Pike County/McComb  TWO BOMBINGS

Two children were injured when a residence and a church—both connected with the movement—were bombed here last night. All but one of Mrs. Aleyanne Quinn’s eight rooms home in McComb were damaged by a blast believed to be dynamite at 10:50 p.m. Mrs. Quinn’s children, Jacqueline, 9, and Anthony, 5, were injured. A babysitter—also in the home at the time of the blast—escaped injury. An angry crowd of Negroes gathered at the home after the blast. When police arrived thirty minutes later, they were pelted with bricks and bottles. One police car was damaged and a Negro girl slightly injured by a ricocheting brick. Another group of Negroes formed a roadblock nearby and tried to stop all passing cars.

In Baertown just South of McComb the Society Hill Baptist Church was almost completely destroyed by an explosion at 11:20 p.m. The church was used extensively for voter registration activities in 1961 and a majority of its members presently support the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The bombings are the eighth and ninth in Pike County since August 27th and the 13th and 14th since the summer began.

Jesse Harris, SNCC Project Director in McComb, had warned Justice Department Civil Rights Division head Burke Marshall on September 9 (in a three-page letter) of the worsening situation in Pike County, in a letter asking for increased federal support in the area he said: "We plead with you to take action now before it is too late." There has been no indication of any action taken in the letter, (essentially the letter summarized the bombings, beatings, threats that have occurred from August 27-Sep 9th. 5th and pointed out the McComb SNCC staff's belief that someone could easily—i.e. in fact, would—be killed if there were not some change in the Justice Department and FBI position on what action to take. The letter also pointed out that the FBI force had been cut to 4 (from 16) which seemed to represent the attitude of the Justice Department, i.e. now that the summer volunteers have gone home, federal officials can relax.)

19-year old Mrs. Johnnie Lee Wilcher—Mrs. Quinn’s babysitter—heard the thrown bomb thump on the porch of the home. She was phoning for aid when it exploded. The two children were in a rear room at the time of the blast. If they had been in the front room they would probably have been killed. Mrs. Quinn was next door. Earlier in the evening she attended a district meeting of the Freedom Democratic Party in Jackson. At the scene of the Quinn bombing a policeman said: "All this happened because of those damn COFO workers down on Wall Street." A civil rights worker inspecting damage to the church was cursed by a policeman. Only the front door and rear frame of an existing. The explosion came from the center of the church, which indicates the bomb was placed, not thrown. No one was in the church at the time.

Mrs. Quinn’s two children who were slightly injured in last night’s bombing were treated and released from a Jackson hospital today. Mrs. Quinn and the children held a press conference in Jackson with C.C. Bryant, a trustee of Society Hill Baptist Church. Bryant’s barber shop was bombed in April and dynamite was exploded in his front yard in late June.

Meanwhile, Carolyn Quinn Beckenridge, a daughter of Mrs. Quinn, and Johnnie Lee Wilcher, the baby sitter, were picked up from the Quinn home at 7 a.m. today by men originally thought to be reporters. When nothing was heard from them for some time, Jackson called McComb police who said that the women had been booked, but would not indicate on what charges, and that they wanted to give them lie detector tests. The jail, however, refused to say they had a record of their whereabouts. City Attorney Reeves was contacted and said he would only give information to the attorney for the women. Meanwhile police brought the two women back to the Quinn house on a police proctor to take them to Jackson for lie detector tests. Jesse Harris, of SNCC, and others refused to let police take the women. The officers called headquarters and left shortly thereafter without the women.

MORE  MORE  MORE
12 midnight -- Tension continued to mount today (Monday) and
helmeted county police poured into WATs. The state police
had come in to WATs in the early hours of the morning and were
still visible. A rally was held at the site of the bombed church
and was attended by about 150 people. During the rally Dennis
Sweeney, 21, from Portland, Oregon, told of his conversation earlier
in the day with Mrs. Quinn. He asked her if she had a place to stay
and she said yes. But a moment later she broke down and cried saying
she didn't know if they would want her to stay there because they
might get their house bombed, too. Shortly after Dennis was finished
speaking and encouraging people to support the voter registration
drive he was arrested by police (state) and taken to be booked for
inciting to riot. He was interrogated by plainclothesmen who appear-
ed to be state investigators. They warned him that he wasn't wanted
in town and said he'd better leave. One investigator told Sweeney
that WATs was "a powderkeg that could blow up at any minute".
They also questioned Sweeney about his father, where he worked; they
looked out all the contents of his wallet and ripped the pages out of his
address book. He was then released.

Five others were arrested Monday night but later released. They
were: Jesse Harris, project director; Cephas Hughes, Negro SNCC
worker from Washington, D.C., Ursula Junk from Germany, Bill Powell
from Britain and Roy Lee, a local resident.

Ursula Junk was the first to be questioned. She was interrogated
by plainclothesmen who were surrounded by police who came in with
intimidating remarks throughout. She asked what was she arrested
for and was told "inciting to riot". Ursula then said "I have a right
to express myself and refuse to provide a livelihood". The investi-
gator answered: "When you enter Mississippi you ain't got no more
rights. Didn't you know that?" Ursula answered, "I heard about that
but didn't know it could be true". And the investigator responded:
"Unless you leave Mississippi voluntarily we are going to help you
leave faster." The questioning continued -- was she engaged?
No. Did she date niggers? The answer: "I go out with people." "You
mean white people or niggers?" The answer: "I mean people". Then there
followed a long period of time when Ursula's investigators tried to
inanimate that she was a prostitute. For example they said they
would have a medical check up and asked did she have any venereal diseases. They asked where she lived, etc. After
establishing that she was a Catholic one said: "Oh those niggers
climb on Catholics, too." Other policemen chimed in with similar
taunts. Then followed a lengthy interrogation about communism.
After the hour and a half of questioning from police she was taken
into the Mayor's office where she was questioned by FBI agent Murphy
for an hour. After Murphy established that Ursula was Catholic he
said: "But you didn't go to church last Sunday"? "Yes," she said,
"I want to church with one of the Negro workers." "You offended the
whole community...It was the feeling of the community that you came
to church in order to demonstrate...and you still wear what the
reasons for the bombings were? The reason was you offended the
community. Don't you see the connection? Church bombings and
Mrs. Quinn's house?" (Ursula had been staying at Mrs. Quinn's).

Questions for Jesse Harris followed. He was told that they would
"get him" for contributing to the delinquency of minors and for
"inciting to riot". And then, "we are going to lock you up good,"
said the police. Bill Powell from Britain was next. When he
asked Murphy, the FBI agent, if he complained to his embassy would
anything be done Murphy replied by trying to convince him not to
complain to his embassy but to give him (Murphy) his complaints.

Finally all five were released. Jesse Harris and Cephas Hughes were
released separately, though and had to pass through a crowd of
whites to get their car. They were followed to the Freedom House.