COFO NEWS
1017 LYNCH STREET
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

SUMMARY OF MAJOR EVENTS IN MISSISSIPPI - March 2 - March 11, 1965

An early morning fire totally destroyed the Freedom School Center at Indianola last week. All books, equipment, and records were lost. Cause of the blaze has not been determined, and citizens feel official action has been inadequate. Eight persons were arrested for disobeying an officer when they tried to investigate. Two of the men arrested were beaten by police and another was struck by a white bystander. A minister was fined $50. for running over a fire hose. In the nearby town of Sunflower, a 1964 car belonging to civil rights workers was badly burned later that same morning. Plans to rebuild and expand the Freedom Center are underway.

A total of 92 arrests were made in Magnolia, near McComb, as demonstrators ignored a Chancery Court injunction and held protest marches at the Pike County Courthouse. The picketers, led by 17-year-old high school junior Joyce Brown, were arrested on the 4th and 5th days of their protests against the discriminatory literacy test, which is graded subjectively by each county registrar.

During the transfer of prisoners to the county farm, Mrs. Aleyne Quin, McComb FDP leader, was beaten by a highway patrolman. An attorney for the group, Al Bronstein, was beaten by a jailer and twice thrown out of the jailhouse when he tried to find out about charges being placed against the group.

A member of the Civil Rights Commission in Washington, D.C., tried to set up a meeting between the demonstrators, their parents, Pike County registrar Glen Fortenberry, and the county election board. County officials, however, would agree to meet only if the demonstrations were called off for 6 months to a year. The protestors said they could not make such an agreement, saying that their future actions would depend on the outcome of such a meeting. Miss Brown went with three other young people to invite registrar Fortenberry to speak at a mass meeting, but he has not committed himself to appear.

A hearing is scheduled in federal court on the original injunction. Now that the case has been transfered to the higher court, no further action can be taken by officials in state courts. A motion has also been filed in federal court by attorneys for the demonstrators to stay or dissolve the chancery court injunction.

Two Negroes were refused tickets to tour one of the antebellum homes featured in the annual Natchez Pilgrimage. A man there told them he would not sell them tickets because they are associated with COFO, which he termed an undesirable organization. He said the refusal was not because of their race. Six people were also refused admittance to the Pageant sponsored by the Natchez Garden Club, and a white COFO worker fromJackson was not allowed to buy tickets to the pageant on grounds she was not "a legitimate tourist." Protest demonstrations are planned.

In Issaquena County, 331 persons cast ballots in a special Freedom Vote held in conjunction with the official election to fill a school board vacancy. Mr. Clarence Hall, Jr., Issaquena County chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party, was the Freedom candidate. Despite the fact that only 9 Negroes have been allowed to pass the registration test in the county, which is north of Vicksburg in western Mississippi, announcements were read three separate days in Negro schools, telling about the election. The notice said that only qualified electors would be eligible to vote. When the Freedom Vote polls closed, three men, parents of Issaquena County school children, took the 331 ballots to the white school in Sharkey County where official voting was taking place. Officials there refused to accept the ballots.

Silas McGee

In Greenwood, two Molotov cocktails, homemade bombs, were thrown at the home of a family active in civil rights work. A passing white truck driver helped extinguish the blaze, which damaged the front room and porch. A picket line was formed at the house the next day to protest the bombing.

Four white COFO workers and a Negro who locked arms with a white friend were arrested in a Negro cafe in Tallulah, Louisiana. At least 18 civil rights workers were there, but police wanted only the whites, which they charged with disturbing the peace or disorderly conduct. The owner of the cafe, however, refused to press charges, and the five were released after about 12 hours in Tallulah City Jail. Groups went to several cafes the next night and were served without incident. The cafes closed earlier than usual, however, and local people marched to the city hall to protest.

INVESTIGATIONS are continuing into 3 deaths, 2 attempted rapes, and one missing person.

The body of a Negro man is said to have been pulled from the Amite River in northeastern Louisiana. No details are available from police or funeral homes in the Clinton, Louisiana, area.

No police investigation has been carried on in the case of a young Rankin County man found dead near the railroad tracks where his father works. Letters have been sent to Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach protesting the fact that the coroner discouraged an autopsy, despite the unusual circumstances, and decrying lack

of police action in determining if foul play was involved.

A coroner's jury has ruled justifiable homicide in the fatal shooting of a Negro by his white employer at Okolona in northeastern Mississippi. No Negroes testified at the inquest, because it was held at almost the same time as the funeral. The parents of the slain man had no attorney and there was no cross-examination of the two white witnesses. Civil rights workers report there are Negroes who have testimony conflicting with the version given by the man who was acquitted in the shooting, but they are afraid of repercussions if they do come forward. They are aware that law enforcement officials are trying to keep the case very quiet and they know that the freed man has killed at least three other persons in past years.

A Monroe County grand jury is expected to investigate the attempted rape of two Negro girls by a local constable.

And there is no word yet on the whereabouts of Mr. Richard Robinson, missing from Natchez since February 23rd.

Twenty-six people were arrested in the Gulf city of Moss Point when they picketed on the property of a school being boycotted. Students have been out of class since February 24 to pressure the board of education to comply with the federal desegregation order and to improve conditions at Negro schools. Only 14 or 15 of these arrested were on the picket line, however. Others were sitting in cars or were bystanders near the schools when police put them under arrest. Several were struck by officers or treated roughly, one girl being pulled from the line by her hair. Total bond for the 26 is $20,000, but attorneys hope a federal judge may lower the amount when the cases are transferred into federal court. Two teenagers are in solitary confinement, and 19 women prisoners are cowded into two tiny cells, with 2 beds for 9 people in one.

Three of four COFO workers jailed in Marks March 3rd for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" are still in jail. Young people in the Quitman County town had been testing public accomodations, ontheir own initiative. Several harassment arrests have been made since the COFO jailings, and a teenager taking food to the workers was beaten in the hall of the courthouse by Negro trusties after an official in the sheriff's office refused to take action on threats reported to him by the youth. The worker now out of jail was beaten, along with young Negro companions, on the street, and their attacker chased them a block with a drawn knife.

The 40-day period in which the state has an opportunity to take depositions relevant to the Freedom Democratic Party's Congressional Challenge ends in about two weeks. No one has yet been subpoenaed, and there is not indication of what the final days will bring. Lawyers for the F.D.P. are planning for their remaining 10-day deposition period following the state's chance to present evidence.

Selma postscript: When the news came through of the Sunday "massacre", good part of SNCC/COFO staff were in Jackson (for a State-wide meeting). About 25 staff left immediately for Selma to give what help they could to to the SNCC project there. More followed, including some FDP people. Both Mrs. Palmer, of Jackson, and Mrs. Ruffin, from Laurel, took part in the all-night vigil on Wednesday, March 11th.

Sympathy protests are planned in several towns.
