

MEMORANDUM

March 24, 1965

FROM: Jim Dombrowski and Carl Braden
TO: Friends Everywhere
IN RE: Help Urgently Needed in Alabama

Between 150 and 200 students are fasting in jail and prison in Montgomery, Alabama in support of the protest in Selma, Alabama.

The news media and public officials are blocking out news of this action and your help is needed to break through the paper curtain.

The students are from Alabama and many other parts of the United States. They are refusing to eat until federal authorities and state officials take steps to protect their right to picket and demonstrate in support of the march from Selma to Montgomery. They have not eaten since March 18.

The Montgomery protest started March 10, the day after marchers from Selma were turned back by state troopers at the bridge over the Alabama River. About 500 students from Tuskegee Institute were in the forefront of the demonstration in Montgomery which took place in front of the State Capitol Building.

They were protesting refusal of registrars in Selma and surrounding counties to register Negroes to vote and the refusal of state officials to allow Selma people to march to Montgomery in protest.

The March 10th demonstration was broken up and the students were forced to take refuge in a nearby church. Since then many demonstrations have been broken up by city, county and state police supported by mounted possemen from the surrounding country-side. These horsemen have beaten the students with clubs, bullwhips and ropes, injuring many of them. City police used the same tactics to break up a rally on the campus of Alabama State College.

On Thursday, March 18, groups of 50 and 60 students picketed in front of the State Capitol and were arrested on various charges such as loitering. About 300 were taken to Montgomery City Jail and to nearby Kilby State Prison where they immediately began fasting. The number in custody has steadily fallen until it is now between 150 and 200.

The hunger strikers contend that the federal government has the power to free them under the Civil Rights Act on the ground that they were arrested while exercising their civil rights. Suits are being filed in federal court to get an order restraining police from making further arrests for demonstrating and picketing.

Public officials have made great efforts to confuse the issue and to say that the students in Montgomery are not supporting the march from Selma. This charge is not true. However the propaganda by the opposition is having its effect. The news media ---the press, radio and television --- have had a virtual blackout of the events in Montgomery.

We ask you to wire, write, or call the U. S. Department of Justice Office in your city; Atty. Gen. Katzenbach in Washington; and President Johnson. Ask them to act to free these students and protect their right to picket and demonstrate.

We also ask you to call the news editors of the daily newspapers, and any Negro or students newspapers in your vicinity. Tell them about the situation in Montgomery. Ask them to print a report about it.

Call the news editors of the United Press and Associated Press in your city and ask them why they have not reported this situation in Montgomery. They can obtain full information from the press office of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Montgomery (phone 263-4481); or the SNCC Communications office in Atlanta, Georgia (phone 688-0331).