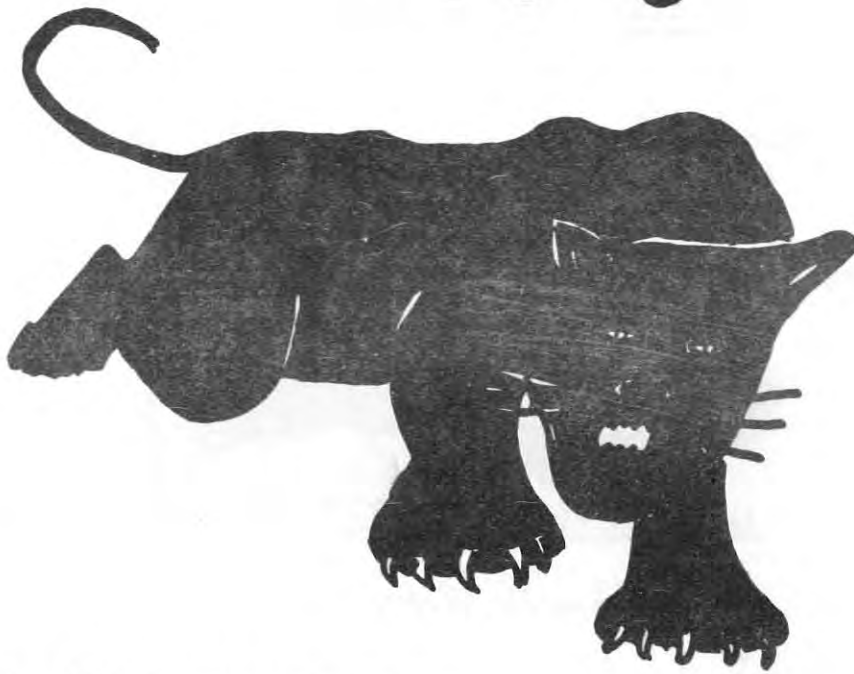


VOTE
NOV 8



LOWNDES COUNTY

FREEDOM
ORGANIZATION

The Story of the Development of an
Independent Political Movement
on the County Level

50¢

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THE ORGANIZER'S LIBRARY SERIES
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LOWNDES COUNTY FREEDOM ORGANIZATION

THE STORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL MOVEMENT ON THE COUNTY LEVEL

In the fall of 1965 the Negroes of Lowndes County, Alabama, decided they would have to start their own political party. They called it the Black Panther Party of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. This is the story of how that party got started.



THE PEOPLE DECIDE TO ELECT THEIR OWN OFFICIALS

In the early Spring of 1965 a civil rights organization called the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights was organized. But the people of Lowndes County found out that its politicians wouldn't listen to them when they were acting through the civil rights organization. The people discovered that unless they had political power, all they could do was just ask for their rights.

So the people decided to form their own political organization. They would elect their own public officials. If they could take over the County government, they'd no longer have to ask for what they needed. They could then take it.

So the Lowndes County people asked the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to show them how to start their own political party. SNCC's researchers got a copy of the Alabama Code of Laws (a 12-book set) and began studying all the laws about County governments. When they knew all about how Alabama Counties were set up, SNCC scheduled a series of workshops, beginning in December of 1965. The purpose of the workshops was to help the Lowndes County people learn everything they needed to know about the political laws of Alabama as they applied to County government.

THE ATLANTA WORKSHOPS

The first 3 workshops were held in the SNCC building in Atlanta. At the first one, about 25 Lowndes County people were there. It lasted for four days. When the people went back to Lowndes and began talking about what they had learned, their friends wanted to come to the next one. So by the last workshop held in Atlanta in February of 1966, about 50 people were present.

By this time, a great number of people in Lowndes County knew about the workshops and about the movement to start a new political party. But most of them were unable to come to Atlanta for the four-day workshops.

So SNCC began holding workshops in Lowndes County. They were held regularly, every two weeks, between February and May of 1966. Hundreds of people attended the workshops by the time the nominating convention was held in May, 1966.

WHAT WENT ON AT THE WORKSHOPS?

The workshops started off by discussing the Alabama laws which say how persons can become candidates for public office. In other words, how a person could be nominated for office.

When everyone knew how you could get nominated, they discussed the laws about how elections must be held in Alabama.

Then the workshops took up the actual offices which were up for election in the Fall of 1966. They were sheriff, tax assessor, tax collector, coroner, and 3 members of the 5-member school board.

SNCC researchers got complete descriptions of the duties, responsibilities and authority of each of these offices from the Alabama laws. They mimeographed these descriptions and distributed them throughout Lowndes County, so that everyone who was interested could find out as much about each office as he felt he needed to know.

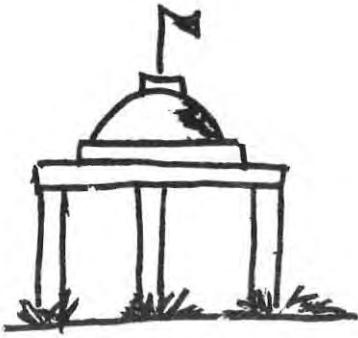
The workshops which were held in Lowndes then began to center around the questions people would have after reading the job-description sheets. By the time the May Nominating Convention came around, hundreds of people had read and discussed the duties of the different County offices.

THE PICTURE STORIES

Since many people in the County could not read and write, SNCC drew up picture-stories about each office. They showed what each official was supposed to do, and what the people could do if they controlled those offices.

Here are 3 pages from the Sheriff and 3 pages from the Tax Assessor picture stories.

①



SHERIFF—

-3-

②



The sheriff keeps the peace in the county.

③



He supresses riots..

④



unlawful assemblies....

⑤



and stops fights.

⑥



He can have a posse.

(18) (We have left out two pages.)



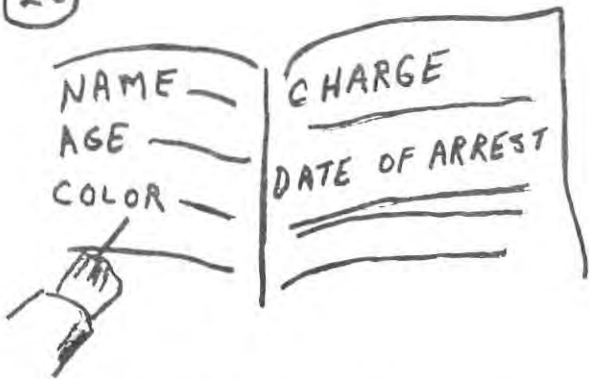
The law and people will protect a sheriff in delivering any legal papers.

(19)



The sheriff keeps a book with a description of all prisoners.

(20)



The book must include the name, age, color, sex, distinguishing marks, charge date of jailing, date of release.

(21)



The sheriff must also keep a book on any sales received by him for unpaid tractors, home, etc.

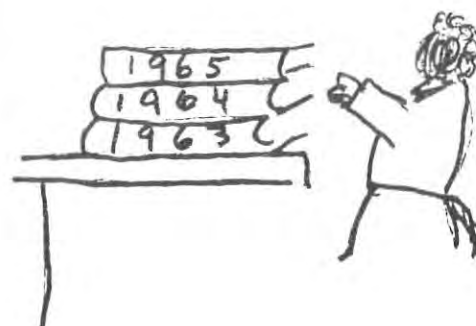
(22)



The sheriff keeps a book on all the property sold by him, by order of the court.

(23)

All books are always open to the public.



...

30 (Another way left out.)



\$1.00 for making fingerprints

31



The sheriff must keep a record of all his work. He must file with the state to get his money.

32



The sheriff helps with the county, state and federal elections.

33



The sheriff, probate judge and the circuit clerk are the election appointing board for the county.

34



During elections they appoint three inspectors, two clerks and one returning officer to each voting place.

35



Those appointed must be registered voters.

①



TAX ASSESSOR



The tax assessor is the person in the county who says how much your property is worth for taxation purposes.

③



The tax assessor is supposed to assess property at its fair and reasonable market value.

④



The old cars are reckoned at the same rate as houses but separately.

⑤



The tax assessor can assess up to 60% of properties value.

⑥

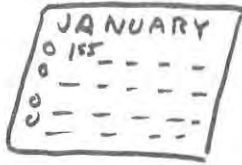


The tax assessor may hire deputies to help him or her to work.

7

-7

The tax assessor makes his assessments between October 1st and January 1st.



8



Every person should come before the tax assessor to state how much property he owns.

9



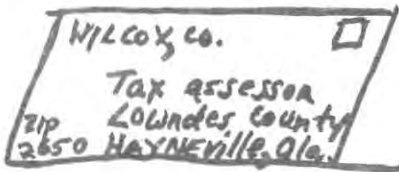
Before going into a community the tax assessor must give atleast ten days notice in the county newspaper.

10



Before the taxpayer makes his return to the assessor he takes oath about the value of his property.

11



A person who lives outside of the county can mail his return to the tax assessor.

12



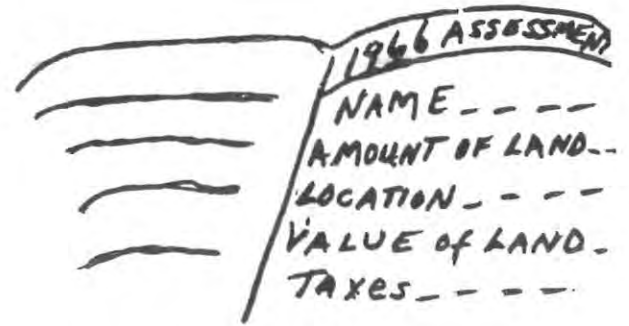
after Dec. 31st the tax assessor or his deputy can demand a return from those who have not reported their taxes

13



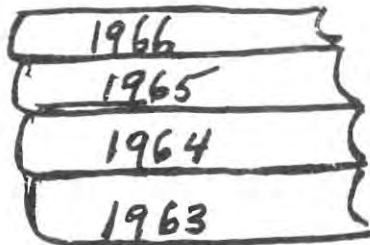
If there is no return by the 3rd Monday in Jan. The tax assessor can give a notice of SALE.

14



The tax assessor keeps books that show the owner, and description of all property in the county.

15



The tax assessor keeps the tax assessment books.

16



The tax assessor keeps the books with the assessed value of personal property and the total amount of state, county and special taxes.

17



The tax assessor has to keep three sets of books on taxes owed in the county.

18



The tax assessor makes a list of the amount of taxes owed in the county. He then turns the list over to the tax collector. ...

These picture stories were mimeographed and widely distributed throughout the County. They not only taught the people what the duties of the various County officials were, but also what the rights of the private citizen were.

THE NOMINATING CONVENTION

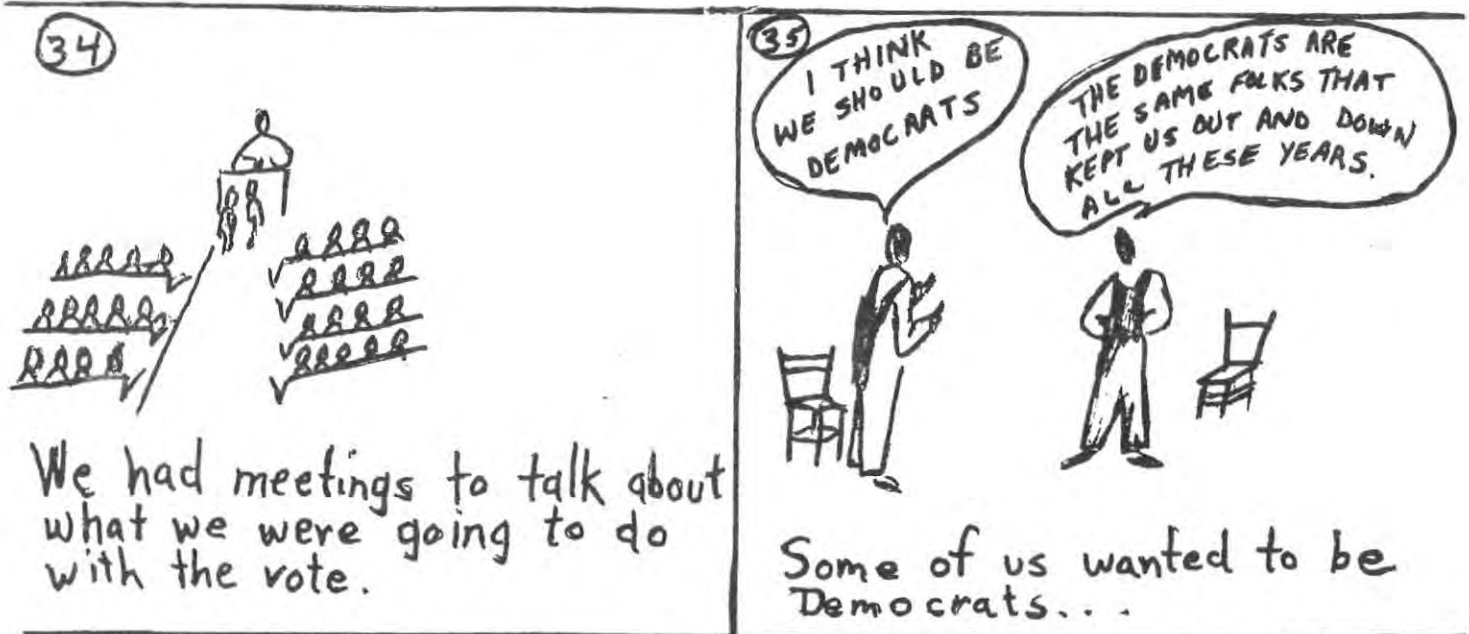
On May 2, after much difficulty with the white County officials, including the threat of bringing their guns to the Court House to break up any meetings held there, the people got an opinion from the Alabama Attorney General which said it would be legal for them to hold their Nominating Convention in a local church.

So on May 3rd the Convention was held. It was wide open. Anyone in the County who wanted to could run for nomination to any of the offices that were open. There were at least two candidates for each of the offices.

Voting in the Nominating Convention was by secret paper ballot. A regular registration procedure was set up, to make sure that only persons who were qualified to vote under Alabama law could vote in the Convention.

All of the Convention rules and procedures were set up by the Lowndes County people, themselves. The SNCC organizers only helped the people determine whether the procedures met all the requirements of the law.

Another picture story was mimeographed, which told the story of the beginning of the Black Panther Party. Here are some of the pictures from this too.



36



But most of us wanted something we could control

37



38



NOW WE HAVE THE VOTE, WE WANT TO CONTROL IT

39



We are going to hold a mass meeting to nominate our candidates for the November 8th. election.

THE SUMMER WORKSHOPS

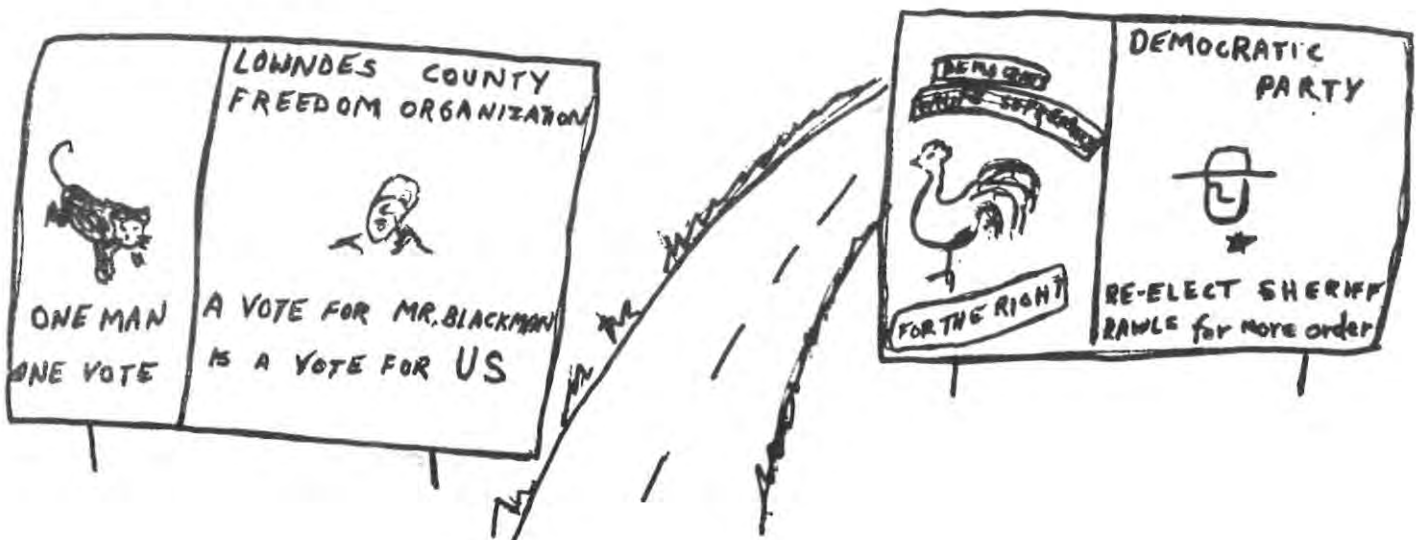
After the Nominating Convention, where there was one nominee picked for each office, the workshops continued throughout the summer. They were aimed toward preparing the candidates to do a good job in the offices they were running for. Many of the people who were not running for office continued to come to the workshops.

These workshops dealt with the ways in which people with money pay off elected officials and get them to sell-out ordinary folks. The way a "bag man," or pay-off man operates was described. The people in the workshops learned that many times the rich people will act like the friends of elected officials. They will invite the officials into their homes for dinner and parties, let them join their clubs, and will almost treat them as equals. Many times this is all that's necessary to get the official to favor them. Sometimes the rich people will actually give money to the official, or help him buy a piece of valuable property real cheap, or get some of his relatives a good job. There are many ways open to the rich person to gain favors from the elected official.

Little by little, the official is made to feel better than the people who elected him, and he begins to see himself as the friend of the rich and powerful.

By the time several such workshops had been held, people in Lowndes County began to see what they had to watch for in a candidate they elected to public office. But, more important, they began to see that the people do not have to put up with such sell-outs. They began to see that officials whom they elect to office, when they sell out this way, can be removed by impeachment, prosecution for not doing their jobs properly, special elections, and so forth.

During the summer there was a lot of hard work too, spreading the word to all the people in the County about the November elections.



ELECTION DAY

On election day, November 8, the Black Panther Party organized car pools and set up pick-up points to get people to the polls. There were only 10 hours to be sure everyone got their long-awaited chance to vote for their own candidates.

The Freedom Organization assigned poll watchers to each polling place, to challenge any voter who was not who he claimed to be. At some polls, the Black Panther poll watchers were ordered to leave by officials, and at a few polls there were no poll watchers.

Black Panther Party workers were fired upon by shotguns and one of the strongest workers **was** beaten on the head with a rifle butt and tire chains by members of a mob near one polling place, just as it was closing.

<u>Final Returns</u>	
<u>Sheriff</u>	<u>School Board #3</u>
Sydney Logan, Jr. (LCFO) --1643	Robert Logan (LCFO) --1664
Frank Ryals (Dem.) --2320	David M. Lyon (Rep.) --1937
<u>Coroner</u>	<u>School Board #4</u>
Emory Ross (LCFO) --1640	John Hinson (LCFO) --1666
Jack Golson (Dem.) --2265	Tommy Coleman (Rep.) --1966
<u>Tax Assessor</u>	<u>School Board #5</u>
Alice L. Moore (LCFO) --1604	Willie M. Strickland (LCFO) --1600
Charlie Sullivan (Dem) --2265	C. B. Haigler (Dem.) --2170
<u>Tax Collector</u>	
Frank Miles, Jr. (LCFO) --1603	
Iva D. Sullivan (Dem.) --2268	

ELECTION RESULTS

The Lowndes County Freedom Organization candidates captured 43% of the vote. Over 1600 people voted for each of the seven Black Panther candidates. The fear, the trick of assigning people to vote in precincts across the county from their home (only about half the people were allowed to vote in their home precinct), the votes of dead people and people who had moved away, and the misleading help of "poll officials" for some people who could not read nor write had combined to defeat the Black Panther Party--this time.

LESSONS FROM THE ELECTIONS

This was the first election in which Negroes of Lowndes County, Alabama, had ever voted. They learned deeply several lessons from it.

1. Poor people can nominate their own candidates. They do not have to vote for candidates named by rich people.
2. If poor people controlled the tax assessor's office, the rich could be taxed fairly. The money the County could collect from the rich people could be used for much-needed schools, roads, waters, sewers and other services.
3. If poor people controlled the sheriff's office, he could become a protector of the people, not a protector of the power structure.
4. There are ways of dealing with most of the tricks in the power structure's bag. The most common tricks are:
 - *physical violence
 - *eviction
 - *firing from jobs
 - *buying out people with poverty war programs, money and jobs
 - *election day cheating
5. The best way of dealing with these tricks is for poor people to stick together. Only by sticking together through physical violence, getting kicked out of your home or job, being tricked on election day, and the tempting lure of Government money can the poor people gain power—and hold it.

Once these lessons are learned, they are hard to forget.