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Comments on national Democratic Party civil rights platform

Strom Thurmond

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Since returning from Chicago, I have been surprised to learn that some people are saying the South gained increased recognition for her views at the Democratic National Convention.

Because I represented you as a delegate to Chicago and because I am the nominee of the primary for the seat I formerly held in the Senate, I feel it is my duty to express my views on what happened in Chicago.

I was disappointed in the platform adopted and even more disappointed in the candidates nominated to run for President and Vice President.

South Carolina's representatives on the Platform and Resolutions Committee, Senator Jefferies and Mrs. Agnew, both voted against the platform, as did 37 of the 40 regular delegates from South Carolina. I was one of those 37.

Former President Truman told the Convention the civil rights plank was the strongest ever written. House Democratic Leader John McCormack, who was chairman of the Platform Committee, took the floor to outline in detail the added strength of this platform over the 1952 plank on civil rights.

In addition to the strong anti-segregation plank which calls for federal action, if necessary, the platform has a number of other provisions obnoxious to our people.

The platform calls for federal aid to education which, regardless of what might be said, inevitably leads to federal control of schools.
The very first words of the education plank in the 1956 platform is much stronger than the same words in the 1952 platform. The 1952 plank said: "Every American child, irrespective of color, national origin, economic status, or place of residence, should have every educational opportunity to develop his potentialities."

But the 1956 plank adds the clause "has full right under the law and the Constitution, without discrimination", after the word "place of residence", thus giving backhanded recognition and tacit approval to the decision of the Supreme Court in the school segregation cases.

In 1952 the platform, with reference to federal aid to education, stated specifically: "The Federal Government should not dictate or control educational policy."

This is a flat denial of federal authority in the field of education, but the 1956 plank on education contains no such strong statement.

In the 1956 civil rights plank the first 2½ paragraphs are identical with the first 4½ paragraphs of the 1952 plank. Both planks state that civil rights enforcement "also requires federal action."

The 1956 plank, like the 1952 plank, pledges the Democratic Party to support FEPC and interference in the voting procedures of the States.

This plank also makes a specific reference to education and to the Supreme Court decision.

The 1952 plank made reference only to discrimination against enrollment in higher educational institutions. The 1956 plank "pledges itself to continue its efforts to eliminate illegal
discriminations of all kinds, in relation to . . . full rights to education in publicly supported institutions." This can mean nothing less than approval of the Supreme Court decision which reversed the separate but equal doctrine of public educational facilities.

In the same plank, with further reference to the Court, it was stated: "The Democratic Party emphatically reaffirms its support of the historic principle that ours is a government of laws and not of men; it recognizes the Supreme Court of the United States as one of the three Constitutional and coordinate branches of the Federal Government, superior to and separate from any political party, the decisions of which are part of the laws of the land. . . ."

Here again indirect approval is given to the May 17, 1954, segregation decision. The implication is that we must accept the decision of the Court. I for one can accept no such decision and I resent this reference in the Democratic platform.

The platform calls for the outright repeal of the Taft-Hartley Law on the specific grounds that such repeal is necessary so as to wipe out the right-to-work laws of the States. South Carolina has a right-to-work law which was enacted to protect the interests of all the workers, and the public as well. If the South Carolina General Assembly wants to repeal this law, it can do so, but I do not want the Federal Government to attempt to dictate its repeal. Nor do I want the Democratic Party to do so.

The platform calls for changing the rules of Congress so as to limit debate in the Senate. If this were done, it would destroy the power of Senators who believe in the rights of the States to block legislation designed to force integration and other abhorrent provisions on the States.