

July 27, 1965

BAKER COUNTY, GEORGIA

SNCC workers moved into Baker County last month; previously fear had kept the Movement out of this county. Baker County is known locally as "Bad Baker" and "one step down from hell." The situation at the moment is very crucial. Charles Sherrod, director of the Baker County project, and the people of Baker County are asking that people from the North come join them in demonstrations starting Wednesday, July 28.

BACKGROUND---

The history of Baker County is one of persistent violence, police indifference and harassment and unjust voter registration procedures. The county sheriff has hired three of his relatives as deputies, and each of them has killed at least one Negro. They prey on anybody from out of the county, especially Negroes, and make Baker County one of the worst speed traps in the country. There are only two roads by which one can reach Newton, one in and one out. And they just sit there. They do fairly unspeakable things too (about a month ago, one of the deputies picked up a guy and his female cousin, who had just come from a church meeting. He took them off into the woods and tried to make them commit sexual intercourse before him. This is nothing unusual. Earlier, another white man shot a Negro man in an argument over a pig. It was in complete cold blood, obviously murder. Nothing was done to him.)

The county is almost completely rural. The only industry is a peanut mill and an underwear factory, which together employ less than 200 people. Therefore we are working to get to the people on the farms and the plantations.

The registrar was enjoined by the Justice Department some years ago, and forced to register between 300 and 600 Negroes. Most of these have since been purged from the rolls or kept from voting by various means and threats of economic reprisals, beatings and killings. Therefore the primary goal is voter registration and the building of a movement.

RECENT INCIDENTS

July 21 -- People have been picketing the courthouse to get the registration office open every day instead of only one day a week. During today's picketing, a group of white boys and girls blocked the picket line. Charles Sherrod told police chief James Holt, who was standing across the street, that there would be violence if the whites were not dispersed. Holt did not do anything. When Sherrod went back across the street, a group of four whites were standing there. Two Negroes again told the Police Chief that there might be violence. A short time later, a white man named Bill Sheffield hit Jack Holt on the head with his gun, while the police chief was standing next to Sheffield. Then James Bailey beat Charles Sherrod, doing severe damage to his eye.

July 22 -- Today Charles Sherrod, Jack Coles, Edward Anderson and Bobby Lee Mathis tried to take out a warrant for the arrest of the white men who beat them yesterday. The policeman refused to swear out the warrant. This morning, however, Sherrod, Holt and Anderson were arrested. James Barry, one of the white men who had taken part in the beating yesterday took out a warrant for the arrest of Sherrod, charging him with disturbing the peace and fighting. Bond for each is \$300. Later in the day the people picketed the courthouse. About 60 whites, armed with sticks, guns and knives, lined up so that the picketers had to go around them in order to get to the other picketers. Several incidents occurred. One Negro boy who left the line was beaten by 12 white boys. When

his mother went to the police office to swear out a warrant, the police refused to swear it out and while she was standing in the office she was hit in the back of the neck by a local white man. Another guy rode his horse up and down the sidewalk among the demonstrators. A policeman tried to make Negro bystanders get off the street. He told them either to stand in groups of seven, to carry signs or leave. Some of the people took paper out of their pockets and made signs which they pinned to their clothes. Another policeman then tried to find out what the people's names were. One man said "Joe Freedom;" he was arrested for questioning. When a woman went to bail "Joe Freedom" out, she was also arrested. Later in the evening Sherrod was bailed out of jail.

July 25 -- Yesterday 200 whites counter-picketed 5 Negro demonstrators at the courthouse with signs reading "Africa needs niggers." Whites later attacked the five, seriously injuring SNCC staff members Isaac Simpkins and Charles Sherrod. John Lewis addressed a mass meeting of 200 there. On Saturday, Robert Childs of Moultrie was shot at twice. This probably occurred after the demonstration away from the courthouse. Several local people were also beaten. They were not demonstrators just near the courthouse.

#### AMERICUS, GEORGIA

July 20 -- Four women, including Mrs Mary K Bell, first Negro candidate for the Justice of the Peace were arrested, charged with blocking the entrance to the polls, as they attempted to use the voting booth reserved for white women. The polls are segregated Men, Women and Colored. They were arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cheeks. Bail is set at \$1,000 each. Negro poll watcher Collins McGee was hit in the eye by whitepoll officer Zera Littlejohn after McGee reported to a SNCC worker that Littlejohn was telling people how to vote. City police and sheriff were standing by during the attack. The ballots are numbered so that officials can tell who voted for whom.

July 21 -- Mrs Bell who ran for Justice of the Peace, received 332 votes according to the official count. The winner, J.W. Southwell, received 2,000 votes. It was believed that over 500 people actually voted for Mrs Bell, 40 people picketed the courthouse with signs saying "Segregated Polls" and "Recount!" While they were picketing, whites sprayed them with water, waved guns and threw bottles at them. Police just stood by and watched.

July 22 -- Law student, Stan Zacks, had rocks and hammer thrown at him by some white construction workers working near the SNCC-SCOPE office. He is ok. About 300 people marched from the Friendship Chapel to the courthouse, with police escort. Purpose was to protest segregation at the polls, a fixed election, and beatings and arrests at the polls on Tuesday. The City Council, the Mayor, and the Merchants Association of Americus had a meeting today, at which they decided to get the colored people out of jail, and to admit that the election was fixed.

July 23 -- The four women arrested at the polls Tuesday refused the bond put up by local white merchants and power structure because they felt the charges against them were unfair, and they wanted the charges either to be dropped, or to be released on their own signatures.