

2nd letter from Oxford, Ohio)

Dear Folks:

Yesterday was non-violence day here. In the morning we heard Jim Lawson of Nashville, gave us the word on non-violence as a way of life. Lawson speaks of a moral confrontation with one's enemies, ~~HEHEHEHE~~ catching the other guy's eye, speaking to him with love if possible, and so on. He gave an example of Birmingham firemen who refused to turn on the hoses in the face of an advancing crowd. Later we learned that Lawson was pretty much lying in his teeth, because those firemen were under orders from the rising group that was trying to oust Bull Connor at that point. "Violence always brings more harm to the people who use it; economic & political forces have no place in the movement....etc." These are the things Lawson came up with. He said we had no right to do otherwise in a movement which is committed to non-violence, ~~than~~ to shape our lives that way. I feel very strongly that he does NOT represent the Movement.

Stokely Carmichael, who is quite famous among civil rights people - rebutted him in the afternoon session, thusly: Non-violence used to work because 1) it was new; 2) the newspapers gave it top coverage week after week and most important: 3) the demands were minor and the resistance to change not hard-core. Now the North is tired of demonstrations, - a very vigorous backlash has emerged - and the papers will only report major violence. Now we are responsible for what we do, and have to explain the stall-in, instead of having it welcomed on the front pages of the press. Again, most important, the movement has grown up, and is now aiming at the places where the white society really feels threatened, as in the area of jobs and voting....

There comes a point, when you are in Mississippi and not in Nashville, when you get tired of being beaten and going back the next day for your beating, for 5 days in a row. You get tired of the pattern of being asked whether you are a Negro or a nigger, and ending up on the floor of the police station screaming at the top of your lungs that you are a nigger, boss. You get tired of seeing young women smashed in the face right in front of your eyes. Stokely does not advocate violence. What he is saying is that love & moral confrontation have no place in front of a brute who beats you till you cry nigger.

My feelings, and I think these are common, are that non-violence is a perverted way of life, but a necessary tactic & technique. The only reason that I will not hit back is because then I will be in the hospital 2 weeks instead of one, and will be useless to the movement during that extra week when I can only read Ghandi's latest book on how to win friends & influence people. The only reason I am against guns is because, with them, all of us will get killed instead of just beaten, and the Negro people will be exterminated. I am glad someone was around fighting the Nazis when I was too young to do the job myself. It is harmful to the human person to feel that he must love a man who has a foot in his face.

No sncc workers are armed, nor are there guns in any sncc office. (The reason of course being that a police officer would murder anyone found in the office and then bring in the gun as evidence of his need for shooting in self-defense. However, the farmers are prepared to defend their homes from attack, and this brings up problems which you can only believe are real if you have been here for a few days. Suppose the man of the house is shooting away & tosses you a gun and says with his eyes: "ok, white man, now let's see which side you are on." If he and his sons are killed and only 2 small children are left in the house, and the mob is still coming, what do you do? Some say, 'shiled them with your body, and hope the mob is satisfied with the sight of the dead male bodies, or morally confronted by the sight of the ~~HEH~~ 2 children cowering behind an unarmed man.' Most, I think, would pick up the gun long before this, particularly since our presence there will be in large part responsible for the attack. I have never before had to think about what circumstances would allow me to shoot to kill, but you quickly learn to think that way when Jimmy Travis is walking around here with a slug in the back of his neck.

We had a workshop in the afternoon. They showed us how to fall to the ground and doubt - also how to throw yourself over another worker to take some of the blows. They piled up or

four or five that way, and then one of them went around the pile as if it were an ordinary classroom visual aid, nothing how nobody had his head fully exposed, no stomachs were exposed, and only the thighs & calves of most were open to beating. Then they acted a long scene in a farmer's hut, with a couple of students trying to convince Forman to go register. He really knew his stuff, and the thing was remarkably true to life. Then they showed courthouse scenes, etc.

Write to me care of the Voter Registration Office in Greenwood. The plan is always to tie ourselves in with voting, as there is precedent for Federal protection of registration workers. Thus, if speeding, say we are on the way to a voter registration meeting, and so on. AND WRITE HER OFTEN.

Have to go to another lecture now - on what to do when arrested, and what your rights are supposed to be.

Love,  
bill