

Mechanization Of Agriculture Helps Anti-Vote Drive**Tennessee: How To Keep People From Voting**

By JERRY DEMUTH

Somerville, Tenn.—Two years ago when 345 Negro families were given eviction notices in Fayette County, Tenn. because they tried to register to vote, the attention of a whole country was focussed on this little county in southwest Tennessee and many organizations gave them aid.

Tent Cities were established in Somerville and Moscow for some of the evicted families. And one year later, when families in Haywood County to the north also were evicted, another Tent City was established in Brownsville.

But now Fayette and Haywood counties are almost forgotten. When they are remembered, people think of them in terms of a victory for democratic rights. But it isn't a victory. The battle may have been won, but the war may be lost.

Many of the families may have managed to stay in their home county but the work by and for the Negroes has only managed to keep the situation in check while the whites, aided by their lawyers, have learned new tactics.

Many of the Negroes are denied jobs. "My husband can only work for Negro farmers," one woman told me.

Many of them are denied food. "We were getting government food," another woman said. "But that suddenly stopped a month ago."

A man from the federal government set up the surplus food program and then left

it to be administered by local whites.

Many Negroes are denied houses. "We'll be in this tent . . . it'll be two years in March," a housewife explained. "We can't find any house here. A family is looking for a house for us in Henderson. My husband wants to stay here with the movement, but I want to better my conditions."

Whites had openly stated that they evicted the Negroes because they had registered. But now the whites are using other, safer reasons and are evicting all the Negroes they can, whether the Negroes are registered or not.

**Negroes In Majority**

These two counties are the only counties in Tennessee in which Negroes are in the majority. Fayette County is 78 percent Negro and Haywood is 62 percent Negro. The whites want to drive out enough Negroes to give them the white majority they need to continue the control they have always had of the counties.

It is feared that they may succeed. The secret of success is mechanization.

Cotton-picking machines are in the early stages of development. They do not pick thoroughly and what they do pick brings a lower price. They also need flat land to operate best and the land in the two counties is hilly. If machines are going to be used extensively the land must be bulldozed flat or some areas cannot be planted.

This does not matter to the whites who already own proportionately more machinery than do farmers in any other county. Nor does it matter that the wood-killer

many use, which eliminates the need for chopping, stunts the cotton plant's growth. The important thing is that the need for Negro field labor is being diminished. So many families are receiving eviction notices as a maneuver to drive them out of the counties. Three hundred families are expected to be evicted in Haywood alone.

Those who are not evicted outright are being told that they may remain on the land. But they are also told that there is no work for them. Without work how can they stay, how can they pay rent, how can they live?

Some families have moved off the farms already and the owners have torn down the houses so that no other Negro family can replace them. The whites intend the moves to be permanent.

Some Negroes have had to go 40 miles to Memphis to find work. Others have left their county to find employment. But moving means losing one's voting rights until new residence is established.

If driving out Negroes by ending the need for a large number of farm workers is successful, the action will spread throughout the South. And these means could be used with more ease in a state such as Mississippi.

Factories can bring employment and members of the movement are trying to bring some industry to the two counties. But there is no guarantee that they will have non-discriminatory hiring policies.

The Civic and Welfare League in depressed Fayette County is working toward bringing in a plating factory under a government program. The company has

not discriminated at other plants and it is hoped it will not discriminate here. The wages will be \$8-\$10 a day, a lot for those who have been working in fields for \$2-\$3 a day when they can find work.

Of the three small factories in Somerville, only one hires Negroes, though another does have two Negro janitors. A factory in the southern part of the county hires no one but white women and once when they needed more employees, rather than hire Negroes, they hired white women from Mississippi.

Negroes can seldom get local loans and though they can get Small Business loans from Washington, these are seldom sufficient. However Negroes have started clearing establishments in both counties.

**Has To Go To Memphis**

And in Fayette, John McFerrer, Civic league president, is constructing a new building for his grocery and cafe. He still has to go to Memphis to stock his store and get gas for his pumps—a major oil company had pulled up its tanks—but he is expanding rather than holding his own. His new building will also include an office, store room, service garage with car racks, and a laundromat.

In Haywood and Fayette counties, Negroes are not only trying to register to vote. They are also trying to create employment and income for themselves. They are fighting to bring progressive industrialization to the South. And they are fighting against mechanization, painful when it normally develops, here destructive as it is used viciously by the whites.