

# VIOLENCE IN ALABAMA

**The murders of Mrs. Viola Liuzzo and the Rev. James Reeb were part of a pattern that still persists in the most volatile state in the old Confederacy**

By JERRY DeMUTH

**W**HEN Mrs. Viola Liuzzo was slain by a gunman while traveling along Highway 80, the Jefferson Davis Highway in Alabama, Gov. George Wallace went on television and told fellow Alabamans that he "felt badly" about the slaying. But he added that "people are assaulted in every state in this Union. It's still safer on Highway 80 than it is riding a subway in New York." Later when he issued a statement to the press, his choice of words was a little more careful. "It was a cowardly act," he said. "Such acts of cowardice will not be tolerated. I have ordered all appropriate state agencies to continue around-the-clock investigations of the death of Mrs. Liuzzo and if necessary I will employ additional investigators to see that the guilty party or parties are brought to justice."

Exactly one week after this slaying, dynamite destroyed the garage, two cars and a boat belonging to a Negro family in Birmingham. Shortly afterward, bombs were found at the homes of the mayor and a city councilwoman. Eleven days previously eleven bombs had been found in the city. This brought the total number of bombings in Birmingham to nearly fifty in the last twenty years.

"We're not used to this sort of thing here," Governor Wallace was able to say when he visited the home of the Negro family, evidently forgetting the other bombings.

"We're going to try to get those who did it," he added. He began a reward fund to find the bomber or bombers who had done this "infamous and dastardly act."

Perhaps the Governor has forgotten—and the American people too—other acts which he has also called

"dastardly." Two years earlier, on April 24, 1963, William L. Moore, on a civil rights walk from Chattanooga, Tenn., to Jackson, Miss., was gunned down on an Alabama highway. Wallace called the murder "a dastardly act" and offered a \$1,000 reward. State trooper head Al Lingo offered help. The local sheriff within a few days arrested a suspect and asked that a charge of first degree murder be placed against him. Ballistic tests showed the suspect's weapon had fired the fatal shots. But a grand jury did not meet to consider an indictment for five months. Then on Sept. 13, the jury refused even to indict the suspect.

Two days later, a bomb tore through the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four girls aged eleven through sixteen. Governor Wallace called this and other bombings (the total was now forty-three) "dastardly acts" and Col. Al Lingo took charge of the investigation. Two weeks later, the Governor's office announced that "arrests are imminent" and the Governor himself went on television to say that "the crime will be solved."

Lingo arrested three men with Klan records. The charge: illegal possession of explosives. There was no mention of evidence connecting them with the church bombing. The next month the three were convicted in recorder's court, fined \$100 each and sentenced to ninety days. The three appealed and in June, 1964, the state circuit court overturned the conviction and the men were set free.

The State of Alabama was through with this case, but what of the FBI's investigation? Last November the FBI announced that it knew the identities of a "small group of Klansmen" who had committed the crime. But the bureau said there was not enough evidence to make arrests and commented: "This investigation was prejudiced by premature arrests made by the Alabama

*Jerry DeMuth, now living in Atlanta, contributes to many periodicals.*