

[1966]

1800 Juneway 465-6235

Chicago

Freedom Drivers Bulletin #3

Bill Banta, Shep Ferguson, and Mark Forester made a trip stopping at Tent City near Greenville, Cleveland, and Ruleville, Mississippi, and Selma and Lowndes County Tent City in Alabama. This was the first trip with our Citizens Band radio. It works beautifully. The trip went well, and the boys got some really good slides, both B&W and color.

Between that trip and the one we are making tomorrow, we have had to overcome another series of disaster befalling the truck, some of which we never expected in the north. On April 9, Bill Frice was making pickups in preparation for a trip. He was in the South Shore section of Chicago when four toughs jumped him, took the truck, and burned it at 91st and Gregier. We lost about a ton of food and clothing in the blaze. The cab of the truck and the engine were unharmed, as were the new tires the United Auto Workers had given us. Our radio was not in the truck at the time. But the van was extensively damaged--the top was buckled in from the heat, and the seams on the side unwelded, and all the plywood facing and tailgate were destroyed. The wiring was also damaged. This did not upset us as much as the fact that vandals had then written "nigger go home" all over the burnt surface. We have no insurance on the truck except liability from the state risk pool. We bore the brunt of the loss, which was not so much a financial setback as a shock and a heartbreaking cleanup and repair job which wasted a lot of time and manpower. We wish to thank the Martin Gas Station at Foster and Green Bay, and Robinson's Mobilgas on Emerson for their help in lending us tools and space, and Mr. and Mrs. Kleiman for donating the paint. Please say thank you for us if you patronize these gas stations and let them know that the supporters of Freedom Drivers appreciate their help.

We attempted another trip on April 28th. This time the old engine threw a rod. The replacement of the engine was a financial disaster--it cost over 400 hundred dollars. Almost all of that came out of the pockets of the drivers: Barbara Mitchell, Jerry Einstandig, Lee Banner, and Ron Fox. These drivers cannot afford this expense and must somehow be paid back. We also have \$390.00 run up in gas on the credit cards of three of the drivers. We need your help to keep going. A lot of people down South depend on us and are already suffering from the delays we have had in getting this load of supplies to them. They needed some office machinery and campaigning in the primaries in Mississippi and Alabama. We failed to get it to them because of the hijacking and burning and subsequent engine breakdown, and also for the lack of adequate financial support. We can stand the time we lose, the chances we take, and the accidents that happen. But we cannot stand failure. We are leaving again tomorrow for Indianola, Cleveland, Ruleville, Greenwood, Marks, and Benton County Mississippi. Two of us are putting our credit cards out for the last time as far as the oil companies are concerned. We would like, after all the work we have done, to keep the truck going, especially with the expected increase in civil rights activity this summer. The best way you could help us would be to arrange a speaking engagement and slide showing with your church, political group, social club, or some gathering. We know there are other ways to raise money, but one of our purposes is to involve more interested Northern liberals in the Southern movement, and the slide showing and speaking engagement provides not only a fund-raising situation, but also a situation in which people can see for themselves what is currently going on in the South; and where they can meet our drivers, who drive and maintain a truck.

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now known to friend and foe alike as the Freedom Truck- a vital north-south supply line for the civil rights movement. Lee Bankhead, SNCC secretary for Washington County wrote us:

"Ferguson and the others were followed after they were stopped in Clarksdale. But my husband, Rev. Hughes, and Mr. Holmes and myself saw them safely into Arkansas. We made it over the bridge when the cops were changing shifts. The cops are still convinced that the boys are hiding out somewhere in the county and keep circling the block looking, but by now they are safe in Little Rock.

This morning we took the clothes and the toys to the Lee St. settlement house. The children named the big stuffed bunny Mr. Freedom Driver to remember the people of Chicago. Some old ladies who have had nothing but cornmeal mush for several weeks were treated to an instant breakfast and some canned fruit. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts. The old people used to say, "God drops good things down your chimney." Now they talk about a truck He sends from the north to show them that there is still a God of love in this world."

The movement in the South needs and appreciates what we bring, but they also have the courage and the ingenuity to go right ahead without supplies, which makes them all the more worthwhile for us to give to and help out. Otis Brown, director of the project in Indianola, Sunflower County, writes:

"As I told you before, we already have the permit to build the center, but we have barely begun to work on the center. We will not have a concrete floor, because we could not get anyone to sell us concrete for the purpose. So we will have a wooden floor and a tin top. What caused the changes in the top was because we didn't have enough money to do the job with anything else."

We know many of you are tired of contributing to the Mississippi movement over and over again. It is natural to feel "I gave once and that is enough." Most of us who drive could feel the same way- that it was enough to go down with the first wave of volunteers in the summer of '64, and now we are through. But with the movement in Mississippi, once isn't enough. That movement is being fought town by town, vote by vote, and too often life by life. There never was and there won't be any "once" in this struggle. It will be day to day, over and over. We must stay to hold the gains we've made, and try with the few workers we have to go where we haven't been before. We'll keep going if you'll keep helping. Without exception, the drivers in our group are physically exhausted and financially in debt. Please don't leave us like that. And please don't stop at writing us a check. We are appalled at and involved in what is going on in the South, and we want to tell as many people as possible about, until maybe just as many people are interested in the poor man's fight in Mississippi as they are in the rich man's war in Viet Nam. Let us speak to your group and show slides- let your friends meet us and know what we do.

Yours for freedom,

Barbara Mitchell

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