

REPORT ON TRIP TO COLUMBUS 7/8 - 7/9/64

Peter Marcuse and Donald Elliott went to Columbus after a short stop at Canton on the morning of July 8.

When we first arrived in town, and before contacting any of the COFO workers we called and visited George Schwitzer, Esq a practising local attorney whose family has known Bill Biggs well, and who had met Mel Wolff. He told us that most of the town was law abiding and tended to be reasonable, but that there was a group that was strongly opposed to what the COFO people were doing. He suggested that the local judge was a fair and decent man, but that the City and County Prosecutor by the name of Joe Sans would be very difficult to deal with. He said that the Mayor was trying to keep things on an even keel, but was subject to great pressure.

We then went out to the COFO headquarters in a house in relatively good repair in the Negro section of town at 1212 North 17th Street. We talked with Dave Lawrence (f) who was the communications and security man and in charge while Don Miller was temporarily away, and with one of the ministers who is helping the group. They told us that 3 workers had been arrested just an hour or so earlier and that the COFO people had not been able to find out what the charges were, although the arrests had come while the workers were canvassing as part of the voter registration drive. We all agreed that if possible we would try and maintain the greatest peace possible between the city and the COFO operation and compromise any legitimate traffic problems etc.

We then went to the City Hall and visited with the Mayor, William J. Propst for about 40 minutes. Although on the surface friendly, he was not the least bit interested in exploring any ways of limiting friction between the local community and the COFO operation. He told us that the application that the COFO people had made for a permit to give out literature had been turned down without dissent by the City Council and he gave us a copy of the letter of refusal. He refused to tell us, as he had earlier refused to tell the COFO people what criteria were applied, saying simply that each councilman had a vote and that none of them had to account for how he exercised it.

We then visited Joe Sans the city and County Prosecutor. His reception was at the best frigid, and after 30 seconds or so of pleasantries he told us that he was sure we all represented insurance companies and when you did you explored the possibility of settlement, but that in this case there would be no settlement. 'This is war gentlemen' he said. We left.

We then decided that the only course was to take all the legal steps at our command. While in the Mayor's office, and at our urging he had called the police department to inquire what charge there was against the 3 arrested that afternoon. The Policechief came in while we were there and said that they were charged with distributing leaflets without a permit.

We went to a local stationery store and bought some paper and carbon paper and tried to rent a typewriter. The clerk told us he didn't have authority to approve our credit and made us wait for the manager who arrived about 5:30. The manager, a young fellow, was friendly and we had a long chat with him. He told us that he just wanted to stay out of any trouble surrounding this civil rights thing, and that as a businessman who dealt with the public he could not do anything else. He said he didn't see any reason why he couldn't rent us a typewriter, but that he didn't sell the OSFO people any #1 Mimeo paper because it had a watermark on it which only he sold. He said that if his competitor in town found this watermark on a OSFO leaflet, he would be finished. Finally after some trouble we got the typewriter.

We had supper with the OSFO people in the freedom house and interviewed those who were available. That evening they received a bomb threat and so they got very little sleep. We spent the better part of the night (until 5:30) preparing the petition for removal which is in the file. We worked with a lawyer, George Hine Baybin who had come to Columbus some days before from the Memphis LDC office and who is admitted in the Northern District of Miss. He had tried to appear for Bruce Glushakow in the traffic cases, but had been objected to by two local attorneys, including the prosecutor.

On July 9, we finished up the removal papers, while George took the money which had been wired in and bailed out our clients. They two white fellows had been kept in a cell by themselves and had not been mistreated at all while in jail. In fact one of the jail personnel had gone and gotten them something to eat, with their money, because nothing was served in the jail after they were picked up until the next morning.

We then drove the Aberdeen and filed the removal petition without any trouble, and in fact the clerk was very pleasant and showed us the other two petitions that had been filed so far in that Court.

On the way home we stopped by the Harmony community in Carthage and met Marv Swaiterman and Al Learner and came on home to Jackson

Don Elliot