

by Wallace Roberts

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About noon on Tuesday, August 4, we called the Chief of Police in Cleveland and told him we were going to distribute leaflets despite the fact that we had previously been denied a permit. Twelve of us, five summer volunteers and seven local high school students, then went to the courthouse, broke into three groups and started distributing the material which urged people to register with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In each case the police were very methodical in making the arrests. They waited until each one of us actually handed a leaflet to someone and then arrested him, getting the name of the person to whom we had handed the leaflet so they could be witnesses against us.

I was in the third group, and, before we were arrested we were able to hand out quite a few of the pamphlets because the police were busy carting the others off to the station. Finally, two officers drove ~~us~~ past us and stopped in an empty parking space about 50 feet down the street. They got out and stood, just watching us. We walked past them and met two Negro ladies to whom we gave leaflets. I heard a "Hey, Boy," and knew it was meant ~~us~~ for me, but I ~~went~~ went on because that phrase is a derogatory one used in the South to Negro men. He then yelled, "Hey, you in the blue shirt," and I turned around. "You're under arrest," he said, "for distributing literature without a permit."

He motioned us into the police car and we were driven to the station where we found the other waiting. The desk sergeant then booked us and we were then told to go upstairs to our cells. Stokley Carmichael, who is the COFO project director for the Second Congressional District and who had only been watching, not handing out leaflets, asked Sheriff Capps the charge on which he was being

held. "Capps just growled, "Get on up there." Evidently the police knew who he was and ~~had~~ arrested him just to harass civil rights activity.

We were segregated according to color and sex and then put into cells. As the jailer opened the first cell for the Negro girls we began singing a Freedom Song, and we kept on singing despite the threats of the Deputy Sheriff that he was going to ~~give~~ slap us with another charge (disturbing his peace?). While we were waiting for the jailer to open our cell, a young man in an adjoining cell yelled, "Put 'em in here. I wanna beat the _____ out of 'em." We had heard of a number of stories in which white prisoners had beaten white civil rights workers, but the jailer fortunately put us into an empty six-man cell.

Compared to some of the Mississippi jails we have heard of ours was the Statler-Hilton. We had clean mattresses, clean canvas sheet, a shower, sink, toilet, table and benches. The only thing wrong with it was the door which seemed to baffle the various jailers and officers who came to get us out for one reason or another. We finally had to show them how to open it.

When the door closed we ~~we~~ immediately took out a deck of cards and began playing three-handed bridge. We had been told at orientation that sometimes the police do not take possessions away and that cards and paperback books were invaluable in jail and good things to carry when one expected arrest. The game was broken up by the jailer who told us we had to go down to get fingerprinted and photographed. The photos were candid; we did not have to pose with numbers hanging from our necks. But the fingerprints were on

standard FBI cards. As we were leaving Sheriff Capps asked me "Well, Wallace, are you happy now that you've forced this?" I wanted to say "I won't be happy, Capps, until there's a black man wearing that badge of yours," but thought it might be safer just to keep my mouth shut. Mississippi county sheriffs are extremely powerful and wealthy men; not only are they the chief law enforcement officers in each county, they are also the county tax collectors and get paid on a commission basis. Liquor, for instance, is illegal in Mississippi but it's sold openly in the stores and the sheriff makes and collects the taxes on it. Consequently, in the few stores owned by Negroes, beer, for instance costs \$2.40 a six-pack, and even white store owners have to charge \$1.80. Some of the county sheriffs make over \$100,000 a year.

Back in the cell we resumed the bridge game. About 8 PM we were getting rather hungry when the jailer came by and told us the FBI wanted to ~~x talk~~ talk with us. We couldn't have cared less about them at the moment, and asked the jailer about supper. He said it had been served while we were being fingerprinted, but, if we had the money, he would order us some hamburgers from a cafe. We ordered and then one of my cellmates went to talk with the FBI. An hour later, after we had eaten, my other cellmate has his interview.

When he came back he said they would see me in the morning, which was fortunate because by that time the heat and lack of circulation in the cell (there was an open window but no breeze or fan) had begun to wear on us, so we tried to go to sleep.

But it was literally too hot to sleep. The last time I looked at my watch it was 2 AM, and we had shut the light off at 10. Once, when I sat up, sweat poured off my face in a steady stream. After waking up constantly during the night, we finally got up about 6 AM. Breakfast was served at 7 by a Negro waiter in black and white striped pants. It consisted of a cold fried egg, three biscuits, a piece of fried bologna, and a cup of extremely strong coffee. We ate it all though, assuming we would not eat again until four in the afternoon.

After breakfast we were still so hot and tired all we could do was to go back to bed. One of my cellmates tried the shower and he reported ~~xxx~~ through various yelps that it was refreshingly cold. I was just about to take one too when the jailer came by and said the FBI wanted to see me. I got dressed and went down to see them.

I cooperated fully and answered all their questions, most of which had nothing to do with our arrests. They seemed much more concerned with my motives for coming to Mississippi and my political beliefs. Just as the questioning was ending, the Cleveland city attorney came in and told me that they had finished their investigation and had decided to release us. I asked if he meant all of us because we summer volunteers had agreed not to use our personal bail money until enough had been raised to release all the local kids who had been arrested with us. He assured me that we were all being released.

I left and found the others outside. We had to wait for another half hour while the FBI talked with a volunteer about an officer

rest is missing