

R E P O R T O N
A L A B A M A

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[1965?]

BACKGROUND

SNCC has had a project in Selma, Alabama since the fall of 1962. The central focus has been voter registration, and on Oct. 8, 1963 SNCC held the South's first "Freedom Day" (mass attempt at voter registration) in Selma. At that time the FBI stood by and took notes as sheriff Jim Clark's men beat and arrested two SNCC workers taking food and water to Negroes waiting in line at the courthouse to register. This was one of many incidents during the fall and summer of 1963 in which SNCC voter registration workers were arrested or beaten, in the presence of federal officers. Yet the Federal Government has yet to make an arrest under Sections 3052-3 of Title 18 of the U.S. Codes which empowers them to arrest those abridging the right to vote or intimidating those who seek to register.

Despite continuous and often massive attempts by the residents of Dallas County, Alabama (Selma) to register to vote, the New York Herald Tribune statistics show that only 20 out of 32,687 eligible Negro residents are registered as compared with 9,463 white residents registered out of 23,952 who are eligible. The Negro residents of Dallas County and the other 18 other counties of Alabama's Black Belt live in utter poverty. And they do not have the vote to use as a tool to improve their condition. Selma's Sheriff Jim Clark who is infamous for beating and arresting Negroes who attempt to register to vote, was himself elected illegally because Negroes were excluded from access to the ballot. So he does not represent the majority of the residents of Dallas County.

JANUARY MARCH, 1965

On January 17, John Lewis, Chairman of SNCC initiated an intensified voter registration drive at a mass meeting. The next day he and Dr. Martin Luther King led a march of 500 Negroes to the courthouse, demanding the right to vote. In the following days, over 3500 arrests took place as hundreds of Negroes, including students, teachers, businessmen, rights workers from SNCC and other civil rights groups and volunteers from the North were also arrested. Jail conditions at Camp Selma were reported to be atrocious: over 350 men were crowded into a cell approximately 18' X 50'; prisoners were given one meal a day consisting of bread and a few peas; a large number of women prisoners were compelled to drink out of the same tub of water; many were ill from sleeping on damp concrete floors. During this time many SNCC workers and local people were attacked and beaten.

On February 9, SNCC's Executive Secretary, James Forman, and Dr. King met with U.S. Attorney General Katzenbach and Vice-President Humphrey in Washington. Dr. King also met with President Johnson. New legislation was promised, but more but more meaningful direct action by the government was refused.

The next day about 165 Negro youngsters conducting a silent protest demonstration were driven on a forced march out into the countryside outside Selma by Sheriff Clark's posse, wielding night sticks and using electric cattle prodders.

Early in February, Federal District Judge Thomas issued an order stating that people could sign an appearance book in the registrars office. These people would then have to be processed by the registrar by July. SNCC basically disagreed with this on the grounds that it was a discriminatory ruling against Negroes since whites could register freely. SNCC's demand is that age and residence be the only requirements for voting. Nevertheless SNCC workers led large groups of people down to sign the book.

On February 18, people at a mass meeting in Marion (Perry County, Alabama near Selma) planned a march on the courthouse there. As they left the Zion Methodist Church (across the street from the courthouse) and began walking, state troopers ordered them to disperse. Then the people knelt to pray. About 300 to 350 people participated.

As people knelt, state troopers went at them with billy clubs and beat them wildly. Many people were hospitalized. At least 20 people were treated in Selma hospitals. Ten men had busted scalps.

JIMMY JACKSON MURDERED

Several hours later Jimmy Jackson was in a cafe with others. State troopers barged into the cafe looking for someone who had allegedly thrown a coke bottle at the troopers during the courthouse brutality. Several troopers grabbed Jimmy and another shot him. One bullet went through his stomach and exited from his left side. After he was shot Jimmy ran out the door and down the street. The troopers followed, caught him, and beat him. No doctor in Marion would treat him so he was finally brought to Selma and treated at Good Samaritan Hospital. HE DIED ON FEBRUARY 26th FROM THE BULLET WOUND. HE WAS BRUTALLY SHOT BY ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS.

Jimmy Jackson was an unemployed mason who lived with his unemployed mother in Marion, Alabama. His whole family was active in the voter registration movement there. He was 26 years old.

SUNDAY'S MARCH

On Sunday, March 7 at a mass meeting at Brown's chapel Church in Selma it was decided to have a march on the State Capitol in Montgomery to protest the denial of voting rights to Negro citizens. The march began at 3 PM, led by SNCC Chairman John Lewis, Robert Mants of SNCC staff and Hosea Williams of Selma. It was reported that Dr. King would not be on the march because after he learned that Governor Wallace had given the state troopers the power to stop the march, he decided to devote his time to building as much northern support as possible.

The SNCC National Office in Atlanta issued a call to its staff in Mississippi to proceed immediately to Selma and at 4 PM four carloads of SNCC staff members left Mississippi. Shortly thereafter the state troopers started to use teargas against the demonstrators in Selma who had reached the bridge over the Alabama river on their planned march on Montgomery. The troopers then beat people and charged them on horseback. Ambulances and doctors from the Medical Committee for Human Rights provided emergency services for the injured marchers. The marchers returned to the church and were followed by the state troopers, who surrounded it. About 2000 people participated in the march which ended at the bridge. John Lewis was hospitalized with a possible concussion.

TUESDAY'S MARCH

About 3 PM on Tuesday March 9, about 3000 people gathered to resume the march on Montgomery. Federal Judge Johnson had issued an injunction against the march but only three people including John Lewis were mentioned in it. The march crossed the bridge and was halted by state troopers. A Federal Marshall read the injunction to the marchers who then knelt in prayer. Dr. King then told the marchers to turn around and return to town.

REV. REEB MURDERED

Also on March 9, a group of three northern ministers who were part of a group of about 1000 who came to Selma to aid in the demonstrations were brutally beaten by a gang of local whites. Rev. Reeb, a unitarian minister from Boston was admitted to Birmingham University Hospital in critical condition. HE DIED ON THURSDAY MARCH 11, A VICTIM OF THE RACIST LAWLESSNESS WHICH HAS PREVAILED IN SELMA UNDER THE AEGIS OF SHERIFF JIM CLARK AND THE ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS.

With the increase in violence in Selma, people across the North sent thousands of telegrams to the President and the Justice Department demanding Federal intervention immediately in Selma. Ministers from across the north made a pilgrimage of conscience to Selma early in the week. After the brutal termination of the Sunday march on Montgomery, Northern SNCC Offices, Friends of SNCC groups and other groups of concerned citizens organized and carried out various demonstrations across the north to protest the inaction of the Federal Government on the recent events in Alabama.

Tuesday March 9 was a day of demonstrations across the country. In New York City, 800 people picketed at the FBI building. In Washington, D.C. 1000 people picketed the White House and three SNCC people attempted to sit in overnight at Attorney General Katzenbach's office. In Detroit 7500 people participated in a march on the Federal Building. The Governor of Michigan George Romney and Detroit's Mayor Cavanaugh led the March. In Denver Colorado 18 people sat in in the FBI Office. In Los Angeles 250 people participated at a picket and sit in at the Federal Building. Fifteen were arrested. In Cleveland over 400 people marched on the Federal Building. In Atlanta, Georgia students from the Atlanta University complex picketed the Federal Building.

CHICAGO

In Chicago demonstrators picketed the Federal Building during the afternoon. At 4:30 PM a group led by Monroe Sharp, SNCC Project Director in Chicago sat in at State and Madison Streets blocking the rush hour traffic. Chicago police brutally arrested the demonstrators swinging billy clubs and dragging the demonstrators to paddy wagons. This gave the hundreds of observers on the side lines an opportunity to witness first hand police brutality which they had read about happening in Alabama. Twenty four people were arrested. Their trial comes up on May 5th. Mayor Daley in the same tone as Alabama Governor Wallace and Sheriff Jim Clark stated that he would not tolerate any further demonstrations of this type.

MARCH IN MONTGOMERY

On Wednesday, March 10, a group of students from Tuskegee Institute planned a march on the State Capitol. A permit to hold the march was granted by the mayor. The marchers reached the Capitol building and were surrounded by state troopers, who would not permit others to join the vigil at the Capitol. They decided to stay at the capitol all night to protest the harassment by the troopers.

In Selma a march was organized on the courthouse despite the statement by the mayor that he would not allow such a march. Police and state troopers attacked the marchers with billy clubs and dispersed them.

Demonstrations took place around the country. In Los Angeles about one hundred people went to the Federal Building. When the U.S. Marshalls would not let them in, the demonstrators blocked all the entrances to the building, including the post office, for several hours. Post office workers were deputized and began to beat the demonstrators. About 125 people were arrested.

On Thursday, March 11, twenty students sat in at the White House in Washington. In Montgomery, Alabama, James Forman, SNCC Executive Secretary led a march of students on the Capitol Building. They were beaten by police and about 160 were arrested.

S U M M A R Y

The SNCC Voter Registration drive has been in progress since the fall of 1962 in Selma, Alabama. Police violence and intimidation have been constant problems. Things became very active this January when thousands were arrested as Negroes marched on the courthouse seeking the right to vote. No meaningful number has been allowed to register. In February, Jimmy Jackson was murdered by state troopers as a result of the demonstrations.

On Sunday, March 7, thousands of Selma residents attempted to march to the State Capitol in Montgomery to demand an end to police brutality and to demand the right to vote. State Troopers on horseback attacked the demonstrators and forced them to turn back. On Tuesday, March 9, thousands of demonstrators attempted to resume the march on Montgomery. Again they were forced to turn back by the presence of State Troopers. Hundreds of ministers from the North came to Selma to participate in Tuesday's march. Rev. Reeb of Boston was beaten by local whites..... he died on Thursday, March 11. Demonstrations and sit ins took place across the North. In Montgomery, Alabama, students marched on the State Capitol. They were beaten and arrested by State troopers on Thursday. Across the country a cry has gone up for immediate, effective action by the Federal Government.

NOTE

If you would like to receive similar news bulletins, send your name and address to the Chicago Office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
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The crisis in Alabama has brought the civil rights struggle to a new height. The brutal murder of Jimmy Jackson and Rev. Reeb has angered many Americans who are concerned with social justice. Across the country people are demanding Federal action to end the reign of terror in Alabama. No longer can the business of the Federal Government continue while complacency governs policy. The Federal Government must act now in a meaningful manner to insure the rights of Negro citizens to vote in the South and to prevent police violence against those seeking their rights.

IF WE ARE REALLY CONCERNED WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS WE MUST FORCE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO LIVE UP TO ITS OBLIGATIONS. WHEN THOUSANDS HAVE PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE TO DEMONSTRATE AGAINST THE BRUTALITY AND INTIMIDATION IN ALABAMA, CAN WE REMAIN SILENT?

The Federal Government has the right under law to act. Federal agents can arrest Sheriff Jim Clark and can act to restore peace and make it possible for Negro citizens to vote in Alabama. Adequate legislation is already on the books. What is needed is affirmative action by the President.

Great numbers of the American people are convinced that the Federal Government is moving too slow in the Alabama crisis. The death of Rev. Reeb has brought forth an outcry from the clergy for Federal Intervention. We must keep ever increasing the pressure on the government until President Johnson lives up to his responsibility.

SNCC has called for a march on Washington to take place during the week of March 15. Final plans are now being made. There is also talk of a march on Selma and Montgomery by concerned people from around the country. People who are able to participate in this activity should keep in touch with the Chicago Office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to receive additional information.

Funds are desperately needed to continue SNCC's program in Alabama's Black Belt. This last week's action is just the beginning of an ongoing program to make the right to vote a reality in the deep South.

More local demonstrations will probably continue to take place as concerned citizens express their demand for Federal Action on Alabama. Telegrams should continue to be sent to the President.

ONLY BY OUR ACTIONS WILL THE DEPLORABLE SITUATION IN ALABAMA BE RESOLVED IN A MANNER TO BRING HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE TO ALL THE PEOPLE.