

MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM PROJECT
1017 Lynch Street
Jackson, Mississippi

TO ALL VOLUNTEERS AND FRIENDS

We are writing to ask your immediate and active help.

The situation in McComb, and throughout Pike County, has deteriorated to a point of extreme danger. Local Negro citizens live in fear of arrest and violence in retaliation for any association with civil rights activity. In the week preceding this letter, there have been four bombings and dozens of arrests on charges ranging from "being out after 4 a.m." to "criminal syndicalism." Mississippi State Highway Police have swarmed into McComb. Civil rights workers have been interrogated and threatened. State Highway Police have set barricades throughout the Negro community.

The enclosed list outlines briefly the pattern of violence and fear which has characterized Pike County. There have been 16 bombings alone since the McComb project began last June. In the words of a local Negro resident of McComb, an ex-policeman:

"... my life is in danger and my family's is, too. I am scared for us and for all Negroes in McComb... we are all told we have no rights... we can't use them if we want to stay alive or keep our homes safe... I've been on the police force and everybody in town knows that the Klan leaders and the police chief and the mayor are close friends... and in Mississippi that means trouble. Everybody is scared to death there's going to be murder. Everybody is sitting up nights. They can't sleep, guarding their homes and churches. Dozens of police and highway patrol are driving around the Negro neighborhood---just scaring people---not trying to calm them..."

On September 9, the McComb Freedom Project staff directed a letter to Mr. Burke Marshall, Chief of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, explaining the deteriorating situation there. The letter expressed fear of further violence and a possible repetition of another tragic civil rights murder unless specific federal action were taken. Copies were sent to the press and to several Congressmen, several of whom expressed concern...but no action was taken. The most recent incidents in McComb underscore the explosiveness of the situation even further, and they make the need for federal intervention more apparent.

This federal action could take several forms:

- 1) the appointment of federal registrars to insure the basic right of qualified citizens to vote.
- 2) the guarantee of federal protection, not to civil rights workers particularly, but to all local citizens for whom local police power is a threat, not a source of help.
- 3) a statement from authorities - including the President - about the role of the federal government in the prevention of violence and intimidation.

We urge you, then, to wire, call or write your congressmen, senators and the White House (C/o Lee C. White, Special Assistant to the President), asking for greater federal support. Please inform others of the McComb situation, since it takes many letters to obtain even minimal action. Perhaps you could reproduce this letter and distribute it among members of organizations with which you have contact. We will be happy to send you further information if you send the Mississippi Summer Project a self-addressed envelope.

We also ask that you actively push the inclusion of this issue in local campaign efforts for national candidates. Please ask specifically about McComb in interviews with candidates and urge candidates to make public statements about the situation.

Most of you are familiar enough with Mississippi to know that the actions in McComb are similar to those that have occurred throughout the state - but not so intensely, nor with such concentrated danger. Please help us to free the people of Mississippi and to remove them from the shackles of fear.

Freedom,

The Staff
of the Mississippi
Freedom Project