

Notes From Mississippi

By Jerry DeMuth

The national elections of last November 3 weren't the only elections of importance to Mississippi Negroes. One month later, on December 3, there were Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASC or ASCS) elections. And though less than 7 percent of Mississippi's voting age Negroes were registered to vote in the national election, any Negro, or white, farmer, except a day laborer, could vote in the ASC election if he receives any income from a cotton crop.

The Department of Agriculture sets a standard cotton allotment for each farmer. But additional allotments are made by a county ASC committee which also has other responsibilities. Counties are divided into geographical areas called communities and each community elects a committee of five, the one with the most votes becoming chairman. The chairmen of the community committees in each county meet and select the county committee.

ASC elections were held in all 82 Mississippi counties; in 12 of those counties COFO sponsored Negro farmers as candidates. Negroes have not in the past participated in the elections.

As COFO workers canvassed and watched polls, they were threatened, beaten, shot at and arrested. And Negro candidates who had to have their petitions signed by farmers from the same community were frequently denied information, or given confusing information, as to community boundaries. One Negro farmer was even told that the farmers who lived on all four sides of his farm lived in a different community.

In the days before the election, police often followed election workers, frequently stopping and arresting them for alleged traffic violations. In Camden, a white man shot at a Negro working on the election. Then came election day, December 3.

In Holly Springs when worker Frank Cieciorcka went to the courthouse to investigate the arrest of another worker, Cieciorcka himself was arrested. The county sheriff, "Flick" Ash, stopped a car containing Stan Boyd and Larry Rubin, charging Boyd with illegal parking. After being tried by a judge, Boyd and Rubin drove off. Sheriff "Flick" Ash stopped them again. This time he charged Rubin with having improper lights.

In Starkville, police ticketed Bill Light three times.

But the greatest harrassment occurred at the polling places in Canton, a town of 10,000, 25 miles north of Jackson, and the seat of Madison County. Canton is a big White Citizens' Council town, leading officials are members and the council sticker appears at most establishments, including on the voter registrar's door.

Six persons were ejected from Canton area polling places where they were poll



watchers; one of them was arrested by police. Police also arrested three other election workers on charges ranging from "for investigation" to "disturbing the peace." The other persons were beaten at polling places.

A white man pulled a gun on Eartiss Crawford while two other whites threatened Crawford. One grabbed and held him while the other beat him. At another polling place, poll watcher Marvin Rich was pelted with stones by a white mob. He later returned to the polling place as the vote counting began. Two white men blocked his way and beat him, one using his fists, the other a belt buckle.

Nevertheless, seven Negroes were elected to community committees, three of them as chairmen.

Though Tennessee gets all the publicity, it's not the only state to forbid the teaching of evolution. It's also illegal in Mississippi and has been since 1926 when the state passed its anti-evolutionary laws. Under the law, teaching evolution is punishable by a \$500 fine and the mandatory loss of any position the educator had.

There had not been any movement to change this law but among books being considered last fall by the State Textbook Purchasing Board were *Biological Science, an Inquiry into Life*; and *High School Biology*. All three books discuss evolution as a theory, but not as an established fact.

The three books were strongly attacked by a fundamentalist south Mississippi group, the Jones County Study and Action Group. JCSAG was especially incensed over *Molecules to Man*, just the title of which they felt taught evolution.

In mid-November the