

Just
Southern Patriot---Jan. issue

lede zellner

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italic note

The author of this article is a young white Southerner, reared in Alabama, son of a Methodist minister, graduate of Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Ala. For two years, he worked as a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), under a special grant from SCEF, on a project designed to carry the message of the integration movement to Southern white students and stimulate them into action. His work took him to campuses and into communities all over the South. In the course of it, he was arrested over 20 times on charges carrying possible total sentences of 25 years; most of the cases are still pending. Now back in graduate school temporarily, he reports here his observations of conditions and states of mind among today's Southern white students--- and his conclusions as to what can be done about them.

BY BOB ZELLNER 8 pt. bold caps

For two years, I worked to cut through the cotton curtain to the minds of Southern white students.

I tried to inspire them to some personal commitment to the struggle for human dignity going on around them---or at least to inform them of the facts which they are systematically denied.

The primary obstacle to this task is the repressive and sometimes stark terror tactics used by the Southern state and

college administrations.

One small example of this occurred last year on the campus of Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Ala., when I was arrested on the orders of George Wallace before he became Governor of the state. The arrest was effected by Col. Al Lingo, a Wallace appointee, who had not taken office at the time either.

My crime: ~~xxxxxxx~~ a visit to my alma mater to talk to students about what the State of Alabama was doing to its Negro citizens across the state, and especially in nearby Selma where a reign of terror was being carried out by the White Citizens Council.

I ~~may~~ cite this example only because the circumstances of my arrest attest to the fact that the power structure has absolutely no respect for the law when their deep-seated fear of free discussion and inquiry is aroused. Hence white students are "protected" from "suspicious" thoughts, and academic freedom and civil liberties are destroyed.

These may sound like cliches; they are not because they are conclusions drawn from ^{evidence} the actual situation in the South today. Here are some concrete examples from the experiences of students I met in the course of my work:

^{A few} ~~Two~~ students at the Univeristy of Mississippi, both natives of that state, had dinner with James Merddith, the first Negro to enter the University. ^{they} As a result, ~~the two students~~ were the targets of threats, physical abuse, fire-cracker assaults, and their rooms ~~xxxx~~ were ransacked. All of this was done by ^{other} students under the overt leadership of something called the

"Rebel Underground, but if university authorities disapproved, they did nothing to make this known or to stop the terror.

Finally, ~~the~~ ^{of the} two/white students had to leave school.

At an ~~Alabama~~ Alabama college, a segregationist student asked his ~~professors~~ professor's permission to interview a Negro minister for an assigned ~~paper~~ ^{so-called} paper on the "race problem." This student explained that he had been to the office of the local White Citizens Council; he had obtained large quantities of segregationist material, and now wanted another point of view.

The teacher refused to allow him the interview. He said: "It might get us into trouble, so you just write your paper from the material you have, and I'm sure it'll be adequate."

Smothered in fear themselves, most Southern educators don't know the ~~mean~~ meaning of academic freedom.

As an undergraduate at a Southern college, I experienced first-hand the power that the state and college administrations have to kill the spirit of protest or inquiry. In the course of research for a sociology paper, I met several Negro students from a nearby ~~college~~ college, attended a federal court civil rights hearing, and observed a nonviolent workshop at a Negro church.

Because of these activities, two crosses were burned near my dormitory; the Klan distributed smear literature about myself and four other students involved; the attorney general of the state summoned the five of us to his office to explain our actions (and accused us of communist associations); and our college

First of all, these students and others are usually totally isolated from people of like mind. On every college campus in the South there are one or two students who would like to do something but they usually don't know each other; even if they do, they feel that nobody else thinks as they do, and therefore action is futile because of lack of support.

The SNCC project, on which I worked, tried to cope with this problem. The project is now being carried on by Sam Shirarh, ^{another} a young white Southerner. He is visiting campuses contacting white students interested in the movement, giving them literature about the organizations involved, telling them what is happening and trying to set up meetings where they can find each other and forge an organizational tool ~~in~~ for support of each other.

Another function this project can perform is to bring these students to meetings and conferences, such as ^{those} ~~these~~ held by SNCC and SCEF at intervals, where they can ^{meet} ~~feel~~ fellow-Southerners both black and white who are working to change ~~the~~ ^{their} system.

Another possibility is the holding of weekend workshops in each state where students can get together and exchange ideas.

The problems are difficult ones and can only be solved by ~~strong support of activists and communication among~~ ^{strong support of activists and communication among} between potential activists and the handful already in action.

In my opinion, we shouldn't at this point ~~hexxxxxxxx~~ spend too much time trying to reach those who are not at all interested or those who are opposed to any action. Those of us in the integration movement should direct our attention

to those white students who ~~w~~ show interest and a potential for significant action and give them all the support and encouragement possible.

Recently, while attending graduate school in Cambridge, Mass., I attended a meeting at Harvard University where Alabama Governor George Wallace spoke. During the question period, I asked him why in Selma, Ala., SNCC voter registration workers had been beaten and arrested by 15 ~~Alabama~~ Alabama state troopers. He replied:

"I know you're from Alabama, Mr. Zellner. You're notorious down there; in fact, you've been in about every jail down there. You don't deserve to speak for Alabama because you represent only a minute minority."

It is evident that Wallace, Governor ~~Barnett~~ Barnett and Senator Eastland of Mississippi, and others like them are using real fascist tools---Sovereignty Commissions, Citizens Councils, and witch-hunting legislative committees---to ~~suppress~~ suppress any traces of democracy they find, and thus make sure that the few who do speak and act against Southern injustice remain a "minute minority."

Our duty, therefore, is to see that those who might act are encouraged to do so, and that once they do they are not isolated and quietly destroyed.