

V. 101

CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN WORKERS HARRASSED IN RULEVILLE, MISSISSIPPI-
MARCH 20, 1964

Report by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Field Worker
Mendy Samstein:

On Friday night, March 20, George Green and I left Jackson for the Delta to find Mrs. Hamer and Charles McLaurin in order to learn the outcome of Mrs. Hamer's opening campaign rally in Ruleville, Mississippi. (Mrs. Hamer is running for congress in the second congressional district) and to discuss future campaign strategy. We took with us hundreds of handout leaflets for campaign canvassing as well as other campaign materials which had just been worked up in Jackson and Atlanta. We arrived in Cleveland, Mississippi at approximately 11:30 in the hope of finding McLaurin at the home of Anzie Moore, a resident of Cleveland. Finding no one home at Moore's house we decided to proceed to Ruleville to see Mrs. Hamer and perhaps find McLaurin. We arrived in Ruleville at approximately 12:15 and were driving through the Negro community when we were stopped by Ruleville police. We stopped our car (George was driving at the time). Two men got out of the police car and approached us. One was a stout, round-faced man (who we later learned was name Milan and was known to Negro residents of Ruleville for his brutality. Milan is the brother of the man who was accused of killing Emmett Till). The other was a shorter man, wearing glasses (whose name we never learned). Milan was dressed in uniform, but the other man was dressed in plain chinos and a tan shirt. (We later learned he was merely an auxiliary policeman who frequently was put on night duty).

The shorter man approached me and asked me what I was doing in "niggertown." When I did not reply he told me to get out of the car. Meantime Milan had gone around to the other side of the car and had told George Green, "nigger, get out of the car." We were both then pushed and shoved to the back of the car where we were continuously and threateningly asked what we were doing in "niggertown". Then the shorter fellow began questioning me as to what I was doing "with that nigger". Milan then grabbed me and started shoving me around. The shorter fellow then went over to George and asked him if "he was a nigger." When George did not reply, the shorter man pulled his gun and shoved it repeatedly in George's stomach. I later learned he had the gun cocked and had jabbed it repeatedly in George's ribs, causing several lacerations. After a few moments, the shorter man came over to me and told Milan that he would take care of me. He then shoved me a few yards to a lamppost and began asking me who I worked for and what I was doing here with that nigger. When I explained that I worked for the Council of Federated Organizations and that we were concerned with voting and education, he repeated intermittantly, "Why you yellow bastard, I ought to..." (cocking his fist back while saying this).

Meanwhile, Milan was back at the car with George, and I later learned from George that Milan also pulled his gun and jabbed it repeatedly into George's stomach. Before anything further transpired between me and the shorter man, Milan came and told us that we were both under arrest and that we should get in our car. We were to make a right and then proceed to the jailhouse -- which we did. When we got out, we were told to go into the jailhouse where we were told to

empty all our pockets. We were then frisked by the shorter man, who kept repeatedly calling George a "nigger." Milan, looking at me, then said, "I still don't know what you people do." When I said we were concerned with Negro participation in politics, he replied that "we don't have any nigger politics in Ruleville." At this point, we were placed in separate cells, without being fingerprinted or booked, without being able to make a phone call, and without any appraisal of what the charges against us were.

During the night, I awoke to the sharp voice of the shorter man who had arrested me earlier. He was talking to a man who was obviously being put into a cell. He kept calling the man a nigger and when the man did not reply "yes sir", he reminded him threateningly to say "yes sir" to him. After Milan and the shorter man left, I learned the man just arrested was a Negro school teacher from Hattiesburg. He was in Ruleville, trying to visit his wife who was in the hospital there, at the bedside of her mother.

The next morning around 9:00 the Negro school teacher was released. When the jailer came in, George asked him if he could make a phone call, but the jailkeeper replied, "when we get ready." Meanwhile George, from his cell, was able to see several officers go into our car and begin searching through it from hood to trunk. George saw them take several of the Mrs. Hamer leaflets from the car.

At about 10:30, George was taken out of his cell for about 15 minutes and when he returned I was taken out. I was ushered into the City Hall (Adjoining the jailhouse) and there seated next to a man at a typewriter who began asking me routine questions. (I later learned that this was the Mayor of Ruleville, Dourrough). When I asked what the charges were against me, Mayor Dourrough replied that they didn't know yet, that they were investigating me because there had been several burglaries in town recently. When he was finished questioning me, I asked to make a phone call, but the Mayor replied, "When we finish investigating." I was then returned to my cell. About a half hour later, George and I were again taken out. We were brought before Mayor Dourrough who was now acting, we assumed, as Justice of the Peace, and were told that I was charged with violating the curfew and that George was arrested for violating the curfew and going through a stop sign. We were told that the fine was \$10 for each count. When I told Mayor Dourrough that the Supreme Court of the United States had ruled that curfew laws for adults were unconstitutional, Dourrough replied that, "that law has not reached here yet." When I asked what the appeal bond would be, he said I would have to go to the county jail in Indianola and there await the setting of a bond. Since we had to do much work, we decided to pay the fines. This we did, whereupon we were released.