

Negroes Await Eviction Moves

Tennessee Tenants Looking for Places to Go - Tent City Likely to Grow

Residents of Fayette and Haywood Counties awaited today the next development in the Federal Government's attempt at enforcing voting rights for Negroes here.

Three hundred Negro families in Fayette (Somerville) County on the Mississippi border and possibly an equal number in adjoining Haywood County were looking for places to go as the Monday deadline approached for eviction from their farm tenant and sharecropper houses.

Their leaders saw little real hope for immediate relief in a United States Court of Appeals ruling Friday that restrained evictions in retaliation for registering and voting but permitted them as a part of normal rearrangement of farming operations.

Landowners contended that the mass termination of tenant leases and sharecropper contracts were a result of mechanization. Negroes argued that the evictions were a direct result of their two-year-old campaign for free exercise of the franchise.

Faced with continuing court action, most landowners, on the advice of their lawyers, have adopted a policy of not discussing the situation with strangers.

Typical of their comments was that of Alex Gray, a Haywood County lawyer and farmer, who was asked whether he planned to go ahead with his evictions. He said: "I have no comment until I read this verdict of the court, which I expect to abide by."

Asked how many Negroes he had on his farm, Mr. Gray replied: "I have no further comment."

In an effort to care for the displaced Negroes, the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, which conducted the registration campaign, has set up a tent city called Freedom Village, three miles south of Somerville on the 200-

acre farm of Shepherd Towles, one of the few Negroes with substantial land holdings in this area.

The charman of the league, John McFerren, who operates a store a mile up the road, said that about a dozen families with sixty children had moved into the tents on a muddy field across from Mr. Towles' ramshackle, two-story house. He said he had a long list of others wanting tents and that more would be put up as rapidly as they were available.

The olive-drab Army-surplus tents are about 20-by-30 feet in size. Most of them are crowded with beds, chairs and sofas, while battered refrigerators and other household goods stand in the mud outside. The tents are heated with wood-burning stoves at one end, but this provides only feeble relief during the cold, damp weather.

Mr. McFerren declined to say where he was getting the food and clothing he was supplying to the Village. He said only that contributions had come from Negroes and whites in New York, Chicago, Toledo and other cities.

Among the big contributors are the Southern Conference Education Fund and an Emergency Relief Committee established by the Chicago Chapter of the Committee of Racial Equality.

Privately, the landowners say the tent city is a "publicity stunt" and all the troubles, including the efforts of Negroes to vote, are inspired by "northern educators." They cite refusal, of the Negroes to accept offers of employment in Arkansas and in other Tennessee counties, where their race is in a minority and farm hands are badly needed.

Until Tennessee's Democratic primary last August, no Negro had been permitted to vote in Haywood County, where the population totals 23,393 and is 62 per cent Negro. A few Negroes had been allowed to vote in Fayette County, where the population is 24,577 and Negroes outnumber whites by more than 2 to 1.



Negroes are permitted to vote and are even encouraged to do so in most of Tennessee's ninety-three other counties, and especially in the metropolitan areas.

Source: "Negroes Await Eviction Moves," *New York Times*, January 1, 1961.