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Senator Stennis Civil Rights Correspondence B01F09L06

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W. A. Wright
COPY

file
[REDACTED]
Attorney-At-Law
Pascagoula, Mississippi
March 29, 1948

*I am going to
make some one put
or get thrown out get
it*
[REDACTED]
Picayune, Mississippi

Dear Mr. [REDACTED]:

This acknowledges with genuine appreciation your letter of March 25, 1948 in which you advise that you have just received a copy of my letter of March 12th to Judge Herbert Holmes, Chairman of the Mississippi State Democratic Executive Committee; and in which you discuss the question involved, agreeing with me that it would be fine if the people could vote on the platform which we desire and which will be built and adopted before our summer election.

Please let me reverse this since I made no mention of platform in my letter and let me tell you that I agree that this would be a fine idea. I realize, as you do, that time would be insufficient to get the platform and its meaning to all the people.

For fear that you only had an opportunity to scan my letter before it was returned or handed to someone else, I am sending another copy requesting that, if you have time, you read with some care and then advise me if you agree on the position taken that all of the people should be given an opportunity to vote for electors of their choice in the November election.

When we claim to be true Jeffersonian Democrats we must not forget that among the principles of Democracy laid down by Jefferson was that a jealous care should be taken of the right of election by the people with absolute acquiescence in the decision of the majority. These are vital principles of Jeffersonian Democracy which, in my opinion, supported by the facts, are being ignored by the leaders in Mississippi.

I did not suggest that the platform should be adopted by the Democratic convention and then submitted to the people for a vote. Even if this were done the situation about which I complain would not be remedied. I need not repeat to you that I am a believer in Jeffersonian Democracy which demands a jealous care of the right of election by the people. Nor can my present position and my

Mr. [REDACTED]

-2-

absolute hostility to the "civil rights" program, advocated by Harry Truman and sought to be enacted by the Republicans of the North, be questioned except by slur and implication.

What I complain about is the refusal of Judge Holmes and his committee and of Governor Wright and the Honorable Walter Sillers to take positive or affirmative action that would permit all the people to vote.

If the present scheme is carried out there will be one set of Democratic electors nominated to go on the ticket in November, namely, an independent and unpledged set. As matters now stand, I still believe eighty per cent of the Democrats of Mississippi will vote for that slate of electors. As a Democrat I insist that the five, ten or twenty per cent that would want to vote for the nominee of the National Democratic Party should not be deprived of that right; and when anyone seeks to deprive them of that right neither the wearing of buttons or of a particular uniform could make them Democrats who believe in Democracy and its processes.

The question raised by me is simple, the Democratic Executive Committee resolved that this was the people's fight and all the people should participate. They further resolved that the electors in the Electoral College should vote only on the dictates of the overwhelming majority of the people. The Governor called on the people for a mandate and said as late as March 20th at Natchez that he wanted every man and woman in the state to participate in his fight and to support him.

A refusal to let the people vote, for electors either independent or pledged to the party nominee, is a denial of these resolutions and of these announcements.

I have received letters from all over the state and everyone of them supports the Governor in his gallant fight against the so-called "civil rights" program advocated by Truman, and, at the same time, everyone of them but one agrees absolutely with my position that the people ought to be allowed to make it their fight and support the Governor by voting for independent electors next November, while those who still want to vote the straight party ticket ought to have the right to do so.

I note you suggest that I have a conference with Judge Holmes and the Governor. I appreciate your suggestion but see no good that would come from such conference. Judge Holmes has not seen fit to reply to my letter, neither has

Mr. [REDACTED]

-3-

the Governor to whom a signed carbon copy was directed. Judge Holmes merely brushed the matter off and, according to the Press:

"Holmes said the present system of selecting electors and delegates gives amply opportunity to the people to elect or defeat persons who may or may not be in accord with the Jeffersonian Movement."

Governor Wright, in his Natchez address on March 20th said:

"If there are any in the State of Mississippi who desire President Truman's name to appear on the ballot or desire a slate of electors pledged to him to be printed on the ballot at the November election, I have no objection. Certainly no other citizen objects."

"And if there are those who feel that President Truman should continue as President of the United States, he, or she or they may arrange to have the electors' names placed on the ticket and every qualified elector can cast his ballot as he sees fit."

This is a negative position and I am sure the Governor realizes that he doesn't improve the chances of success of his fine program by implying that anyone who seeks to have it carried out, but on the Democratic principle, is supporting Truman.

Walter Sillers, as quoted in the Press, says:

"Under present law, the State convention could nominate two slates of electors - one pledged to the party nominee and one unpledged."

And further says that Legislation is not necessary. No one disagrees with 'could nominate' but Walter Sillers, Judge Holmes and Governor Wright know that there is no Legislation that would require the nomination of two slates of electors.

Immediately on reading the announcement of the Governor and these gentlemen I drafted a small Bill which would, I believe, take care of the situation. It was introduced in both the Senate and the House on Monday, March 22nd. I send you a copy of it as Senate Bill No. 647. I don't know the House number. If that Bill is enacted it will be an announcement to the Nation that Mississippi is still a Democracy and believes in the principles as enunciated by Jefferson. We will then all be together against Truman and his civil rights program and have seven months to carry the fight to the people with the assured hope that a majority of the Democrats of Mississippi will sustain the Governor's

Mr. [REDACTED]

-4-

position by voting for the proper electors in November.

If the Governor maintains his "no objection" attitude and Judge Holmes and his committee don't urge the passage of the Bill, and if Sillers manipulates it to death with the adjournment of the Legislature, they will have reaffirmed their refusal to let the people get into the fight, and the reaction of the people will long be remembered.

The sole question is: Shall the Democrats of Mississippi be allowed to express their choice for presidential electors in the November election? Or will only the majority who now support the Governor's program be permitted to vote for electors and the minority be denied the right to vote unless they vote to support the Governor's position?

Again thanking you for your letter, I am,

Yours very truly

[REDACTED]

HW:al

Enclosure

cc - Governor Fielding L. Wright
Jackson, Mississippi

Judge Herbert Holmes
Senatobia, Mississippi