

NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Illinois

CAIRO, ILL. POLICE USE TEAR GAS ON DEMONSTRATORS

CAIRO, ILLINOIS, SEPTEMBER 27 — Charles F. McDew, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, protested today to Illinois Governor Otto Kerner "the brutal tactics" of the Cairo, Ill. police who sprayed tear gas on civil rights demonstrators here last night.

On three successive days of picketing for fair employment at Banks' Wondermarket since Tuesday, Sept. 24, 58 demonstrators — mostly young people, Negro and white — were arrested on a city ordinance passed Sept. 12 prohibiting "parading without a license."

Last night 200 Negro citizens of Cairo protested the arrests in front of the city jail and demanded that the prisoners be released. Police ordered the crowd to disperse and then, when they did not move fast enough, fired tear gas on those assembled.

The crowd scattered, and then formed again after one teenager had been hospitalized.

Inside the jail, as the demonstrators were being fingerprinted, 25 witnesses saw police attack Harold Whitfield, 15, and beat him on the head.

Seven of the 58 are still in jail, including Jim Peake, a young white man, who is on a hunger strike protesting the arrests. Peake, a SNCC volunteer, is a paraplegic and has been working on voter registration in Cairo.

Hearings for the arrested picketers are scheduled to begin Oct. 12.

The text of the SNCC telegram to Gov. Kerner stated,

It is most disgusting that police officers in the State of Illinois have resorted to the brutal tactics of the Albany, Georgia, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana police departments.

We urgently demand executive powers of your office be mobilized to halt these violations of civil rights and civil liberties.

Last January, police used tear gas on several hundred Southern University students in Baton Rouge when they marched to the city hall to protest the arrests of students who had sat in at local lunch counters. In Albany, hundreds of citizens have been arrested when they picketed, marched, or prayed on the streets. An injunction against these demonstrators is being argued.

Rev. Blaine Ramsey of Cairo stated today that the picketing of Banks' Wondermarket would continue despite the "repressive" ordinance.