

SUBJECT: "Tenant Farmers and Voting Rights"

PARTICIPANTS: Senator Hubert Humphrey (D.-Minn.)
Don Slaiman
Mrs. John McFerrin

MODERATOR: Harry W. Flannery

Time: 13:27

FLANNERY: AS WE SEE IT!

HUMPHREY: You elected a pro civil rights administration, that's number one. That's the best thing that happened to civil rights.

FLANNERY: That was Senator Hubert Humphrey, majority whip of the Senate, as he addressed the Civil Rights and Legislative Conference held by the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers at the Hotel Willard here in Washington.

This radio station of the ABC network and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations bring you Senator Humphrey as he continued.

HUMPHREY: You won't have to come up there and plead and beg and shove and push. You have a president, you have an administration, you have leaders in the Congress, you have groups throughout America that want to see effective, steady progress in this great area of equal rights and human rights, called civil rights. And the President of the United States, with his executive powers, can do more for the cause of civil rights in the next 12 months than all the combined effort of the legislative bodies of the 50 states and the Congress put together in the next four years. We are going to have executive action in the field of civil rights and we are going to have legislative action.

Don't you believe these folks that would like to have you believe that nothing is going to be done. Maybe we are not going to do it next week, but, as I said to a friend of mine I wrote to back home (and the rascal went and put it in the paper) I said to him he was giving me a real working over because I wasn't getting a job for somebody and I said, "Look, Harry, I want to tell you something, we are not going out of power. We are just coming in, you know. Just hold on a while. We have only been in two and a half weeks." And, every so often, somebody gets up that was never ever really for civil rights and says, "Well, I see you haven't done anything for civil rights yet." Haven't we? You wait and see.

FLANNERY: Senator Humphrey gave some instances of the way that the Administration has selected men for their ability: George Weaver, the Assistant Secretary of Labor; Robert C. Weaver, administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, and Frank Reeves, Presidential Assistant.

HUMPHREY: And the Justice Department will be taking care of the right to vote, and I want to tell you something, my friends, you give me the right to vote and you give every American the right to vote without fear, without intimidation, without coercion, without fear of bodily harm or economic injury. You put the government of the United States along side of me as a citizen to protect my right to vote and, I'll tell you something, my friends, the segregationists and the white citizens councils and the reactionaries will shake in their boots. And they will lose them too.

It may take a little longer, but it will be sure. I tell you, when the people are permitted to exercise their franchise without fear -- not being thrown out into their tents -- when they are permitted to exercise their franchise with the most powerful government in the world alongside of them as their strong right arm to see that they are untouched, unharmed, there will be the darndest change of political views up here in the Congress you ever imagined. You'll be surprised.

That's civil rights and we are going to see that this is done. We are not going to make any ridiculous commitments that can't be fulfilled. We are going to progressively proceed to the fulfillment of what every American knows he ought to have and is entitled to have -- his full and equal rights.

This is the best foreign policy this country can have, too, make no mistake about it. Everybody is talking about the African problem, talking about the Latin American problem, the Asian problem. The first thing that needs to be done about these problems is right here at home. There is no amount of American money that can cover up for our failure to regard and respect human dignity. There is no amount of a checkbook -- this open checkbook (just write out another check) will never take care of the denial of equal rights. And I am here to tell you that the President of the United States, who is the chief spokesman for this country in foreign affairs, knows as well as any man that ever lived since the time of Abraham Lincoln that in order to make our foreign policy more effective, in order for us to get off dead center, in order for us to stop the retreat in which we are presently in, that we must face up to the biggest issue of our time -- the fundamental moral issue -- human equality and the protection of equal rights and equal privileges and responsibility for every human being that calls himself or is entitled to be called an American citizen. And, when we have that, my friends, we will be prepared to do a better job in Africa and we will be prepared to do a better job in Latin America and Asia and until we cleanse our minds, we are never going to be able to do anything in terms of the basic needs of these people.

This is it, this is fundamental. And everybody of responsibility today that has the responsibility for the performance of this government knows it. So, it is no longer a matter of whether you have been politically liberal or politically conservative, if you just want to live, if you just want this country to survive, my fellow Americans, if you just want this country not to cast itself upon the rocks and be destroyed in the turbulent storms of revolution throughout the world, we are just going to have to live up to what we say. That is why I am an optimist. I am an optimist out of the impact of necessity.

FLANNERY: With us is Mrs. John McFerrin, who is the wife of the chairman of the board of directors of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League.

Mrs. McFerrin, you notice that Senator Humphrey just said:

HUMPHREY: I tell you when the people are permitted to exercise their franchise without fear -- not being thrown out into their tents -- when they are permitted to exercise their franchise with the most powerful government in the world alongside of them as their strong right arm to see that they are untouched, unharmed, there will be the darndest change of political views up here in the Congress you ever imagined.

FLANNERY: Mrs. McFerrin, what is the situation in regard to these tenant farmers in Tennessee in your county who have been ousted from their homes because they wanted to vote in Tennessee?

McFERRIN: Well, the situation is very sad. We have 15 families living in tents already. We have hundreds of other families that are living on the farms because there has been a temporary injunction issued and, until after this court hearing, they will remain there. At that time we will know further steps to take.

FLANNERY: Are they able to live on the farms and support themselves? Are they able to make anything while they are on the farms, Mrs. McFerrin?

McFERRIN: No, as of now they only live in the houses on the farms. They do not have any source of income, and their only resources for living or surviving is through aid that is sent in from people all over the country.

FLANNERY: Now what about those living in the tents. Do they have any means of income, of supporting themselves and their families?

McFERRIN: The only support they have is the support that is sent in to the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League.

FLANNERY: What is the status of the case now?

McFERRIN: We will be informed of the date of trial and the next action.

FLANNERY: In what court would that be, Mrs. McFerrin?

McFERRIN: That would be in the federal court.

FLANNERY: Of the state of Tennessee?

McFERRIN: Yes.

FLANNERY: That decision might give these people the right to remain on these farms, to remain as tenant farmers and also have the right to vote -- you hope.

McFERRIN: We hope so.

FLANNERY: What is the weather in Fayette County at this time, Mrs. McFerrin?

McFERRIN: The temperature at this time in Fayette County is 45 degrees. It's very mild there for winter weather.

FLANNERY: How long have they been in the tents and how long has this situation generally been in progress?

McFERRIN: Well, the first family moved into the tents in early December.

FLANNERY: They have been receiving some aid so far haven't they?

McFERRIN: That's true.

FLANNERY: With us also is Don Slaiman, assistant director of the Civil Rights Department of the AFL-CIO.

Don, I believe the AFL-CIO has been attempting to get some aid for these people. What has it done so far?

SLAIMAN: So far, the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO has donated \$2,000 directly to our Tennessee AFL-CIO to be distributed for emergency needs in Fayette County. The Executive Council has also called on our community services department to survey the needs and alert the affiliates of the AFL-CIO to help. I am told by our community services department that a number of our international unions and large locals are already on alert and ready to make donations as soon as they find out the immediate pressing and priority needs.

We are also interested in the longer range needs in the situation besides those of the immediate welfare needs. We are sure, and I believe Mrs. McFerrin can tell us more about it, that in order for these people to freely exercise their vote as Senator Humphrey says without fear, coercion or eviction into tents, that they will have to be rehabilitated in the area in some gainful occupation. This might mean crop loans, mortgage loans, loans for the wherewithall to farm. We are keeping in touch with the situation to see what will be needed and what we can do in this regard along with other community organizations and national organizations.

FLANNERY: You are not necessarily figuring, as I gather it, that all these people would go back to the farms from which they have been evicted?

SLAIMAN: No, I believe that even if the court decisions are favorable, that some of these people will have to be settled in other areas of the county -- of both counties -- that even under the best court circumstances, there will be some attrition from normal economic developments and mechanization and, I believe, here again I would refer to Mrs. McFerrin, that there is an investigation into the problem of resettlement on other land that might be available from sympathetic people in the counties.

FLANNERY: Can you tell us about some of these plans for this resettlement, Mrs. McFerrin?

McFERRIN: Yes, we hope to buy land through contributions of wonderful people such as those who have contributed already and, in so doing, we hope to rehabilitate these evicted people on the land and perhaps, in some way, they can become land owners and be self-supporting.

FLANNERY: Is their morale pretty good?

McFERRIN: The morale is very good.

FLANNERY: Mrs. McFerrin, what is the simplest way to send aid whether it is in the form of check or canned goods or clothing?

McFERRIN: It should be addressed to the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, Route 4, Box 133, Summerville, Tennessee, and in care of John McFerrin.

FLANNERY: Thank you, Mrs. John McFerrin, wife of the chairman of the board of directors of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League; Don Slaiman, assistant director of the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, and Senator Hubert Humphrey, majority whip of the Senate.

This is Harry W. Flannery, speaking for the AFL-CIO and inviting you to be with us next week at this same time for AS WE SEE IT.

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