

# Holmes County, Mississippi





In Holmes County, we are not the minority race.

## **WE ARE THE MAJORITY RACE**

The minority race - the whites - have had all the  
power for 100 years or more.

## **IT'S OUR TURN NOW!**

This book is by the people of the Holmes County Freedom Democratic Party, who are working to organize a political machine that will reach every single black voter in the county.

It is taken directly from tapes recorded at workshops and meetings and edited by Mary Varela of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Spring, 1967.

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HOLMES COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI  
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Mary Varela

Illustrations - Mrs Susan Lorenzi  
Photographs - Mary Varela  
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# HOW WE STARTED

HOLMES COUNTY has been in on the civil rights movement in Mississippi from the beginning. For the past four years we've been having meetings, doing voter registration, integrating the schools and other public places, and organizing our own political party.

We helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and sent our delegates to try and get seated at the National Convention in August, 1964. Then we sent delegates to Washington to support the MFDP Congressional Challenge in January and again in September, 1965.

After all that delegating and politicking, we saw that the only power the Negro has is in his numbers. We had to get all our people together and registered. And then we had to try and win some power for ourselves here in Mississippi.

Even though the movement had been going on in our county for 3 or 4 years, we were strong in only a few communities. We saw that there wasn't any purpose to working hard and registering everybody in just our strong communities. We had to get everybody with us if we were to ever win any elections.

So we started going around to other communities to talk about setting up regular weekly meetings. We got throwed out of a lot of churches, but kept on talking. Pretty soon some new communities started meeting and getting their people to register.



Bob Fletcher

After we got seven or 8 different community meetings going, we saw that we needed something to tie everybody together. So we started a county-wide meeting where the communities come together once a month. Since a lot of us weren't registered we had plenty to meet about. It was almost easy in a way. We talked on voter registration and planned who would go up to the courthouse and when.

But after awhile, (and it was a long while too, because our circuit clerk wasn't any too nice) it got so that everybody who came to the community meetings was registered. Then things got harder. What good was it to have everyone registered if we had to

vote for the same crackers who had kept us down all these years. If our vote was going to help us at all -- we had to get some of our own people into office. The white people have had 100 years or more to show whether or not they have our interest at heart.

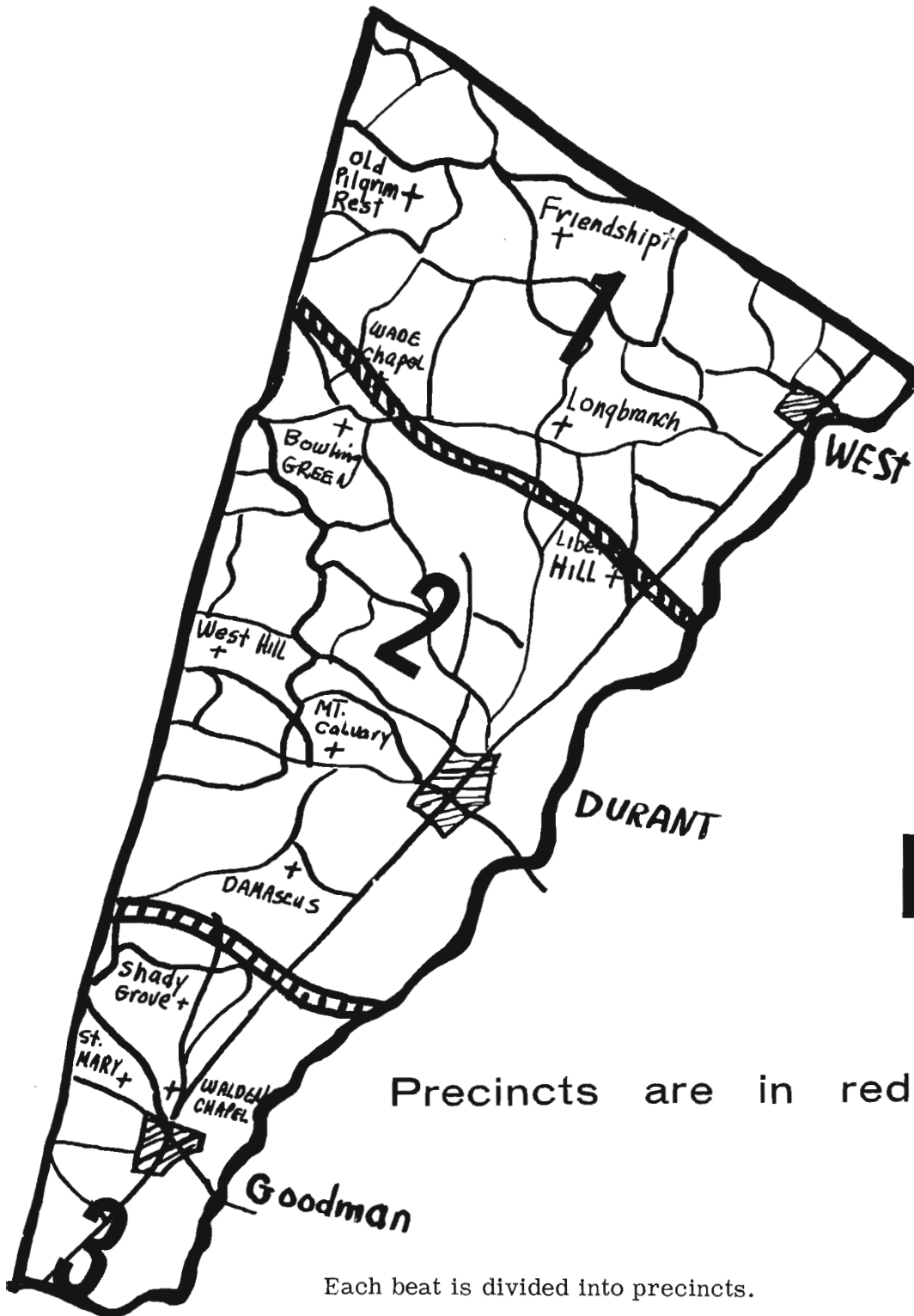
So we decided to run some of our own people for office. Then we began to see that if we wanted power we would have to do more than hold a few community meetings and register a few voters. There were a whole lot of people -- in fact most all the Negroes in the county -- who never even came to any kind of meeting and who weren't registered. To win an election, our votes wouldn't count for nothing unless most all of our people were registered and voting together.

And we were going to need some help to win these elections. All these years since the movement started, it was just a few of us who were doing all the work. We needed a way to get more people working and into the leadership of our political party.

We needed to organize our political party into a real machine where we could reach all the black people in the county and win some of those elections. With the help of some of our civil rights workers, we started on a plan to organize our party into a working machine.

This political machine has to be able to get information out to every voter -- even the ones who don't come to meetings and even the ones who don't have phones. Our people are spread out all over in hard to get to places. We needed a way for them all to be reached because we need every single black vote we can get.

# HOW OUR MACHINE WORKS



## MAP of BEAT 2

Precincts are in red

Each beat is divided into precincts.

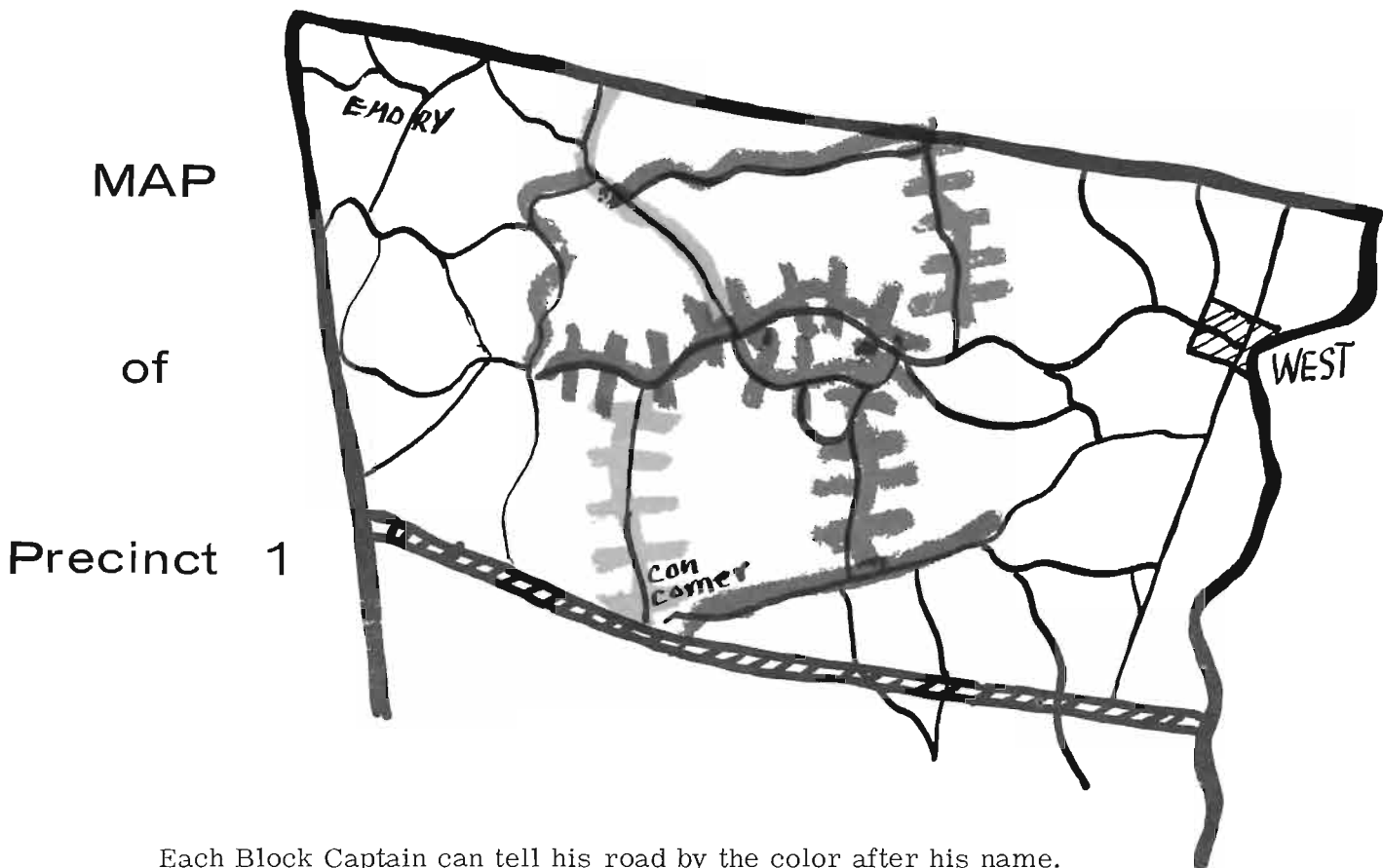
In these precincts there might be anywhere from two to five or more communities. In some of these communities there are already meetings going on every week.

But in precincts where there aren't any meetings, we've been trying to set them up. There should be at least one weekly community meeting in each precinct.









But everybody doesn't come out to meetings. So we put our active people in charge of getting information out to their neighbors. We call these active people, BLOCK CAPTAINS.

We divided each precinct up into blocks wherever black people live. We make sure that a block has no more than 15 or so houses on it. That way, no one block captain would have too much work and walking to do.

At community meetings we have the people to choose their block captains or we pick volunteers. The block captain has to be sure and live on the block he's supposed to cover. We give a map of the precinct with all the blocks marked to each block captain so he can tell where he is supposed to work.



Each Block Captain can tell his road by the color after his name.

- |               |   |               |   |              |   |
|---------------|---|---------------|---|--------------|---|
| John Nalls    |  | John Stovall  |  | Virge Wash   |  |
| Jodie Saffold |  | Georgia Clark |  | Alfred Green |  |
| J.W. Young    |  | Otis Ellis    |  |              |   |

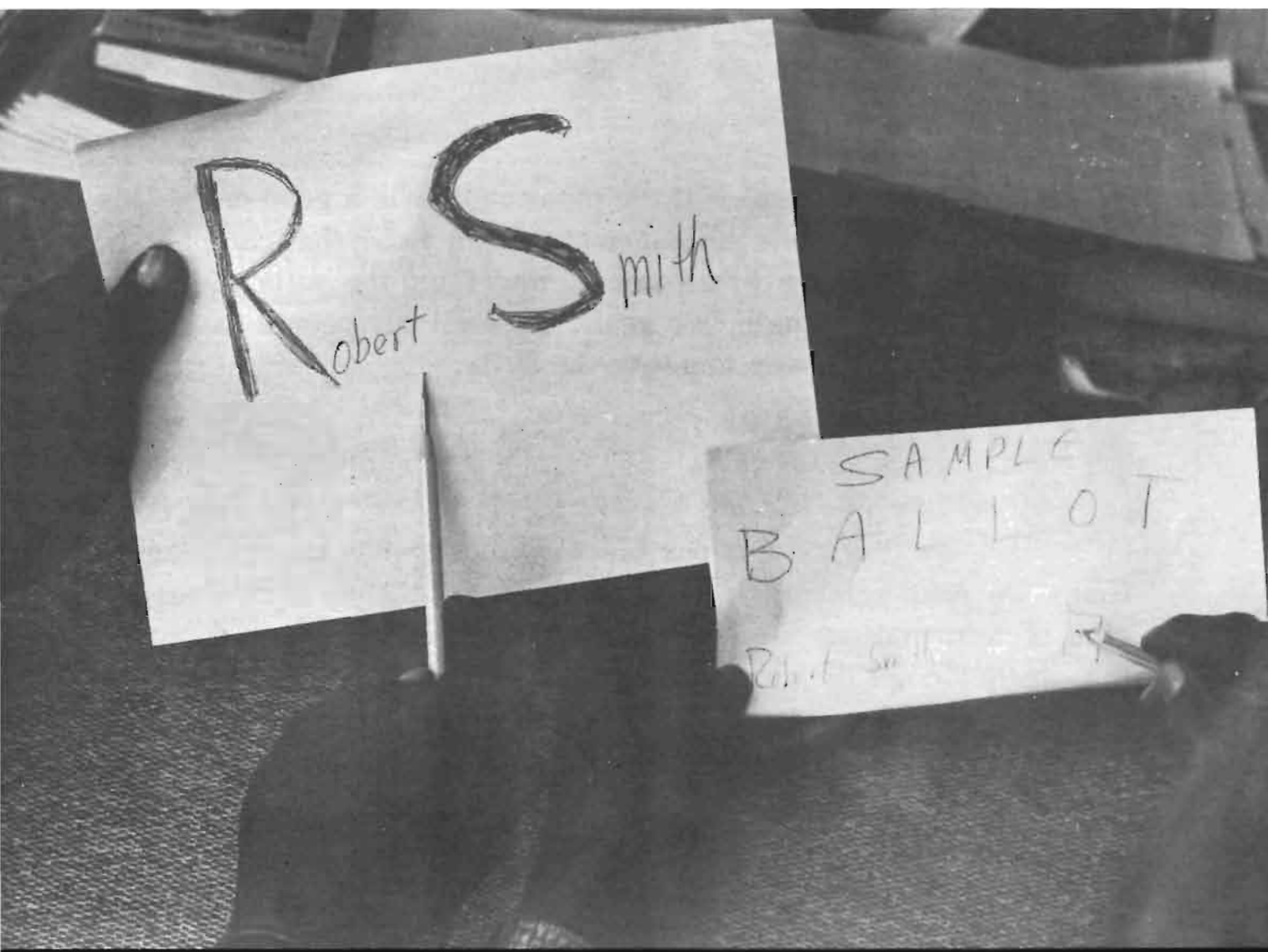


This block captain has to do political education too.

If people in his block don't get out to meetings, they won't know who's runnin' for what -- or how to mark the ballot.

It's not enough just to get people to register. Some of our registered people in the last election didn't go down and vote. Some of them, when they did go to vote, didn't know that there were Negroes on the ballot for them to vote for. That was our fault. We fell down on the job of political education.

Another lesson we learned was that if the white man tells some of our people to register -- he'll be the one to tell them how to vote too. So we have to get to our people first and educate them on how to vote.



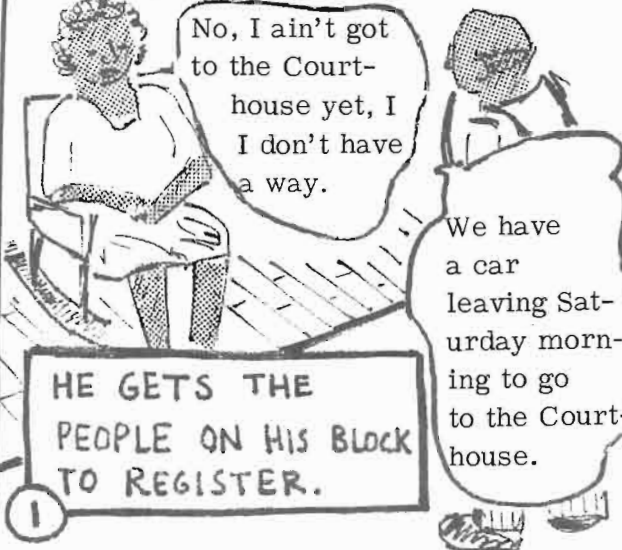
So the block captain has to help his people understand how to mark the ballot. Some of our best block captains can't read. But they can still teach people how to mark the ballot for the right name. Since the names are in alphabetical order, we have them to count down to our candidate's names and put their mark. Or maybe they know letters -- then we have them to memorize the first letters of our candidate's names and practice marking their X by that name. They can teach other people on their block to do the same thing.

The block captain is the key man in our political machine. If he falls down on his job -- the whole machine breaks down. He can't just stand up in church on Sunday and make an announcement about the elections. He has to get out and see his people as often as he can.

On voting day -- if the block captain is a good one -- his work pays off. We make sure each block has a car that can be used that day for getting every voter to and from the polls. With the help of the block captain, we make sure all our people have been contacted and have a way to get to the polls.

We check up on our block captains when we can. Sometimes we send someone into his block to ask if they have a certain kind of information. If they do, then we know he's been doing his job. If they don't then we call him in and find out what the problem is.

# THE BLOCK CAPTAIN'S JOB

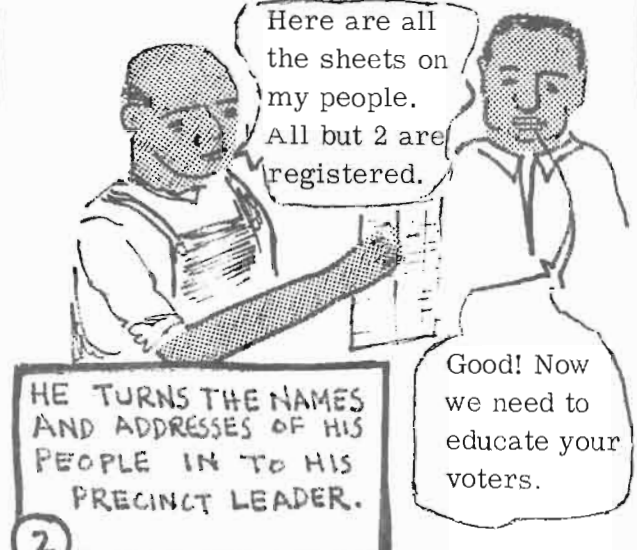


No, I ain't got to the Court-house yet, I I don't have a way.

We have a car leaving Saturday morning to go to the Court-house.

**HE GETS THE PEOPLE ON HIS BLOCK TO REGISTER.**

1




Here are all the sheets on my people. All but 2 are registered.

Good! Now we need to educate your voters.

**HE TURNS THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF HIS PEOPLE IN TO HIS PRECINCT LEADER.**

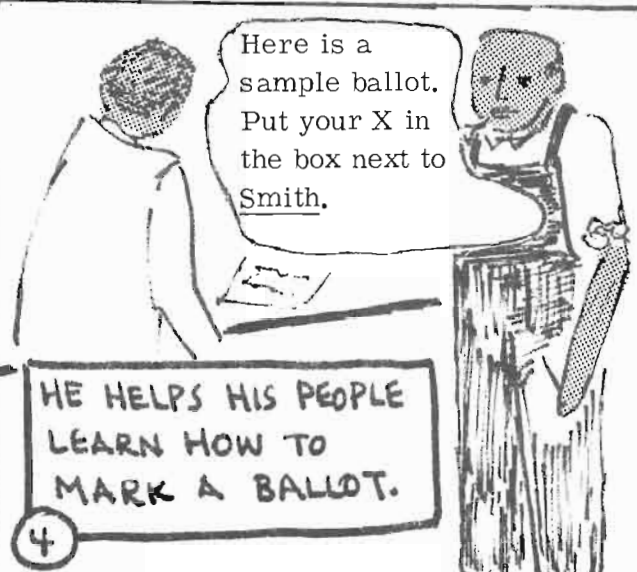
2



Our candidate for sheriff is Robert Smith from Lexington. He stands for good law enforcement.

**HE EXPLAINS OUR CANDIDATES AND WHAT THEY STAND FOR.**


3



Here is a sample ballot. Put your X in the box next to Smith.

**HE HELPS HIS PEOPLE LEARN HOW TO MARK A BALLOT.**

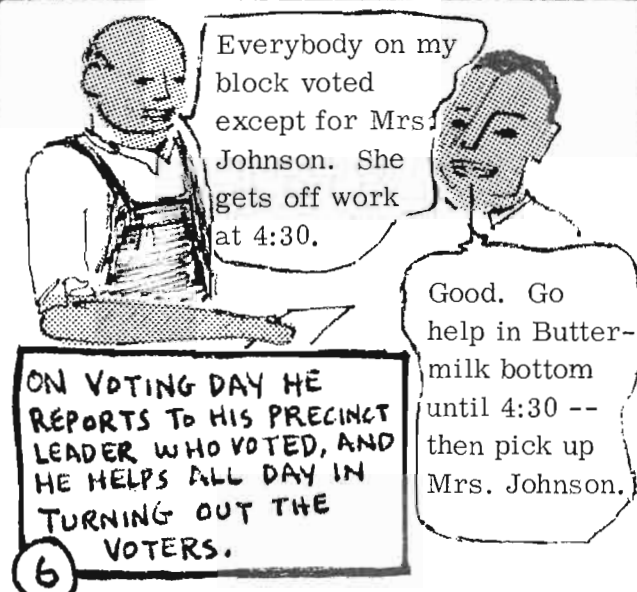
4



The polls close in two hours, Miss Rosie. We can take you right now

**HE TELLS HIS PEOPLE WHEN VOTING DAY IS AND HE MAKES SURE THEY ALL HAVE A WAY TO THE POLLS.**

5



Everybody on my block voted except for Mrs. Johnson. She gets off work at 4:30.

Good. Go help in Butter-milk bottom until 4:30 -- then pick up Mrs. Johnson.

**ON VOTING DAY HE REPORTS TO HIS PRECINCT LEADER WHO VOTED, AND HE HELPS ALL DAY IN TURNING OUT THE VOTERS.**

6



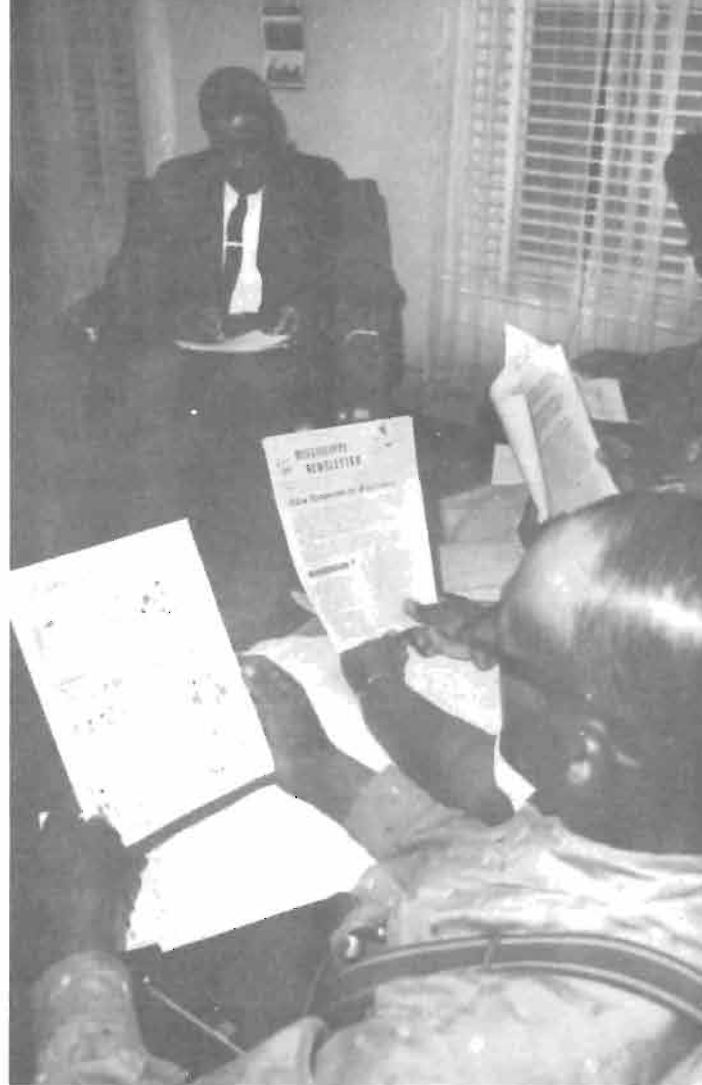
The block captain's canvassing helps on other things too. He can give information out about other movement projects like the ASCS elections or school integration. He can also learn about what problems people are having, like if something goes wrong at the welfare, or someone couldn't get medical help from the hospital, or something happened down at the school and some of the parents are upset. The block captain should be the first to hear if one of his people on his block

is having a problem. If he can, he will try to give people the information they need to help them. And then when he gives his report twice a month, he will also bring in these problems and we can get ideas on what our Movement needs to straighten out.

Another part of our machine is the PRECINCT LEADERS. Each precinct has one person responsible for the whole area -- he is the precinct leader.

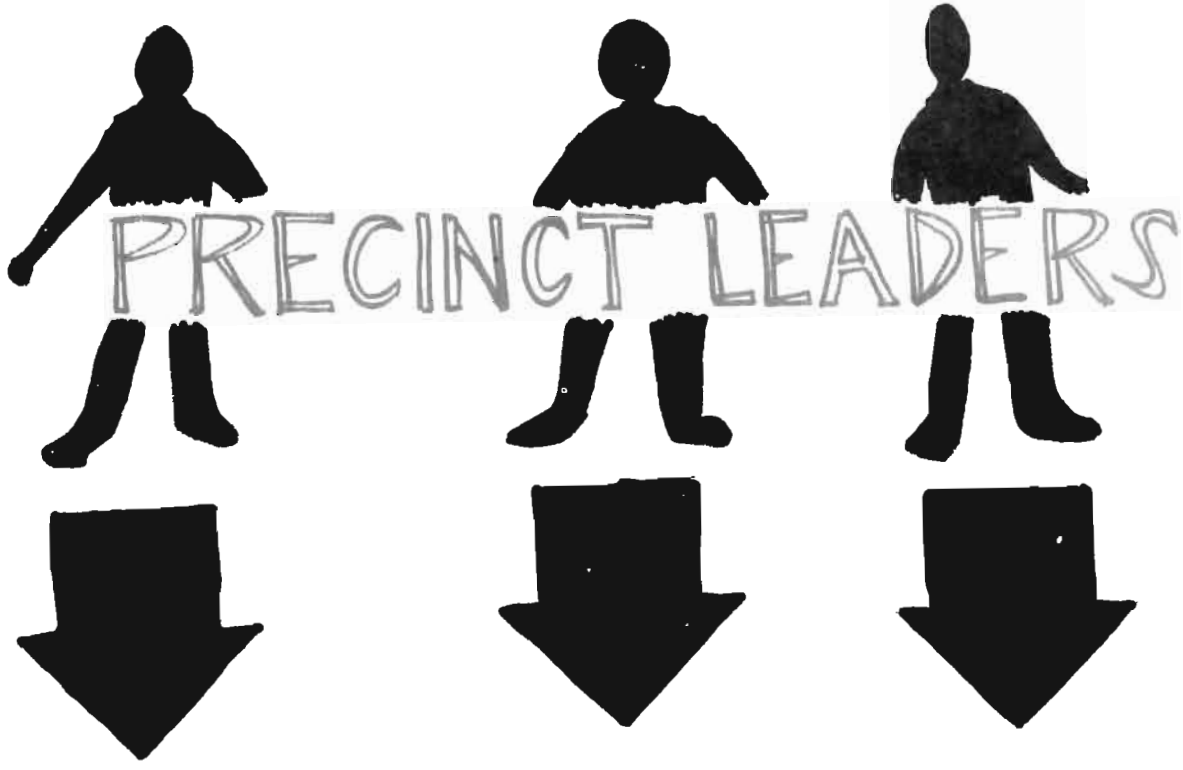
He's the one to make sure that there's a block captain covering every block in his precinct. He also sees to whether all the block captains are doing their jobs. The precinct leader makes sure there's at least one weekly meeting in his precinct. If there are a number of meetings in his precinct, then he has to make sure he gets the right kind of information to all of them. Precinct leaders get information out to their block captains by keeping in contact with each one or by calling them all together and holding a workshop.

Like in our workshops now, we're talking about how people shouldn't be fooled by how easy it is to get the white supervisor to gravel their roads and drive-ways now. We're teaching that he does it just to win our people's votes and if he's elected it will be four more years before he will gravel for them again. Then too, most people think that all the road supervisor does is gravel the roads. We teach about how much power the supervisor has over the hospitals, schools, the welfare and even jobs.



Then the block captains bring all this information back to their people out on the blocks.

It's the precinct leaders job to see that the block captains are working. If they aren't coming to the weekly community meetings, or if they aren't doing their jobs on their block, the precinct leader has to discuss it with the people at the community meeting. They might decide to take this person off as block captain and put on someone else. Maybe the block captain is working long hours and he doesn't have enough time to thoroughly cover his block. Then they might put another block captain in with him and the two of them work the block together.

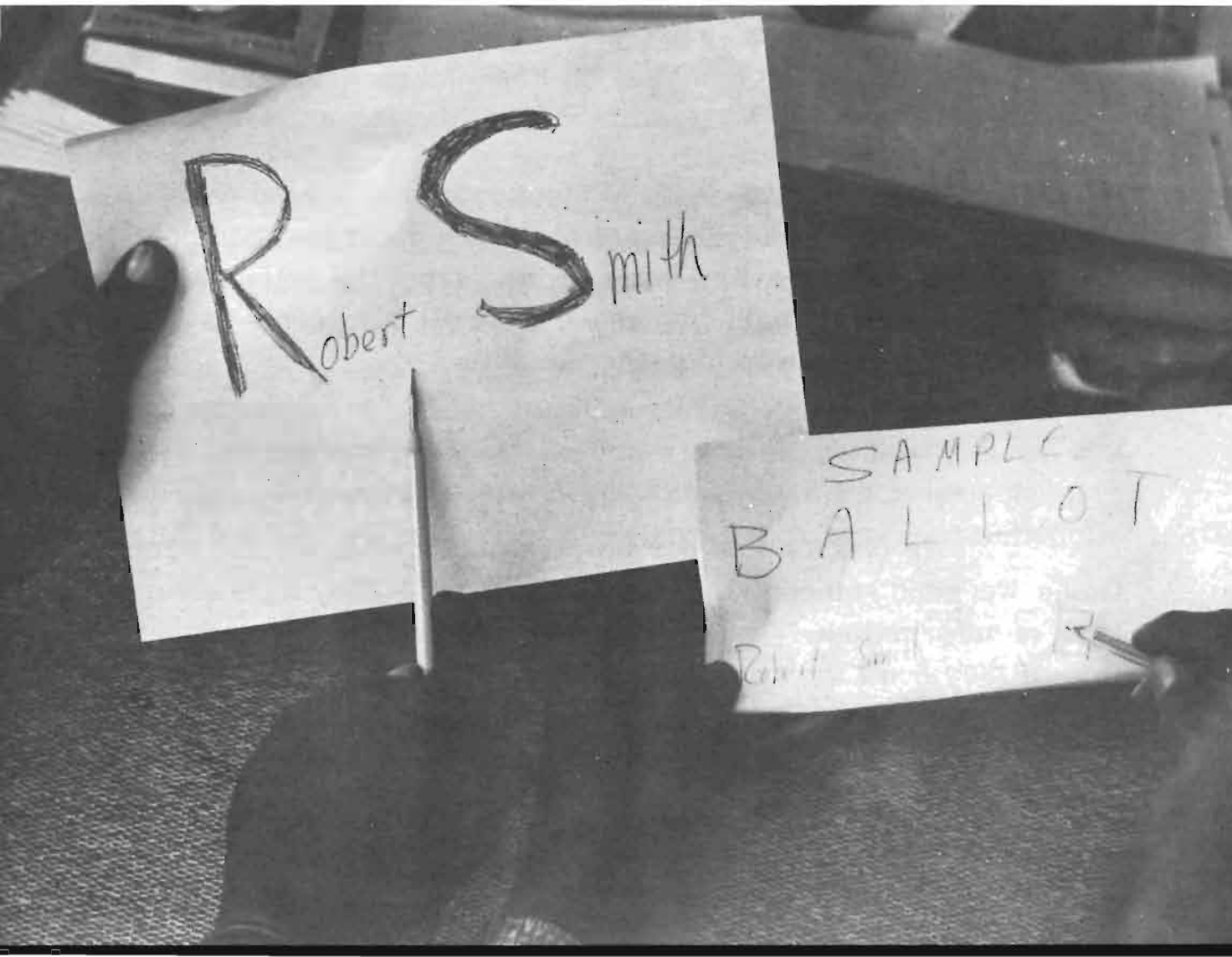


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Another lesson we learned was that if the white man tells some of our people to register -- he'll be the one to tell them how to vote too. So we have to get to our people first and educate them on how to vote.



So the block captain has to help his people understand how to mark the ballot. Some of our best block captains can't read. But they can still teach people how to mark the ballot for the right name. Since the names are in alphabetical order, we have them to count down to our candidate's names and put their mark. Or maybe they know letters -- then we have them to memorize the first letters of our candidate's names and practice marking their X by that name. They can teach other people on their block to do the same thing.

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One thing we know about our political machine is that it may look good on paper . . . .but it doesn't always work out that easy in real life. It takes a lot of work to make sure every single precinct has a precinct leader who will make sure there are good community meetings and will also look out after the block captains.

When you have that much working going on in all the beats, all over the county, there has to be a way to coordinate it and make sure everybody's driving the machine in the same direction.

In Holmes County we have what we call our county executive committee. People in each beat elects three responsible persons to the executives committee. They might appoint their precinct leaders -- or if they feel that the precinct leaders have too much work, they might get someone else to handle the job. When every beat in the county elects their three people, we end up with a 15 man executive committee.

Now these executives aren't supposed to do all the work. We say that the executive committee man's job is to make sure other people get the work done. It makes sure all parts of the machine are working right. This may sound like a whole lot of buck passing, but it's the way we get a good sized group to take responsibility for their party.

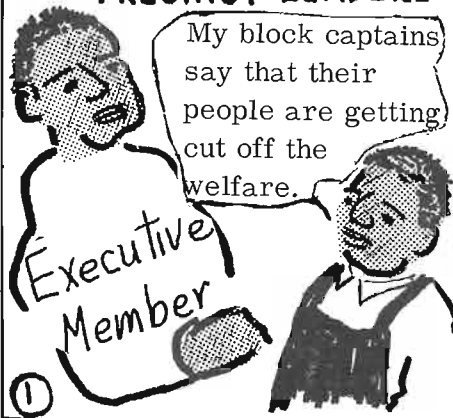
One of the most important jobs of this executive committee is to get information out to the community meetings and the county-wide meeting so people can decide on what should be done. The committee finds out things like when the next elections are, what offices are up for election, and what we have to do to run candidates. Maybe people in the county are having trouble with welfare. The executive committee might find out from a lawyer if a suit could be filed -- or it might find out that another county had a demonstration and got their welfare office to do like it is supposed to do.

The executive committee would get all this information out to the precinct leaders. The precinct leaders would get the information to the community meetings and the block captains. Then when the county-wide meeting comes up, people will have already discussed it and maybe gotten some new ideas or new information. Then when the subject is brought up at the county-wide meeting, people can discuss the problem and make a decision about what they want to do. The county-wide has the final say on deciding what the Holmes County FDP will do.

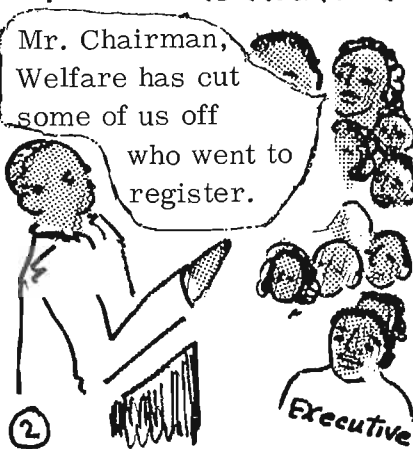
# HOW THE EXECUTIVES WORK

## EXECUTIVE MEMBERS FIND OUT PROBLEMS ...

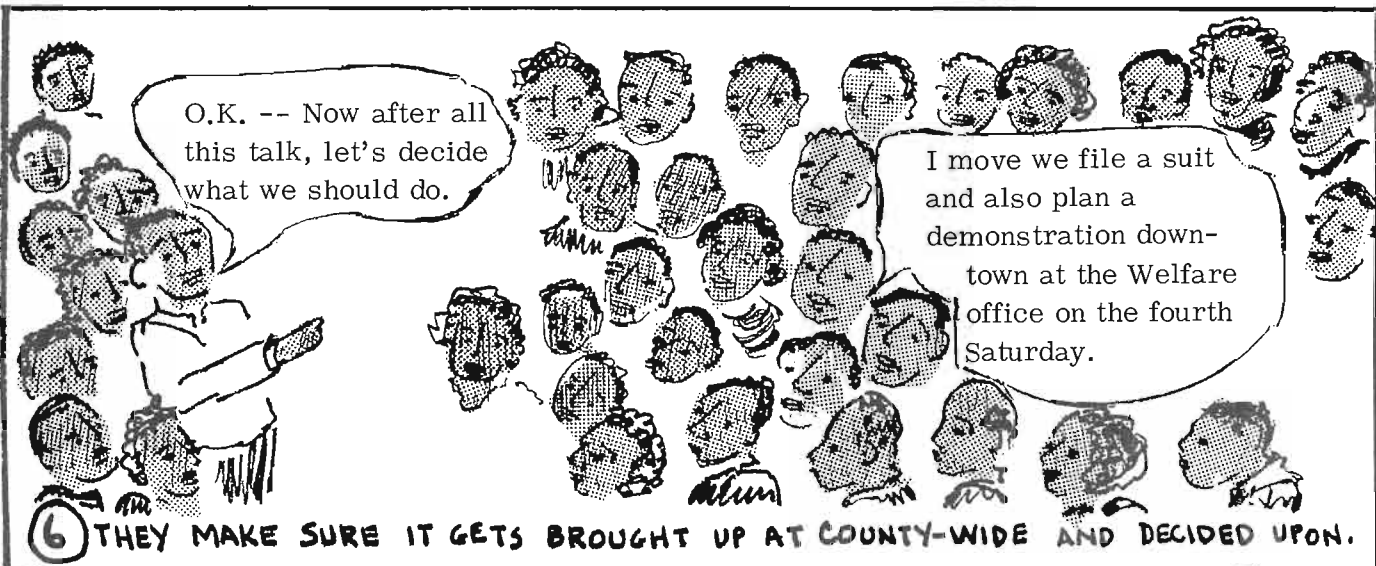
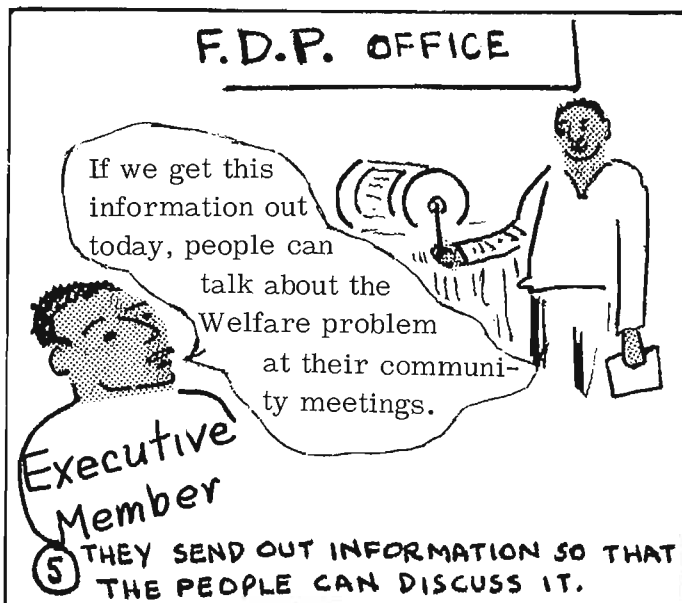
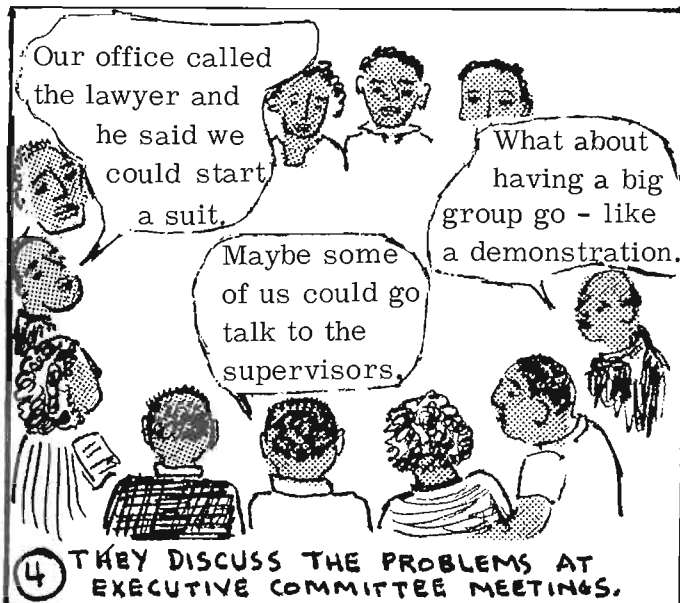
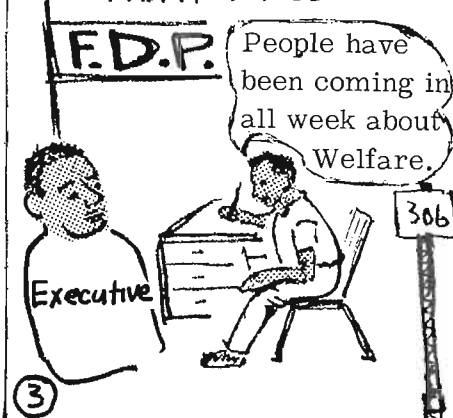
### BY CHECKING WITH THEIR PRECINCT LEADERS



### BY GOING TO MEETINGS



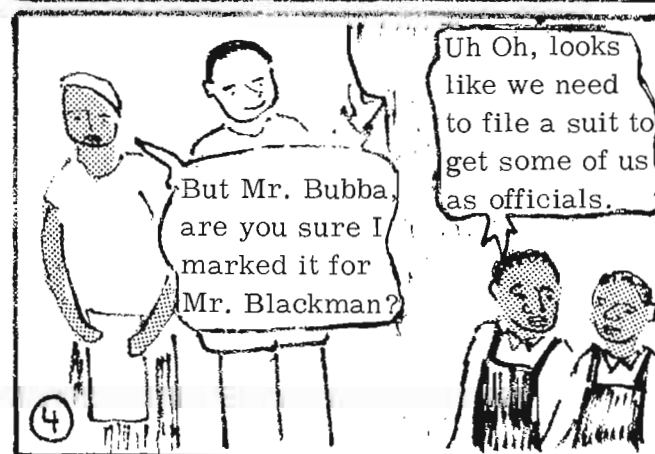
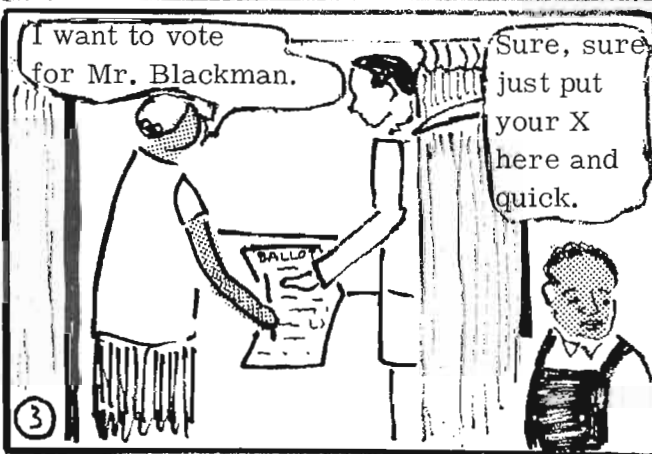
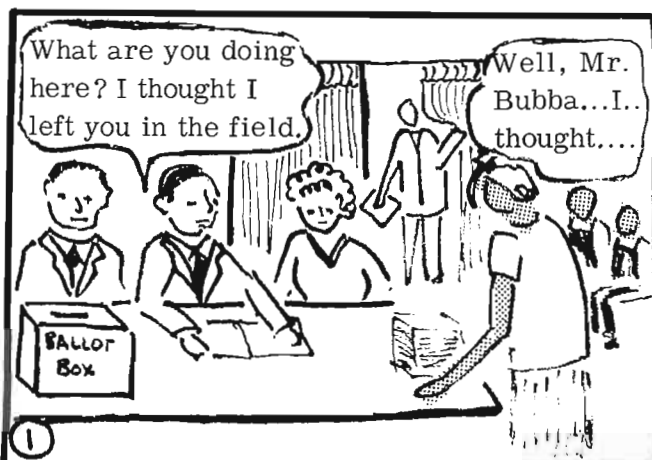
### BY CHECKING IN WITH THE F.D.P. OFFICE



For instance, at our last county-wide meeting we voted on the candidates we will support for the 1967 elections. We also voted on whether or not the Holmes County FDP would run its candidates in the regular Democratic party or as independents.

We decided that in Holmes County it would be better to run as independents. It seemed like if our candidates ran in the Democratic party the voters would end up going to the polls maybe three times -- once for the primary, once for a run-off and then once for the regular elections. People would be saying "we voted last time, why should we go again." This is the first chance most of us have to vote. If we would run an independent candidate -- where we only have to go to the polls once in the November election -- we could take the time to really get it over to our people what this election is all about. We probably could win.

Not only that but, we know the white man controls the regular Democratic party. In other places they've done things like raise the qualifying fee from \$50 to \$500 just to keep Negro candidates off the ballot. As long as that white man controls the party -- he'll do what he can to keep us out.



It will be hard enough to get some black officials at the polling places and also to get those votes counted right - without us worrying about fighting the Democratic Party too. These are the kinds of things we talk over at our county-wide meetings. An important job of the executive committee is to make sure we all get enough information so we can decide on what we should do.

But the main job of the executive committee is to be the steering wheel of our political machine. It is the executive member's job to get reports from each precinct leader in his beat and know whether or not each one of them is doing his job. The executives together in their committee meetings give reports on the precinct in each of the five beats.

This committee is supposed to make sure the machine is running in every block, in every precinct, in every beat. If a precinct leader seems to be messing up, maybe he doesn't know what he's supposed to do. The executive committee may decide to call in all the precinct leaders who are falling down on their jobs and hold a workshop with them. Or maybe the precinct leaders just don't want the job. Then the executive committee has to find someone else to do it.

Another job the executive committee has to do is to hire the office staff and tell them what to do. Our FDP office is in Lexington, the county seat for Holmes County. People from all over -- even from outside the county -- come to our office for help on welfare problems, school integration problems, police harassments and other legal problems. We have a civil rights lawyer who we can call for help in giving our people legal advice.

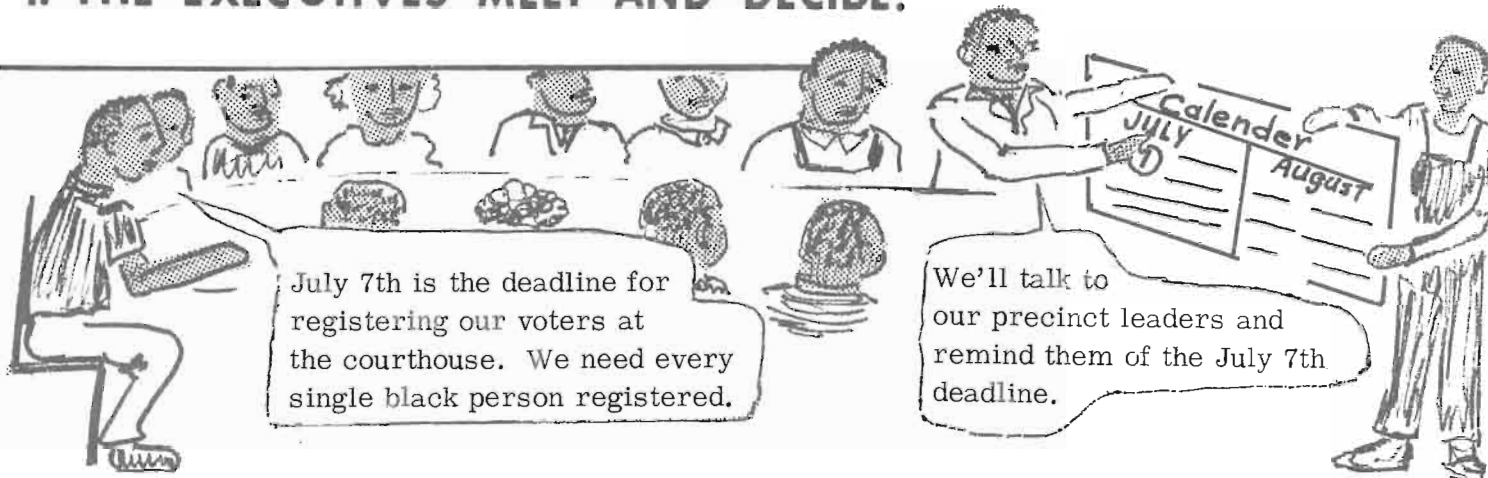


We needed somebody full time to run the office, so the executive committee hired a young man from out in the community. He has learned a lot about welfare laws and bonding people out of jail and other rights, so he can help people that come in.

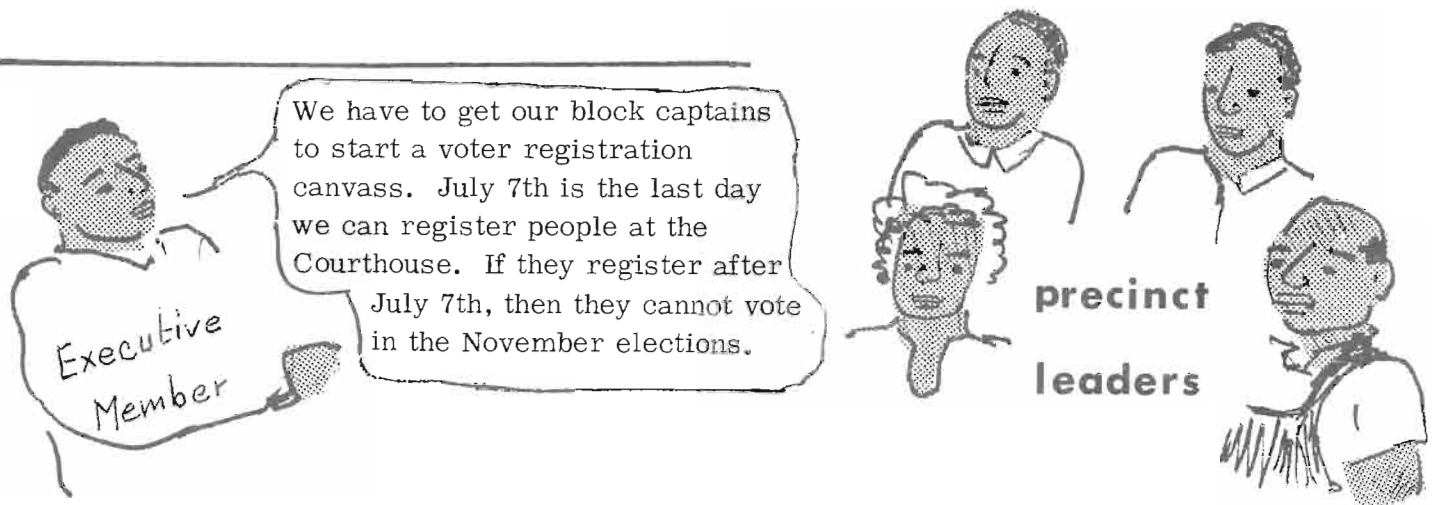
Because our office gives these services, we get to people who might never come down to the meetings. When they come in we encourage them to go down and register and get their names and addresses. Come voting day we can contact them and get them to the polls.

# THIS IS HOW

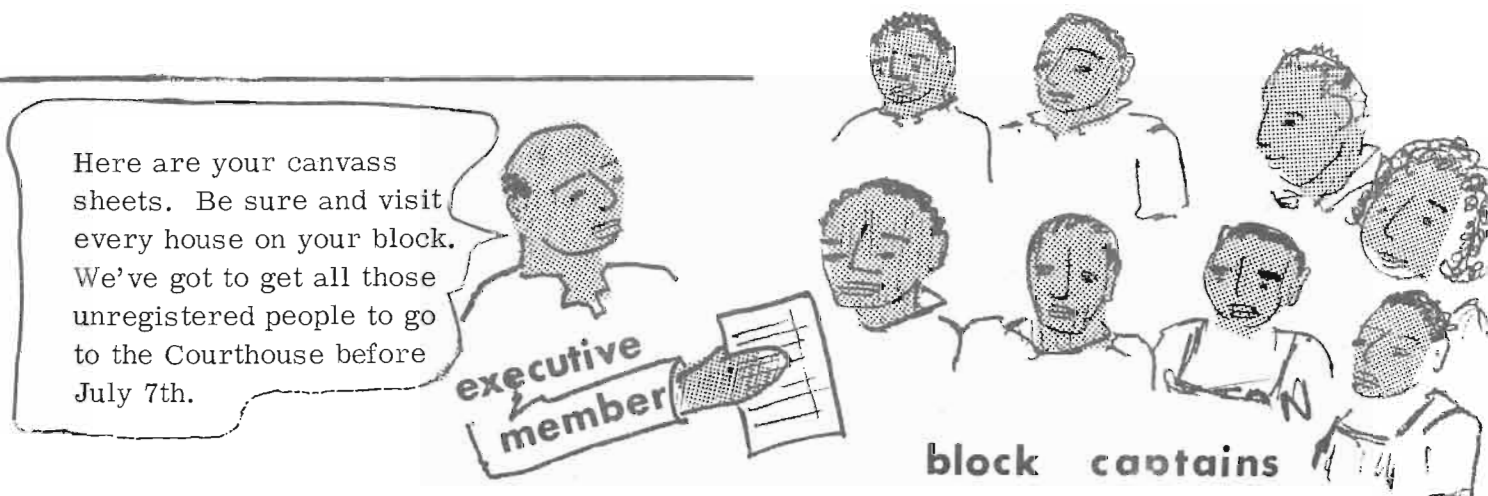
## 1. THE EXECUTIVES MEET AND DECIDE.



## 2. THEY PASS THE WORD TO THEIR PRECINCT LEADERS.



## 3. PRECINCT LEADERS TALK TO THEIR BLOCK CAPTAINS



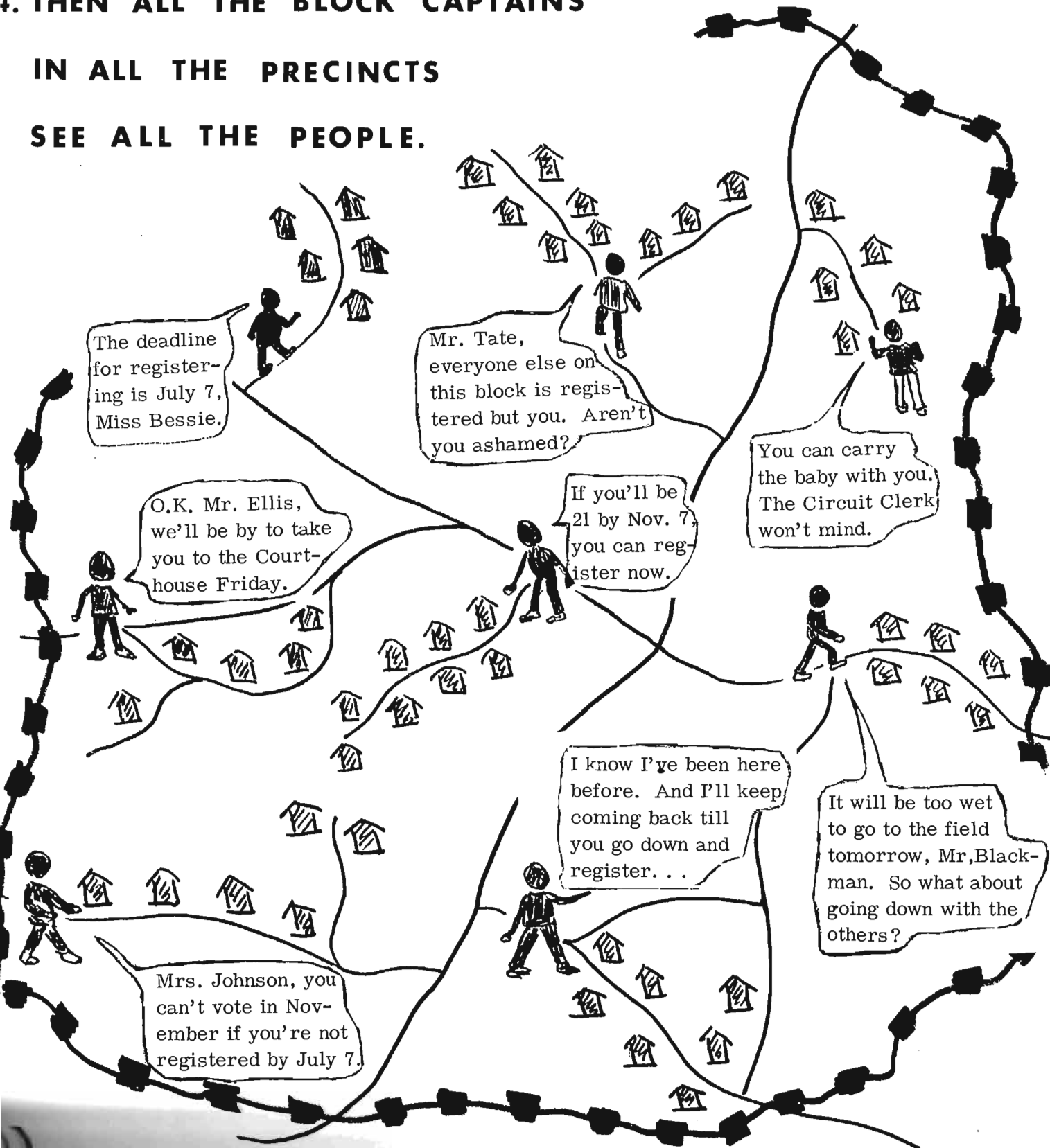
(note; in counties with Federal Registrars, the deadline is August 28th.)

# OUR MACHINE RUNS

4. THEN ALL THE BLOCK CAPTAINS

IN ALL THE PRECINCTS

SEE ALL THE PEOPLE.



# ATTENTION

of the first time in history, Negro People are  
Invited to Help Elect a Negro Sheriff

## HELP ELECT A NEGRO SHERIFF

We in Holmes County have decided to elect a  
Negro for Public Office in this year's County Election.  
We have the One Political Party—the NAACP—and  
the following class of Independent Candidates in the  
November 7, 1967 General Election.

These Candidates Also Have the Backing of the  
County Branch of the National Association for the  
Advancement of Colored People and the  
International Brotherhood of Bookbinders.

- The Sheriff, Robert R. (Bob) Smith  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Jim (Tom) Cook, Mr. Wm. W. (Walter) Williams  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- The Recorder, Earl Gray, Mr. T. E. Williams  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Supervisor, Earl Gray, Mr. Wm. W. (Walter) Williams  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Inspector, Earl Gray, Mr. John H. Williams  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Sergeant, Earl Gray, Mr. Willie J. Smith  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Assessor, Earl Gray, Mr. William T. Smith  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Justice of The Peace, Earl Gray, Mr. William T. Smith  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Justice of The Peace, Earl Gray, Mr. John H. Williams  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- For Constable, Earl Gray, Mr. Earl Gray, Jr.  
County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

We Give the Vote to Do the Job — About 6,000  
Registered Negro Voters. We Have the Machine to  
Do the Job, the Holmes County Freedom Movement  
Party . . . and it Needs Your Dollars.

We in Holmes County Have Raised \$1,600.00 For Our  
Candidates — You Can Help Us Win — see Money.

- Please Contact The Finance Committee
- Mr. J. W. Smith
  - Mr. C. L. Smith
  - Mr. Earl Gray
  - Mr. William T. Smith
  - Mr. Robert R. Smith
  - Mr. John H. Williams
  - Mr. Willie J. Smith
  - Mr. Wm. W. Williams

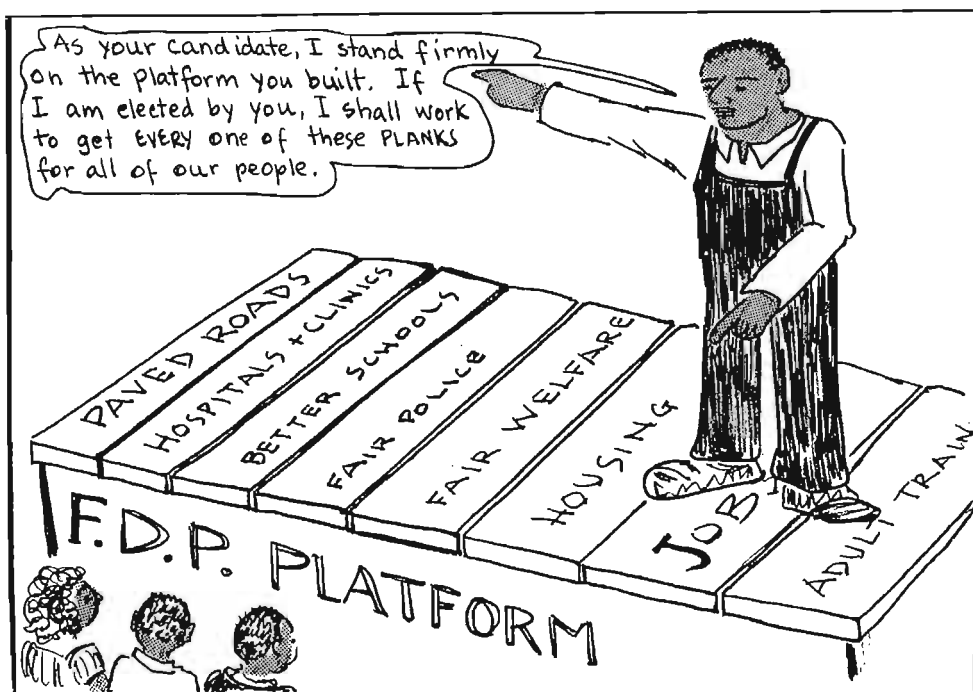
Checks Should Be Sent  
Holmes County Independent Campaign Fund  
P.O. Box 1, N. W. Williams  
Route 2, Box 102, Dalton, GA 30702

# OUR PARTY'S CANDIDATES

Because we've worked so hard to build our political party here in Holmes County, we probably look at our candidates for office a little differently than some other places. A man doesn't decide by himself that he will run for office and represent the black people here in the county. If a man runs for office its because we have voted to support him. He runs as a representative of the Holmes County Freedom Democratic Party. He is our candidate.

And a candidate who is running for office doesn't just decide by himself what he stands for on issues like welfare, education, jobs. Our candidates have to write their platforms and then present them to the party at the county-wide meeting. We decide what parts we will keep -- or what parts we will change and then vote on the whole platform.

Then when our candidate for sheriff makes speeches, he will talk about the FDP platform. He will talk about issues. This is a form of political education. If we do the job right, the voters will know why they are voting for our candidates. And once he wins, he'll know that he has to stand by his platform because all the people who put him in office voted for his platform.



**H O W**

**W E**

**S U P P O R T**

**O U R**

**P A R T Y**



Most of the black people in our Movement in Holmes County are farmers. They say that farmers are independent -- and some say we're too independent. But we know one thing -- we won't give up our independence when it comes to our political party. We don't want any outside control of our party.

So we have laid plans to finance our party and our political campaign as much as possible from within the county. If we started to rely on outside money -- then when they get ready to stop sending it, we'll be up a tree. Besides that, if a person believes in his party, he should pay for it. That way he might give some time to it because he wants to make sure his money goes for a good investment.

There are three or four ways we look for money. Right now we keep our office going from our community meetings. Each community is supposed to pay \$5.00 dues every month. Another way we keep money coming in is to have the block captains collect from each registered voter.



This hasn't been working too well, but it does bring in a little money. We bought receipt books for every block captain. They are supposed to go around once every three months and collect one dollar from every registered voter on their block and then give him a receipt from his book.

If we could get this going, we would have over \$20,000 coming in over a year's time. So far we've raised only about six or seven hundred dollars this way.

This keeps our bills paid and helps pay the salary of our office manager. But it is not enough. We can't pay him a family wage and we can't pay a secretary which we need very badly.

# the poverty program

The poverty program first came to Mississippi and to Holmes County because of the Freedom Democratic Party. We try not to let our people who are getting poverty money forget that. We find at least one strong FDP member in each headstart center, in each adult education class and in other Federal programs. Then our people collect a dollar a month from each person in these programs. We hope to have \$1,000 a month coming in when we get through setting this up. This would go to pay salaries of two full time people in our office and office expenses like the phone bill and postage. We would also have the money to pay some full time organizers.



# campaign finance committee

When we started organizing seriously for our November, 1967 elections, we knew that if we were going to win we would need some real money. We need to buy posters and voter education materials. If there are 6,000 registered people to get to the polls, we'll need a lot of gas money. Then we're thinking of taking ads in the paper and buying radio or television time. We'd like to pay some of our teen-agers and maybe others to canvass and help the candidates. All in all, we figure we need at least \$10,000 to run all twelve of our candidates and win.

We set up a finance committee called the Holmes County Independent Campaign Finance Committee. Every different kind of Negro is represented on this committee -- old time Movement people, ministers, some businessmen, and some teachers. We knew we'd need them because to win an election we need everybody's vote. One thing is made very clear from the beginning, however. The executive committee is the group which decides how the money is spent.

This finance committee meets every Friday night. A goal of \$6,000 by the first of June has been set. So far we have raised almost \$3,000 from pledges.

At weekly community meetings we ask every person to pledge some money towards the campaign. He also says when he plans to pay it. The secretary keeps a list of the names and the amount they pledged and reads it every week. Each community meeting has one person responsible to report about the pledges, to the Finance Committee every week.



Dolores Varela

Some communities have plate suppers to raise money. This summer we will probably have some picnics, barbeques, dances and rallies for the candidates and get some money this way.

Also some of our people have gotten other ideas on raising campaign money. One candidate for beat supervisor decided he would ask every church in his beat to make a donation of \$100 to the campaign fund. He's already gotten four of the churches to raise their \$100. If we get this to work in all the beats in the county, we'll have real help. There are over 150 Negro churches in our county.

When Stokely Carmichael spoke in Mississippi he said something very important. He said that until black people learn to support their political organization, we'll never control them. We control our churches because we pay for them. If we believe in freedom like we believe in God, then we better start showing it by paying for our freedom party.



This young woman is an important member of our party. She is our candidate for Circuit Clerk, but more important, she is only twenty-three years old.

If a movement can get young people to stay and fight for change, that movement will keep on. Without young people, we might get a little tired -- and maybe stop a little sooner than we should.

We've come a long way since we've been in this movement. We've risked our lives and the lives of our families to be where we are today. But with our young people to carry on -- we know we can finish this race.



If you would like more information on  
the Holmes County FDP....  
or if you would like a speaker,

Write To:

**Holmes County F.D.P.**  
**306 Third Street**  
**Lexington, Miss.**