

February 4, 1964

Chronology of Recent Events in CANTON, MISSISSIPPI

The City of Canton is located 25 miles north of Jackson. Its total population is 9,707, the Negro population is 6,220. Only 5.9 percent of the voting age Negroes in Madison County are registered to vote, according to the 1961 U.S. Civil Rights Commission Report on Voting.

January 21, 1964 - The Canton City Council passed a law making it criminal to distribute literature without a permit from the Mayor and Chief of Police.

Two constables and a new police cruiser were added to law enforcement agencies in Canton.

January 22 - George Washington, 50, a prominent citizen and Treasurer of the Madison County (civil rights) Movement, was arrested. He was charged with "burning trash without a permit," posted \$250 bond, and was released.

January 23 - Police entered the community center-voter registration office and seized a list of names taken from a recently circulated petition.

Two persons were arrested for violating the city building code. Member of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) staff were attempting to make repairs on the voter registration office which had been condemned by city authorities earlier. (The Council of Federated Organizations is a coalition of all civil rights groups working in Mississippi.) James Collier, 28, from Jackson, and Clarence Chinn, 40, from Canton, were charged with violation of the city building code and bond was set at \$350 each.

Theotus Hewitt, 25, from Canton, was arrested for disturbing the peace and intimidating an officer. Bond was set at \$500.

That afternoon the three arrestees reported that they had been given the "hot box" in the county jail - that is, the heat was turned up until it was stifling hot and they became ill. Hewitt said he had been kicked by police once inside the jail.

Between 4:45 and 6:00 P.M. that day, ten voter registration workers were arrested bringing the total to 13 in jail. Nine were charged with "distributing leaflets without a permit." They were all arrested while in the vicinity of the voter registration office. At the time they were passing out leaflets urging an already effective boycott aimed at merchants who insist on addressing Negro customers as "boy" or "nigger." The leaflets also encouraged the payment of poll tax to vote.

Officials of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) protested the arrests to the U.S. Department of Justice and called for federal protection of civil rights workers. The Justice Department replied that it would have the matter investigated.

Those arrested were: Alma Bosley, 21, Plaquemines, La.; Milton Esco, 17, Canton; Peter Hewitt, 17, Canton; Levi Jackson, 15, Canton; Martha Jones, 21, Canton; Richard Jewitt, 30, CORE worker, New York, N.Y.; Patricia Myers, 18, Canton; Barbara Robinson, 16, Canton; William Veal, 18, Canton; and Joe Lee Watts, 20, Canton.

Bond was set at \$800 each - an unusually high bond for that offense, with the exception of Joe Lee Watts who was charged with breach of the peace. His bond was set at \$500.

January 24 - Carole Elaine Merritt, 23, SNCC worker from Cincinnati, Ohio was arrested for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and allegedly causing a minor to distribute material of a "libelous nature." Bond was set at \$500.

January 25 - Canton police began to stop all incoming and outgoing cars at the Canton city limits.

January 28 - 30 to 40 Negroes went to the courthouse to try to register to vote. Only five were admitted.

Sylvester Lee Palmer was arrested for disturbing the peace.

Canton police followed SNCC and CORE workers as they left a voter registration meeting at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church. CORE worker George Raymond reported that he had been kicked by a constable of the Sheriff's department when officers stopped him for questioning. Raymond reported that he had been beaten once before by police in Canton

Negroes were allowed to sit only on the Negro side of the courtroom during the arraignment hearing.

January 30 - Six of the rights workers were removed from the Madison Co. jail and taken to the Jackson city jail. SNCC spokesmen believe this move was made under a new law recently passed by the Mississippi State Legislature which facilitates exchange of jail space and riot protection between cities in that state.

Police halted operation of all Negro taxicabs, claiming their permits were faulty.

The gas pumps of a filling station owned by George Washington (see above) were removed by the AMOCO representative. SNCC workers interpret this act as "further reprisal against Mr. Washington's civil rights activities."

Henry Cooper, 45, owner of the Tolliver Cafe - where voter registration workers sometimes congregate - was arrested. Charges are unknown. It is believed that bond was set at \$1,000. Two SNCC workers were present in the cafe at the time.

February 3 - All of the rights workers were found guilty and convicted in the Canton city court.

Carole Merritt was convicted of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and "publishing libel." She was sentenced to \$500 fine and six months in jail on each charge. Bond was set at \$1,000, property or surety. The minor in question testified in court that Carole had given her leaflets to be passed out. She stated that she did not distribute them however. Workers observing the trial reported that the minor was "barely able" to identify Miss Merritt.

All "distribution of leaflets without a permit" charges were changed to "publishing libel" or other charges. Richard Jewitt, Patricia Myers, Martha Jones, William Veal and Sylvester Lee Palmer were all convicted of publishing libel and disturbing the peace. They were sentenced to \$500 fine and six months for each charge and all had appeal bond set at \$1,000 property or surety - or \$500 each charge.

C.O. Chinn and Theotus Hewitt were found guilty of intimidating a local Negro who had signed an affidavit for the Sheriff stating that Chinn and Hewitt had threatened to shave her hair and eyebrows if she broke the boycott. They were also convicted of publishing libel. Same sentence and bond as above.

Alma Bosley was convicted of publishing libel, disturbing the peace and contributing to the delinquency of a minor - three charges with \$500 fine, six months prison and \$500 appeal bond for each charge.

James Collier and Joe Lee Watts received similar sentences. Three juveniles were placed in the jurisdiction of juvenile court.

Two youths, Willie Galloway, 17, and Arthur Harris, 18, were taken into police custody after a voter registration rally. Galloway reported he was taken behind the jail, questioned for about an hour, and hit in the head and stomach with fists by police. Harris stated that he was hit with a rubber siphon hose and had a night stick broken over his head by police. Police shot a bullet into the floor near his feet, cut off some of his hair with a razor and fired blanks into his body leaving burn marks on his coat, Harris reported. Both were advised against further participation in voter registration and civil rights, and told that if they reported the incident they'd "better get the next train for St. Louis." They were both released. Neither were notified of charges or booked.

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