

EYEWITNESS IN ALBANY

Charles Sherrod

According to classic definitions of journalism, the following dispatch is more a feature than a news story and should therefore be denied the front page. It is, however, we feel an outcry of such urgency and universality that it is worthy of the front page of any liberal journal in the land. Charles Sherrod was one of the first Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Field Secretaries to start work in Albany, Georgia.

--THE EDITORS



KING - FROM JAIL TO COURT.

Albany, Ga.: The importance of the Albany Movement is only now being realized. The eyes of the world have been on Albany, Ga. since the mass demonstrations in December. Millions were shocked that "white people" would do such things to those "poor Negroes" in the South. Thousands were appalled at the brutality of the city officials here. 1,200 were arrested, and many beaten. A pregnant woman was hit from behind and slammed to the ground while holding her 3 year old baby girl in her arms. Charles Jones was roughed up. Bill Hansen was hospitalized with a broken jaw. Attorney C.B. King was whacked a bloody blow across his head by a sheriff's cane. And on runs the blood into the streets of Albany where it is seen across the country; but there are only a few who really understand what we are doing, where we are going and what it all means.

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TERRELL COUNTY

Perhaps the people in Lee and Terrell counties are the only ones who grasp the depth, the meaning of the Albany Movement. Lee and Terrell are two counties among many that surround Albany, the only urban area in Southwest Georgia. Strange things have been happening in these counties.

Since June 10, SNCC has had workers in Lee County -- Kathy Conwell of Skidmore, Donald Harris of Rutgers, Penny Patch of Swarthmore, Isaac Martin of Rocky Mountain College, and Peggy Dammond of Boston University. Dr. Robert Johnson of N.Y.C.C. was present during the early part of the summer. There we were about 18 miles away from Albany, the mighty fortress, and 18 other miles away from every "other" where, way back in the deep woods.

We stayed at "Mama Dolly's" house. She is a gray haired old lady of about 70 who can pick more cotton, "slop more pigs", plow more ground, chop more wood, and do a hundred more things better than the best farmer in the area. We received threats on the telephone, strange automobiles approached under cover of darkness, and a shoe box sized package was found in the mail box, possibly a bomb. It disappeared before it could be investigated.

We were steadily making a "bee line" to the registrar's office and having meetings each Saturday night. Can you imagine what this means -- Saturday night in a small county which knows only wine, women, and song for recreation -- on Saturday night, these people are singing Freedom songs in a little wooden church somewhere in the back country. And the meeting is peopled by the folk of Sumter County, Albany, and Terrell County; all come together on Saturday night in Lee.

"I'M SCARED"

At the same time we were also engaged in a similar pro-

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gram in Terrell County, living there as in Lee on the three C's of health, well at least our health -- crackers, cucumbers, and collards. We had a few squash thrown in by well wishers. But half starved, holes in the bottoms of our shoes, we were walking long country miles in Lee and Terrell counties, hearing, "I'm scared" over and over and over and wanting to yell, "Hell, lady, I'm scared too, so what!"

It was in Terrell, called "Terrible Terrell" or "Tombstone Territory" by the high school students, that opposition first crystallized. It was about 8:30 on the evening of our voter registration meeting and we had just begun. In walked about ten white men into our church, smoking, hats on, talking, mumbling, flashlights, guns, clubs and bil- lies, and looking mean. They took over after asking for a word. They stayed for more than an hour. They took names of people at the meeting and finally left to remain in front of the church. This was not the only time they had "taken over." The people were afraid and so were we, but nobody showed it. That night we sang as if they were listening in New York. And they were, for the Times carried the story the next day.

CHURCHES BURNED

They were also listening across the country when in Leesburg County where we used to meet -- Shady Grove Baptist Church -- the first burning occurred. The Sheriff said that it might have been lightning. The burning was undoubtedly a scare tactic. On Saturday night we had a full crowd walking and talking and singing and praying about Freedom. The people of the County were angry and showed it. Some came now who had previously been afraid.

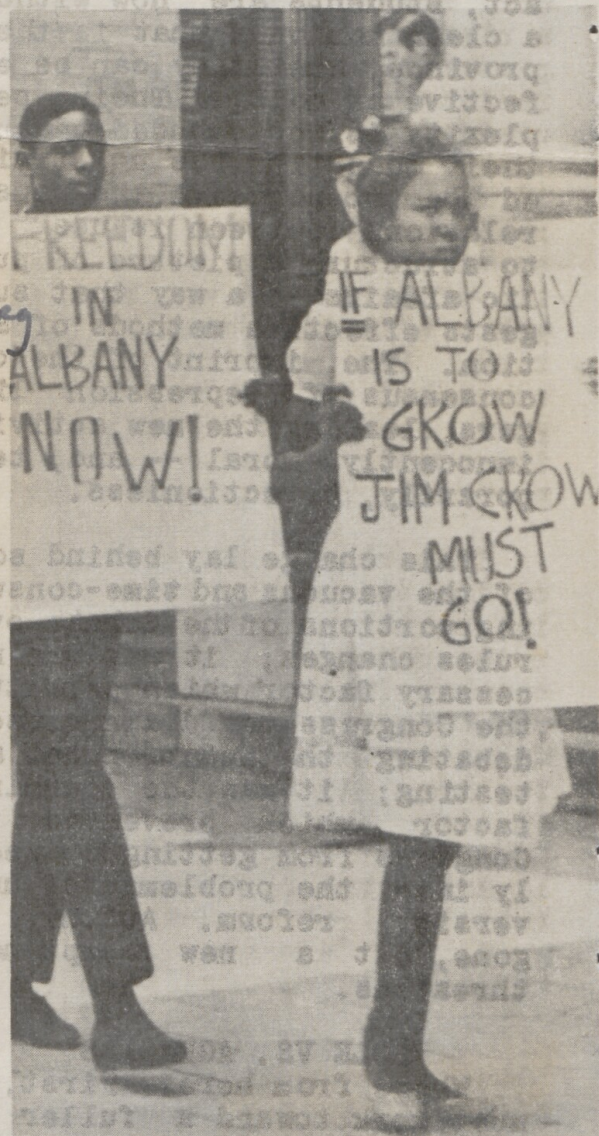
Then followed the two burnings in Sasser and in Terrell County. The churches had been completely destroyed, leveled to a ground of hot cinders. The church in Lee County, a cinder-block structure, had its white walls blown down. At the two churches in Terrell the only thing standing was the chim-

ney.

Only a week before, our headquarters had been shot up. In Terrell we lived with Mrs. Carolyn Daniels, a young divorcee in a three room cinder-block structured house. She is the "mama" for us there. There is always a "mama". She is usually a militant woman in the community, outspoken, understanding, and willing to catch hell, having already caught her share.

It was about midnight. I had hopped in the sack, being sick, and Prathia Hall of Temple, Ralph Allen and Jack Chatfield of Trinity College, Christopher Allen of Oxford, and Roychester Patterson, Mrs. Daniels' son, were busy in the kitchen hunting syrup, mayonnaise, or butter sandwiches.

Out of the night that covered us, pitch black, there were two blasts. Chatfield crouched, gliding into where I was. Suddenly, he snaps around, explaining quite surprisingly but not too excited -- "I'm hit." Prathia Hall and Christopher



Allen were grazed, one on the finger, the other on the arm. We were all on the floor. We were working together on voter registration. We had been shot at. Some were hit. There was blood. We were afraid. Where was the Federal government? We crawled about on the floor as if we were in Korea on Pork Chop Hill.

24 SHOTS

There were some shootings in Lee County. In one home there were twenty-four shots. We had about twelve, all of which went through the front door and through the middle wood section of the back screen door. Four homes were fired into. The meetings continued in Lee and in Terrell. Another church was burned -- I Hope Baptist Church. An attempt was made to disconnect this from any effort to register Negroes.

They found men who admitted to the burning. They had been drinking. But the head deacon there is a staunch supporter of the drive to register people. The 1960 report of the Civil Rights Commission describes the brutal killing of one James Brazier and the injunction proceedings brought against the officials because of it. The Brazier family goes to this church. After the burning, there was evidence of threats to destroy the home of a deacon.

ALBANY MEANS PROGRESS

This is "the Movement." These are the people on whose backs, in the heat of the day, the South was built. It will be through them again that the South as it exists today will be destroyed. Albany means progress to these people, the possibility that White is not always right and Negroes may stick together sometimes.

Recently we met in a tent on ground which had been cleared off for the rebuilding of the church. We had about fifty people from Albany. Six months ago, maybe four, you couldn't have paid these people of Albany enough to come to Dawson, Sasser, or anywhere else in Terrell County. But something has happened here