

A STATEMENT BY
THE REVEREND RALPH D. ABERNATHY,
SCLC VICE-PRESIDENT-AT-LARGE AND
FINANCIAL SECRETARY, TREASURER
JULY 1, 1965

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE VOTING RIGHTS BILL, AS A VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH THE NEGRO CITIZEN CAN OBTAIN A JUST PORTION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM, HAS ENCOUNTERED AN OPPOSITION IN THE SOUTH WHICH INFLICTS VIOLENCE WITH AN UNCONSCIONABLE EASE UPON AN INNOCENT AND ALREADY DEPRIVED PEOPLE.

FIELD WORKERS OF THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE AND LOCAL NEGRO CITIZENS ENGAGED IN VOTER REGISTRATION PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH ARE BEING SUBJECTED TO SINISTER HARASSMENTS AND BRUTAL INTIMIDATIONS.

IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THIS BRUTALITY CAMPAIGN BEGAN AT THE SAME TIME THAT SCLC LAUNCHED ITS SUMMER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL EDUCATION PROJECT (SCOPE) NINE DAYS AGO.

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF SCOPE, SOME OF THE NATION'S MOST REPUTABLE ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES, SENT HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS INTO THE SOUTH'S BACK WATER COUNTIES TO ASSIST VETERAN SCLC WORKERS IN REGISTERING A DISFRANCHISED, AND IN MOST CASES, A POVERTY STRICKEN NEGRO PEOPLE.

THESE YOUNG COLLEGIANS, MOST OF THEM WHITE, AND LOCAL NEGROES, WHO HAVE COURAGEOUSLY STOOD BY THEIR SIDES, ARE WITHSTANDING THE BRUNT OF THE MOST VICIOUS ATTACKS IMAGINABLE.

BY REVEREND ABERNATHY

ALLOW ME TO PINPOINT A FEW OF THE LOCATIONS IN WHICH MAJOR ACTS OF VIOLENCE HAVE BEEN COMMITTED AGAINST SCLC'S SCOPE PERSONNEL AND LOCAL NEGRO CITIZENS.

ONE OF THESE LOCATIONS IS WILCOX COUNTY, ALABAMA, ONE OF THE MOST INFAMOUS OF THE STATE'S BLACKBELT COUNTIES, WHERE UNTIL RECENTLY NOT A SINGLE NEGRO WAS REGISTERED TO VOTE.

IN CAMDEN, THE COUNTY SEAT, LOCAL WHITES TUESDAY NIGHT BROKE INTO A HOUSE OF GOD, ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH, FIRED A SHOT GUN BLAST AGAINST THE WALL AND BRUTALLY BEAT SEVEN NEGRO TEENAGERS, TWO OF THEM SO BADLY THAT THEY HAD TO BE HOSPITALIZED.

EARLIER TUESDAY, AN 18-YEAR-OLD WHITE SCOPE WORKER FROM SAN FRANCISCO WAS RELEASED FROM JAIL SO BADLY BEATEN THAT HE HAD TO BE ADMITTED TO GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL IN SELMA.

THIS BRUTALLY BEATEN YOUTH WAS ONE OF 18 PERSONS ARRESTED BY THE CAMDEN MAYOR, THE SHERIFF AND POSSEMEN, WHEN SCOPE WORKERS AND LOCAL NEGRO CITIZENS PROTESTED AGAINST LOCAL MERCHANTS BY DISTRIBUTING BOYCOTT MATERIALS.

MANY OF THOSE ARRESTED WERE FORCIBLY TAKEN FROM ANTIOCH BAPTIST CHURCH BY POSSEMEN WHO ENTERED THE HOUSE OF GOD WITH GUNS DRAWN AND SWINGING CLUBS.

WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE VICIOUS TREATMENT OF THE LOCAL NEGROES AND OUR VOTER REGISTRATION WORKERS IS SYMPTOMATIC OF A SICK SOCIETY IN WHICH NEGRO CITIZENS ARE DENIED THE RIGHT TO VOTE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS.

BY REVEREND ABERNATHY

NEARBY, IN NEIGHBORING MONROE COUNTY, OUR SCOPE WORKERS WERE FORCED TO FLEE THE COUNTY AND ABANDON THEIR VOTER REGISTRATION WORK BY COUNTY AND LOCAL POLICE OFFICIALS.

BUT IF THINGS ARE BAD IN ALABAMA, THE SITUATION IS EQUALLY AS BAD IN GEORGIA.

TODAY, IN SAVANNAH'S CHANDLER HOSPITAL, 13 - YEAR - OLD JOHNNIE LEE JONES LAY STRICKEN AND IN GRAVE DANGER OF LOSING HIS EYESIGHT BECAUSE AN ENRAGED WHITE YOUTH HURLED THE JAGGED EDGE OF A SODA BOTTLE INTO HIS FACE ON MONDAY.

JOHNNIE'S CRIME IT SEEMS, WAS THAT HE WAS THE ONLY BLACK TARGET AVAILABLE AS HE EMERGED FROM A NEGRO POOL ROOM IN HINESVILLE WHERE HE WORKS AS A SHOE SHINE BOY.

LAST SUNDAY, IN AMERICUS, GEORGIA, TWO SCOPE WORKERS WERE CUT BY GLASS WHEN LOCAL WHITE YOUTHS RESENTED THEIR PRESENCE AT A SEGREGATED STATE PARK AND HURLED BRICKS AND BOTTLES AGAINST THEIR CAR WINDOWS.

THESE ARE BY NO MEANS THE ONLY REPORTED INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENTS DIRECTED AGAINST OUR WORKERS AND LOCAL CITIZENS, BUT THEY ARE SIGNIFICANT.

WE KNEW THERE WOULD BE OBSTACLES ALONG THE JERICHO ROAD OF EQUAL RIGHTS. BUT HOW LONG, AND HOW FAR, MUST A WEARY TRAVELER GO BEFORE OUR GREAT LEGISLATIVE BODIES IN WASHINGTON DECIDE THAT A VOTING RIGHTS BILL IS SORELY NEEDED TO HELP CURE THE ILLS WHICH BESET

PRESS STATEMENT - 4

BY REVEREND ABERNATHY

WE IN SCLC WOULD LIKE TO TELL THE PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF OUR SCOPE VOLUNTEERS THAT THEY TOO ARE REMEMBERED IN OUR PRAYERS. WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOUR CONCERN FOR THEIR WELFARE AND SAFETY AWAY FROM HOME ALSO IS OUR CONCERN.

THESE DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS HAVE PROVEN THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF HUMAN DIGNITY BY LABORING UNDER A SWELTERING SUN AND OFTEN IN THE SHADOW OF PERSONAL DANGER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF AN OPPRESSED PEOPLE.

AND IF THROUGH THEIR LABOR, OUR STRUGGLE IS BROUGHT JUST ONE INCH CLOSER TO VICTORY, THEN, TOGETHER WE WILL HAVE KEPT AN IMPORTANT DATE WITH DESTINY AND OPENED A GLORIOUS NEW CHAPTER IN AMERICAN HISTORY.