

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

6 RAYMOND STREET, N.W., ATLANTA 14, GEORGIA • 688-0331

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During the course of the week end of August 21 through 24, I heard from a number of different sources in the Negro community that the police had told the deacons of the lodge, where we had been holding Freedom Schools in the Baertown section of McComb, that they had better kick the Freedom Schools out. We found, in the course of our investigation on Monday afternoon, that the opposite was true; that is, the city authorities were offering protection to the deacons against anticipated violence from us, C.O.F.O. It is noteworthy, however, that this offer of official protection was widely interpreted as official intimidation.

Joe Martin of McComb and myself set out on Monday afternoon, August 24, 1964, to check out what we had heard. At about 5:30 p.m., we contacted Mr. Edward Felder. Mr. Felder is a deacon at St. Mary's Church, which is just twenty yards away from the lodge used for a freedom school, but which bears no property relation to it. Mr. Felder said that at 11:00 a.m. on the previous Friday, August 20, 1964, he was picked up at his job by a policeman who told him that the mayor wanted to see him in his office. Mr. Felder was taken to the Mayor's office and interviewed by five prominent McComb citizens: Mayor Burt, Fire Chief Fred Smith, a Mr. Buzby, and two other men whose names Mr. Felder forgot, one of whom wore a big Texas-style hat. In the hallway adjacent to the office, Mr. Felder said he had seen McComb Police Chief Guy and Pike County Sheriff Warren.

The officials questioned Mr. Felder concerning a visit by C.O.F.O. workers to St. Mary's church, on the third Sunday in July, I believe Mr. Felder said. They asked the number of persons in the group, whether or not it was a mixed group, and what the workers said. Mr. Felder told me he had said very little about the visit. Mr. Felder said, "They were trying to get something on you all. They were trying to get me to say the C.O.F.O. workers had asked to use the church and if they didn't get it, they threatened to bomb it." Mr. Felder said that each of the deacons of St. Mary's had been interviewed individually. "They

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were trying to match our stories against each other," he told us. On the next night, Saturday, Sheriff Warren came to the church as a business meeting was breaking up and spoke with the people about the same subjects covered the previous day.

Mr. Felder emphasized that the sole purpose of these interviews was to find a violent intent, in particular a bomb threat, on the part of the C.O.F.O. workers. "They want to get you all out of town," he said.

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