

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Student Nonviolent Coordinating
Committee 387-7645
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Statement of Marion Barry, Jr. on the Atlanta, Georgia disorders:

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press:

I have just returned this morning from Atlanta, Georgia. I was there attending a program workshop conducted by SNCC for some of its staff members. Since SNCC has many programs throughout the country, it is necessary for staff members to get together from time to time to exchange information and ideas. This workshop began on Friday, September 3, and ended on Tuesday, September 6.

The white press, the white racist cops in Atlanta and the white Mayor of Atlanta have tried to frame and discredit SNCC by accusing SNCC of 'leading' a riot there. This is an obvious attempt to cover up the truth and shift the focus from the brutal actions of the Atlanta police department. All one has to do is to look at the facts. These are the facts:

At approximately 1:15 pm (EST) two white policemen stopped a car driven by Harold Prather, a 25 year old Negro, who lived 3/4 of a block away. The cops stopped Prather at Capitol Avenue and Grand St. According to 15 or 20 persons who witnessed the incident, Prather jumped from the car and ran and was shot three times by one of the white officers. "Prather kept moving at a very slow speed and was fired upon again as he tried to get to his home 3/4 of a block away," said one witness. He finally made it and fell on the porch. (Statement from his mother attached).

Immediately after the shooting, a crowd of 150-200 persons gathered at Prather's house to protest the shooting. There were no SNCC people present. Stokely Carmichael, SNCC chairman, returning from a radio interview heard about the incident over the radio and went to the scene. The people there were very angry. The local people wanted Carmichael to come back and help organize a

peaceful pretest demonstration. The demonstration was called for 4 o'clock pm. At approximately 3:30 pm, two SNCC people arrived at Capitol Avenue and Ormond St., the scene of the planned demonstration. 200 people were there. The local people had made their own signs and gone around in the various neighborhoods informing their friends as to what had happened. At 3:45 pm, Bill Ware, project director for SNCC's Atlanta Project, and 3 other SNCC people arrived with a sound truck and immediately parked it at Capitol Ave. and Ormond St. Ware asked the assembled people what had happened and they began to tell him. Ware said the whole group should know what happened and asked if witnesses would tell about the incident over the public address system. Several persons began telling what they had seen. Police officers immediately moved in and told Ware to turn off the PA system. Ware informed the policemen that he wanted to stop rumors and make sure that everyone knew what had happened. The policemen immediately arrested Ware. Another SNCC worker asked if people still wanted to talk. The local people said, "yes". The talking continued and police arrested the SNCC person. This made the crowd angrier. They demanded that the policeman release the two SNCC people. The local people said that they would sit in the streets until the two persons were released and the mayor suspended the policeman who shot Prather.

The Atlanta policeman tried to remove people and arrested some who lived in the neighborhood. The arrests were immediately protested by the crowd, but to no avail. The people really got angry and started pushing some of the officers and several bottles were thrown. Mayor Ivan Allen arrived on the scene and brought with him 150-200 white policemen and an armored truck loaded with white cops, machine guns and other riot equipment. White officers with shotguns were stationed all along the street. At that time Mayor Allen tried to lead the crowd to the Atlanta Stadium some four or five blocks away. The crowd refused to leave their neighborhood. The crowd was also angry because all of the white officers had machine guns and shot-guns, but the Negro officers had only their pistols. This really set the crowd off. Bottles, bricks, and other objects were thrown at these white officers.

Allen tried to talk to the people from atop a police car, but they would not listen, because the crowd wanted one of their leaders to talk and not Allen. The black leader who got on top of the car demanded that 1) white cops get out of there with machine guns and shot guns 2) the release of all those illegally and unjustly arrested, and 3) the cops be fired who shot the young Negro. The crowd cheered the demands, but Allen refused to answer. He refused to address himself to their grievances, at which time he was toppled from the police car. Then 50-60 cops rushed into the crowd and started hitting and pushing people. Mayor Allen then directed that tear gas be used to disperse the 1500 people who were on the scene. "Tear gas them or tear those houses down," Allen shouted.

All 400-500 officers began firing their pistols and shot guns without warning. Both in the air and at the crowd. It was a terrifying experience. Unarmed people were assaulted by officers armed with tear-gas, pistols, machine guns and shotguns.

Never seen anything like it. Little kids, 7 or 8 years old, were hit with tear gas canisters. Black women were clubbed to the ground. Anyone who was not moving fast enough was immediately arrested and thrown head first in the paddy wagon.

Cops fired tear gas indiscriminately into the homes of black people who were not even on the streets. Little kids came out gasping for air. Cops went onto black people's porches to beat and arrest them. During this period several police cars were stoned, and several policemen were injured.

During all of this, the attack was directed by Mayor Ivan Allen. He ordered little kids tear-gassed. He ordered white cops to beat and arrest white people who were in the area.

Now as to SNCC's role:

- 1) SNCC has only one project in Atlanta and that is in an area called Vine City which is on the other side of town from the disorders.
- 2) SNCC has never worked in the neighborhood where the disorders took place.
- 3) It was the shouting of the young Negro by the white cops then subsequent

arrests of SNCC people that made people angry.

- 4) The local people themselves made the signs and got their friends together.
- 5) Stokely Carmichael drove through the area only after the disorders began.
- 6) Most of the SNCC people arrived on the scene after the crowd had gathered and police were beating and hitting people.
- 7) The focus should be on Mayor Ivan Allen and his racist cops and not SNCC. At 11 am on the same day, SNCC members had gone to the Mayor's office with a complaint concerning police officials. At this time Mayor Allen refused to speak with the group and dismissed them by stating, "You're out of line in Atlanta which is known for its fair and equal treatment of all citizens."

SNCC will fight any and all attempts to discredit and frame them. We will let Washington citizens know what the truth is.

We will organize a "black truth squad". We will distribute thousands of leaflets. Get on street corners and tell the truth. We will also start a defense fund for the people who were arrested in Atlanta.