

Dear Friends,

Shaw

Mississippi in the summer of 1964 is beginning to show a new spirit, a spirit of revolt which is spreading daily as the movement gains momentum in the big cities and the small rural towns. The spirit of a suppressed people rises to the great occasion that presents itself with more force every minute; every day as we civil rights workers go to more and more mass rallies, and attend churches to speak with fire about the revolution which is taking place, we find more enthusiasm in the soul of black folks. The singing rises to a crescendo, then the preacher gives a sermon packed with emotion; as he nears the latter half of the sermon, the congregation begins a beautiful humming; all the while the deep voice of the minister is constantly interrupted with shouts of approval; "That's Right!", "Amen", "Well, well", "Your're right brother and preach that message, brother." The response from the congregation makes the church a most lively and enjoyable place; everyone can participate; it is as democratic as a people can be. It is certain that democracy for the Southern Negro has meant his church life for the church as the center of his existence--an existence which is close to subsistence. Subsistence life forces this people to stick to the fundamentals of life. Speaking in a church to these people means you talk directly about the most important problems; this is a refreshing experience after being forced to engage in the meaningless trivial discussions of the decadent liberal world. Liberalism here means very little, for these people want concrete action; and they need concrete action brought about by a well organized political party dedicated to the goals of justice in race matters, an overcoming of poverty, an intensification of federal programs such as setting up a Mississippi River Valley Authority, and the encouragement of industrialism. The necessity of developing a well organized party dedicated to these goals, which go far beyond the interest oriented parties of the present, is now becoming apparent to more people. The imperative of developing a philosophy of politics grounded in a theory of political action is increasingly obvious as we are met by the inadequate theory of SNCC and find ourselves stumbling over the narrow dogmatism of some of the SNCC leaders.

Canvassing door to door we come upon an old man in his 70's sitting in a straight-back chair outside a hut which one of our group can not believe is a house. We say hello and he answers with the greatest warmth. One of the student group trying to get everybody down to the courthouse to vote, someone says. He answers yes, he's heard about us and he knows we are doing right. Then he gets up and we see he is on crutches because of an accident which left him with only one leg. He tells us he has not worked since December; we ask him how he lives, and he answers, "By what my friends gives me." Then he continues, "I tried to get welfare but I did not receive it." We try to find out why, but he does not know. He tells us he wants to go down to the courthouse tomorrow to register to vote. We agree to give him a ride, and arrive the next day. We find him too sick to go and he needs a doctor; we hear more of his plight; and then promise to go to the welfare center in Cleveland, the county seat. That afternoon in Cleveland, I will never forget; first we took a group to register and waited while they tried to interpret sections of the Mississippi State Constitution, some of which are too complex for lawyers. As we walked the Negroes to the office of the Circuit Clerk, we were accosted by several of the Sheriff's Deputies and gruffly asked what we white boys were doing in the Courthouse; then we met Mrs. Lewis, the Circuit Clerk who sneered at us and asked us to leave. Then we went down town to talk to the welfare department about welfare standards and got a reception of veiled antipathy. The lady in charge said she was a native Mississippian in a very defensive manner. She would tell us nothing, she said, because of the "need to keep such matters confidential". We received even more antagonism in the other offices we entered. The whites of Cleveland are determined to keep the traditional caste society intact.

as we walked down the street we received more than our usual supply of hate stares. It was on a highway running through Ruleville, that I learned I was a son-of-a-bitch; it was in a store in Ruleville when I was told that three segregationists wanted to beat in my head; it was in Jackson when walking down a street that I ran into a friend from another project and learned that he and three others had been jumped in broad daylight in Jackson by whites and beaten with police clubs; it was in Greenwood that police were caught smashing windows of COFO workers' cars, and it is in McComb that bombings have occurred and threats are continual.

Violence is a powerful force today in Mississippi even though it has diminished since the Northern rights workers came to Mississippi bringing along the Northern Press. Everyday there are threats of white retaliation once the Northerners leave. This means action must be taken to recruit more Northern workers for the fall, and it means the need to intensify the effort to get the press into the South to discourage violence, and cover it when it occurs. Many letters must be written to this effect and much pressure must be exerted. I hope many of you will take it upon yourselves to act quickly and decisively to end this suppression here as well as entering the battle against Goldwater. Since the beginning of the summer project there have been about 11 bombings according to a research er whom I talked to in Jackson. Threats in some areas have been almost continual; but probably in most areas threats have been occasional; but you must never forget that one threat is enough to cause many restless nights. When Mrs. Hamer, leader of the movement in Ruleville, said "We are tired of being sick and tired", she meant that the threats and the worry wear a person down; believe me the Mississippi heat and mosquitoes are bad enough, but with the "fear," men are driven to continual tiredness. You may think that there is exaggeration of the violence occurring in Mississippi, but I would point out to you that between 1888 and 1959 there were 578 lynchings of Negroes, and it is important to note that this refers to recorded lynchings. In 1962 most of the leaders of the pioneering Ruleville movement had their homes shot into. Mrs. Hamer, upon registering, was beaten severely by police while she was in jail. In Ruleville I worked on a study on intimidation, at first centering around Eastland's plantation. Another worker and myself interviewed more than 25 people in Ruleville, including the white Mayor, Charles Dorough, who has gotten undue favorable press coverage in the North as a decent moderate. Dorough has been involved in numerous incidents of intimidation including a threat to the Negroes that we Northerners were planning on killing Negroes and that therefore they should not let us in their homes. On reaching Ruleville we were immediately ushered into the city hall and lectured by the police and the mayor during which time the mayor told us certain Negroes were handy with razors. I have not received one antagonistic gesture from a Negro since being in Mississippi, and I have worked in Ruleville, Drew, Indianola, Mound Bayou, Winstonville, Shaw, and have been to Cleveland, Greenwood, and Jackson. On Eastland's plantation much has occurred including murders of Negroes by Negroes, gambling, manufacturing of moonshine whiskey, and protection of violators by Eastland from the law as long as whites have not been hurt by Negroes. There is a man living on the Eastland plantation now by the name of W.C. Williams who has killed 10, and has not even seen the inside of a courtroom. Eastland protects his Negroes from the law and then proceeds to blackmail them. There are instances of blackmail involving murders where the Negro murderer was offered protection with the provision that he work on the plantation for 3 years for practically no pay and when the 3 years was up he was to be free, but on asking for his freedom to move out, was immediately turned over to the courts for the 3 year old murder. Parolees are released from Parchman

state prison in Sunflower County, a cotton plantation prison, to work on parole on the cotton plantations; such a system means virtual slavery.

Working conditions for the average Negro in Sunflower and Bolivar Counties are tough and the pay is very low. In Ruleville, busses come for the Negro day laborers about 5 in the morning and sometimes get back after dark. This means about 10 hours of chopping cotton in the fields and 2 more hours of riding the bus and waiting in line for \$3 per day. Chopping cotton, or hoeing, is the main work in the summertime, while picking cotton is the fall job. After the picking season is over some Negroes go South to Florida as migrant laborers and others remain here and draw federal commodities or welfare; but if they are unable to gain any of these benefits they starve. Welfare, as I have mentioned, is precarious and uncertain because it is administered by white Southerners. I have collected many cases of intimidation concerning welfare and the cutting off of welfare when a Negro becomes involved in Civil Rights activity. There are numerous cases of Negroes being fired for attempting to register. Teachers never, or almost never even sign the Freedom Registration Forms because they are so afraid of being fired. Teachers are in an exposed economic position; likewise others in better paying jobs are afraid to become involved in civil rights. The young leaders with courage and intelligence want to and usually migrate to the North, so that the South is deprived of her best Negro leaders.

Houses in Shaw are in the most depressed condition that I have seen anywhere in Mississippi. Ditches carrying sewage run in front of every Negro's home. These ditches are the breeding ground for the most powerful force of mosquitoes I have seen. Pupae are visible in the ditches like so many pin pricks dotting the vile water from which frequently a stench arises. When I say sewage, I mean everything that you can imagine runs in those ditches. Walking in the dark nite, especially after a rain in the unlighted streets, one occasionally steps into a ditch. Driving down the road is an exercise in maneuverability. For the road is marked by numerous holes, some of which are due to the inadequate packing by the plumbing company which laid sewage pipes some time back. Most of the houses are not connected to the pipes since a hookup costs about one hundred dollars. The mosquito spray man rarely comes around, so in our political classes two other workers and myself who now run the remainder of the Shaw Freedom School, have stressed the necessity of putting pressure on the spray man. The high school boys and some girls have also pressured the mayor on many local improvement ideas, and now we are working on pressuring the powerful men behind the mayor. Houses are almost universally without paint, are derelict, rat-infested, mouse-ridden, cockroach covered, and fly speckled. The other night Morris Rubin told me a rat made so much noise in his house that he at first believed the place had been bombed. I stay in the same house but was in Jackson that night; but last night the rat, a very clumsy one, was at it again. Cockroaches are so thick in one house that they have been found in drinking water, stew, coffee, milk, washwater, beans, tomatoes, beds, pillows, shoes in the morning, pajamas in the evening, on every table in the house, and between the pages of every book. Cats chase the cockroaches, and cockroaches are the cats main food. Mosquitoes bite you all night because the screens are always defective; consequently some people are simply covered with bites and a few have scars from numerous scratching sessions. I have seen the feet and ankles of people dotted with clotted blood marks where mosquitoes have feasted.

Shaw has one laundry which is for whites only. There are Negroes around Shaw who own small farms; perhaps a majority of the Negro farmers around this town of 2,000 own their own farms. They raise cotton and soybeans. As you know, cotton is subsidized by the U.S. Government at 8 1/2 cents higher than the world market. In the Congressional

Record in 1963 a representative from Georgia pointed out how this price support system is aiding the large cotton plantation owners to make a killing, while aiding the small farmer who needs help at an average of about \$5 per month. White plantation owners, including Eastland, raise 3-5,000 acres of cotton and hence continue to argue in favor of price supports. Logrolling continues in a Congress, which is supposed to articulate the interests in the country, but unfortunately tends to articulate the interests of those who have organizations to pressure for changes or defend the status quo in their interests. The 50,000,000 Americans found in slums and hovels are ignored by these logrollers. The Farm Bureau, which has tremendous power in the Dept. of Agriculture, is the voice of the big farmer; and studies come out of the Dept. of Agriculture showing that price supports for cotton must remain at their present high levels. Meanwhile, the possibility of truck gardens and the opportunity of developing processing plants is being ignored. We feel that information on crops which can gradually replace cotton on these small Negro farms will be invaluable in improving the economy here. There is necessity for industrialization to meet the increasing unemployment introduced by the extended use of machinery on plantations. This is also forcing Negroes into the expanding Northern slums.

The riots in New York are being used by Northerners to justify their refusal to do anything about the civil rights problem. We must realize that a long history of suppression has culminated in a vicious cycle of despair, cynicism, defeatism, and violence. Just as Northerners have watched without action while people have been murdered, so today we see a people are watching silently while these forces of suppression are erupting into violence. How long will we Americans turn our backs like the Germans under Hitler to the atrocities which are occurring? Will the loaded conscience of the prosperous and placid Northerner be reached by the plight of a long suppressed people or will these irresponsible Northerners continue to manufacture excuses to explain why things are bad in the South and the North and ever search for new scapegoats to alleviate their slumbering yet erupting consciences? In a store in Jackson this week the store owner said to one of our workers whom he mistook for a tourist, "Mississippi really isn't as bad as they say it is, is it?" The consciences of white Southerners are guilty, their lips are pursed in unhappiness. The chain bound around the soul of the Negro is held in the hand of the Southern white and he also is not free--not free to talk to SNCC workers even if he wants to for fear that he will be branded as a "nigger lover" with all the threats contingent upon that status. The identity of the Negro is wrapped up in his blackness which has long been the mark of inferiority; indeed the Negro people have been crucified on a cross of segregation and hammered by the nails of poverty. The vicious cycle set up by this system of exploitation has resulted in the horrors described above. The lack of concern by Northerners in general who find themselves drowning their emotional senses in the softness of prosperity and the placidity of respectable conformity, and the irrelevance of much of the specialized and sceptical intellectual liberal world, are the complements to the viciousness of the poor Southern white who needs to believe that someone is more lowly than he. Well meaning people can be found everywhere, but well meaning people are not enough; we must reach toward a higher community consciousness expressed through responsible political action founded on a world view--a cosmology expressing the values of importance in theory and action; thus replacing the present American practical hectic activity-ridden existence, which results in obscuring matters of significance and clouding off strong emotions of concern. The struggle is as broad as the United States--in fact as broad as the world; and there are battles to be fought everywhere. Once people begin to express themselves in concrete actions guided by communitarian purposes, the current chaotic and joyless world filled with the gadgetry of modern materialism and confused by a merry-go-

-round of passing events undistinguished from each other because of the wearing out of values, we will begin to enter a new age--the age when harmony will reign between the races. Noone is arguing that all problems will be overcome--heaven forbid--it would bore men to death--men can not stand the lack of excitement found in small utopian communities , and they are beginning to find it difficult to stand the modern world because the notion of greatness and the value of work are disappearing while new values are slowly taking shape. The Negro revolution is hopefully an expression of the attempt to change toward a better society where the old values of competition oriented toward a destructiveness of common values and human decency will be replaced by a community concern and a reorientation of work habits again to be centered around expressing a spirit of joyfulness between human beings. Conflict will always remain--but there are many forms of conflict. Let us hope that lynchings will be replaced by the aggressive consciousness of a liberated black and white people who are no longer chained by the forces of segregation and destructiveness characteristic of business work values which result in a production consciousness far too devoid of human concern. An age of greatness must be an age of belief as Kierkegaard has written, because you can not act greatly without a strong belief that some things are supremely worth doing; the age of sceptical reflection--the age with the worthy excuse for remaining in bed--must be replaced by an age of passionate belief--the age of social concern where men turn from their own specialities and concentrate their spiritual energies on the matters of deep concern found in the hearts and souls of men.

I would like to hear from anyone who wishes to write; any additions, suggestions , criticisms, or comments are welcome.

Sincerely,

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