

873 Broadway
2nd floor south
New York, N.Y. 10003


February 6, 1970

TO NCers AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

Enclosed is a report by Doug Jenness on the United Citizens' Party of South Carolina. As the report indicates, the party is a new formation, and we hope to follow its development in the press. We are sending this report to NCers and organizers to keep them abreast of the information we have.

Comradely,



Joel Britton
National Office

REPORT ON UNITED CITIZENS' PARTY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

by Doug Jenness, January 27, 1970

The United Citizens' Party is a predominantly black political party in the state of South Carolina which is attempting to obtain official ballot status on a state-wide basis in order to run candidates independent of the Republican and Democratic parties. The first public announcement of this party was made on November 22 at the annual meeting of the South Carolina Voter Education Project, an organization that coordinates black voter registration efforts.

The party grew out of repeated failures at getting black candidates nominated in the Democratic primaries. For example, one of the main figures identified with the party is George Payton, a black lawyer from Charleston who ran unsuccessfully against Rep. Mendel Rivers in the 1968 Democratic Party primary. Consequently, the party embraces individuals who have been active in the Democratic Party. The party appears to be a genuine state-wide effort with the main groups in Columbia and Charleston. A 14-person steering committee has been established and the party claims organizations in 24 of South Carolina's 46 counties.

The primary activity of the party at present is the drive to obtain official ballot status. Only 10,001 signatures are required by law, but they want a safe margin. Most of the petitioners carry information as they petition explaining how to register to vote. In Columbia they are only petitioning in wards that have 300 or more registered black voters and are clearly concentrating on obtaining black signatures. The party leaders are reluctant to release figures of how many signatures they have collected, so there is no way to report an accurate figure. However, in Richland County they have set themselves a goal of 4,000 signatures. They claim to have collected nearly 2,000 of these. This would indicate a slow pace since the petition drive started on December 1 and they were hoping to conclude in one month. They will be filing the signatures sometime in late February or early March, and expect to be challenged. The party has not yet discussed a program or selected candidates. There will be a state-wide convention after they obtain ballot status to discuss these questions.

Four comrades attended a meeting in Columbia, S.C. on January 25 called to organize a Richland County section of the United Citizens' Party. About 50 people attended the meeting and the composition was all black except for one white AFSC person. The meeting represented a cross section -- including several black clergymen involved in the civil rights movement, old civil rights activists, college students, professors and lawyers. Most of the people present were in their 20's and 30's. The Columbia group is temporarily operating out of the offices of the Blacks United for Action, which is a militant black youth group headed by John Harper.

From this meeting we learned the following things:

- 1) The primary leadership and strongest group appears to be in Charleston.
- 2) At this point the party is almost exclusively concerned with electoral activity -- getting black representation in local state offices.
- 3) Some of the Columbia leadership is very sensitive to press publicity labeling the party as an "all black" or "black-oriented" organization. They contend that the party is open to whites and in fact the white AFSC person was elected to the county steering committee. This feeling, however, was not unanimous.
- 4) The radical movement in Columbia (the people around the University of South Carolina SMC and RYM-II as well as those around the UFO coffeehouse) knew almost nothing about the party, and most were not interested.
- 5) The Columbia leaders were very reluctant to talk with us (we identified ourselves as being from the Militant newspaper) and did not want to give interviews. However, Lawrence Tolliver, a professor at Benedict College in Columbia, and state-wide petition coordinator, told us they weren't permitting the press to cover the meeting we attended, but that since we were from the Militant it was all right. (He was familiar with the Militant.)
- 6) It is unclear what political differentiations exist in the group, especially on a state-wide basis.
- 7) They are in bad financial shape, at least in Columbia.

John Harper, a member of the state-wide steering committee and chairman of the Richland County group, emphasized that the party is "genuinely independent" of the Democratic and Republican Parties. He, like many of the others, refers to establishing South Carolina's 4th party. In his presentation at the meeting he indicated that the purpose of the party was to represent "black and other powerless people," and he quoted Malcolm X on why black control of black communities was a better demand than integration. However, he also indicated to me that they see their movement as being similar to the Alabama national Democratic Party. He said if white or black Democrats were nominated who sincerely supported the interests of black and poor people, his party would probably support them. Thus, there seems to be considerable confusion on the question of the Democratic Party.

I wasn't able to determine their attitude toward the national Democratic Party.

The party is clearly still in a state of flux, and its future seems to rest on whether it obtains ballot status. We should keep in regular contact with them and follow their development closely. There will be an open state-wide meeting in Charleston, S.C. held at the Hospital Workers' Union Local 1199 on Saturday, February 7.