

January 14, 1966

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FCR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The demonstrations in this City and County concerning voter registration and other denials of civil rights for Negroes have begun to have telling effects upon this city and county. This is evidenced by the violence and horrible brutality visited upon the demonstrators yesterday by the police of this area, evidently upon orders from high officials. In dealing these vicious assaults upon unarmed, defenseless men, women and children, the policemen really moved the mask from the face of this City and revealed the real heart of Birmingham; ugly, violent, vicious, a place where freedom seeking Negroes can be killed while only seeking to live. America cannot allow this violence and brutality to pass unnoticed.

Another indication of the effectiveness of the demonstrations is the temporary Federal Injunction obtained by the Jefferson County Board of Education against SCLC. The State is using the Board as a pawn in a plot to use the strong arm of the Federal Judiciary to block legitimate protests and stifle 1st Amendment rights and privileges.

As far the injunction itself, it does not prohibit orderly and peaceful demonstrations. It merely prohibits SCLC officials and staff from blocking traffic, from entering in, upon or near school premises to encourage or entice students to leave school, or from picketing or boycotting schools. Certainly the denial of basic constitutional right of Negroes to be immediately registered and qualified as voters ought to be strenuously protested--even to the point of civil disobedience.

However, out of our respect for what the Federal Judiciary has consistently done since 1954 on the question of desegregation, we will abide by the injunction, not withstanding the fact that we feel this injunction is an infringement of First

Amendment rights and privileges. Our lawyers are now looking into the legal implications of the injunction.

The demonstrations will continue until neighborhood, evening and nighttime registration is set up by the Board, or the Federal Government sends registrars to do the job--as indeed it should have already done. The Board has Poll Tax Collection places all over the City and County and has published them in today's paper. People vote in precincts near their homes. Why can't the Board also sign up prospective voters at different places in the County? Several intelligent Negroes are willing to give their time free to facilitate this. The U. S. Attorney's recent letter to the Board to add more hours or he would send in Federal Registrars is an admission that something much more is needed than is being done. His letter favors neighborhood registration.

Students understand today as they did in 1963 and 1965 that freedom is the overriding concern of all at the moment. Many have volunteered their hearts, their time, and their bodies, to secure for their parents and themselves the freedom that is legally and morally theirs. We shall never tell anyone--young or old--that they should not or could not participate in an orderly or peaceful demonstration at any time.

We shall not encourage the children to stay out of school, and the staff will not go in or on school premises. But our students have always understood even better than their elders the rights denied them and their elders; and they have voluntarily joined the action, and have traditionally been in the forefront of our movement.

We shall refrain, for the present, from blocking traffic. But, the protest will continue, and take on newer dimensions. There will be morning, noon, evening and night marches. There may be all-night vigils at the Court House. We may organize and transport people into white neighborhoods for marches. In any event, the protest is on until justice is done.

RELEASED BY: Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, President  
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and  
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