

ARREST OF VOTE WORKERS PROTESTED

GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI - The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has protested the arrest of 14 voter registration workers to Congressman Jamie L. Whitten (D-Miss.) and called for the arrest of public officials under the United States Criminal Code.

SNCC Chairman John Lewis cited the arrest of the 14 here March 31, 1964, when they defied police orders to restrict their picketing to one side of the Leflore County Courthouse, as grounds for the arrest of Police Chief Curtis Lary of Greenwood.

"These arrest constitute the latest in a long series of incidents of harrassment and intimidation aimed at potential Negro voters by local officials dating back more than a year," Lewis told Whitten. Inteference has "intensified", he said, since Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, a Negro, qualified to run against Whitten in the June 2 primary for the 2nd Congressional District seat.

The 14 arrested carried signs urging Negroes to register to vote. They are charged with disorderly conduct. Bond was set at \$500.00. All have decided to remain in jail "until the United States Department of Justice acts to secure our release and to insure that further arrests and harrassments do not occur."

In June, 1963, the Justice Department filed suit in federal court to restrain Greenwood and Leflore County officials from using their arrest powers to intefere with voter registration activity. The suit is still pending, but "intimidation continues", the SNCC contends.

SNCC charges that the recent arrests constitute "criminal" violation of Title 18, Section 594 of the United States Code.

SNCC head Lewis told reporters at an Atlanta, Georgia press conference March 31 it was "time for President Johnson and Attorney General Kennedy to enforce statutes which make inteference in voter registration activity a federal crime." "This is their minimum responsibility to the American people," Lewis stated, "and does not require additional legislation."

Voter registration workers, joined by local citizens and ministers from the National Council of Churches, have been picketing the Leflore County Courthouse since a March 25 "Freedom Day". On March 30, Chief Lary told picketers they would not be allowed to picket anywhere except the west side of the building.

On March 31, pickets returned to the front of the courthouse and were arrested. Those in jail now are: Willie Peacock, 26, Charleston, Mississippi and Dick Frey, 21, Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, leaders of the vote drive; Dorothy Higgins, 18; Flora George, 18; Laura George, 21, Will Henry Rogers, 17; Fred Harris, 17; Matthew Hughes, 20; Alberta Stuart, 26, and Willis Wright, 23, all of Greenwood; James Brown, 21, Itta Bena; Robert Bass, 21, Jackson; Alvin Packard, 18, Hattiesburg; and Tony Gaenslen, 22, Philadelphia. Frey and Gaenslen are white; the others are Negroes.

Lewis called for protests across the country "so Mississippi Negroes can vote for a president next November." According to government figures, there are 425,000 Negroes eligible to vote in Mississippi, but only 25,000 are registered voters.