Dr. Page, the community leaders tried to see what could be done in the way of civil rights in the community by forming a bi-racial committee where grievances could be aired.

Representatives from CORE and the NAACP Youth group were involved with the adult organization. The Youth group and NAACP drew up a set of plans and objectives that they wished the bi-racial committee to implement.

The adult group elected Dr. Yelldell, a local physician, as temporary chairman and later as permanent chairman. A plan was presented to the city council. The Council refused to form a bi-racial committee but instead suggested that three Councilmen and three of the Negro leaders get together and try to work out the problems involved.

The Negro leaders were Father O'Leary, Dr. Yelldell and a third man whose name Dr. Yelldell could not remember. The three Councilmen were R.A. Blackmon, Sam Smith, and Jake Markuson.

The three Negroes carried the proposal to the City Council, asking for integration of the parks, and other public facilities. The Council said that it did not have the power to form a bi-racial committee and that many of its members felt that this request was a "slap in the face."

The Negro group then asked the Councilmen if they could believe what was going on and if they (the Council) could be trusted. The Council replied that the Negroes had to trust them.

The Negro spokesman asked for employment in the city and public works. The Council said that it would take applications for firemen, clerks, meter readers, etc. from the Negro community. The Negro spokesman accused the city of discrimination in all its departments except the Trash and Garbage Department--where there are a few colored drivers and foremen (this department has trouble finding literate persons for drivers). Nothing was done by the Council about the promised jobs.

The Negro spokesman also asked about the library and was told that it was already de-segregated.

Parks and playgrounds were allegedly de-segregated, however, in practice they were not. The Councilmen felt that they had no power to do anything about this and preferred to wait for a court order.

Nothing has been done about the schools. Dr. Yelldell stated that he could see no future plans for doing anything about them either.

The three Councilmen said that they would contact the Chamber of Commerce, a powerful group in Greenville, in regard to some of the complaints. Two changes came out of the meeting with the C of C. The Hospital report was discontinued rather than add "Mr." and "Mrs." to

the names of Negro people. The Bank reports were changed to read, "The way that a person signs his name is the way a report is to be mailed out." Other than these two items, nothing was done with the C of C.

All the subsequent meetings of the Negro spokesmen and the Councilmen ended in arguments over policy and precedent. About three months ago the bi-racial group disbanded due to frustration.

The above information was obtained in an interview with Dr. Yell-dell.

KKK and WCC

In 1960 or '61 the White Citizens Council tried to organize in Greenville. They held a few poorly attended meetings. Cornwell Sykes, president of the Commercial National Bank, through the influence of the KKK, which infiltrated the WCC group, was elected president of the WCC. After his election Sykes refused to call meetings and as a result the group dissolved. There are, however, members of the WCC living in Greenville who take an active part in the organization in neighboring towns.

The KKK, on the other hand, is definitely organized in Greenville and holds periodic meetings. Its statement of policy for this summer was that it intended to act as a "second line" force to back-up the police force if it is overwhelmed by Northern "invaders". The Klan draws its membership from a large cross-section of the community (men with money to poor whites). They generally employ people from outside of the community when they take direct action.

About a month ago four crosses were burned in Greenville. The Chief of Police arrested those people involved. At the trial one of the accused had a heart attack and died on the witness stand.

This information was obtained from Chief of Police Burnley.