

July 5, 1965

Dear Phil:

I'm enclosing a clipping from the Constitution of yesterday. I think the NAACP "private" statement is priceless. Have you heard that Roy Wilkins is working on a book on communists in the civil rights movement.

Dear Friends:

The long hot summer that everyone talks about is finally upon us in S.W.Ga - violence has started to break out sporadically with every indication of it getting to be a big problem in the next few weeks. There is a very beautiful State Park in Cordele which has always been white only. At the beginning of the season they took down all the signs and Negroes have been using the park quite frequently. A guy from Americus brought his kids down a couple of weeks ago and when they left the Park a couple of young Crackers shot at them, wounding one of his children in the leg. Last week the Movement in Cordele planned a picnic in the park. It almost developed into a riot - the only thing that stopped it was the fact that they had lots of little children along and people were afraid that they'd get hurt. The Crackers started smashing windows of Negroes cars, took a camera away from one of the white volunteers and smashed it, and were firing pistols in the air. The Sheriff had been told that people were going to go out and use the park but he said that he couldn't offer any protection because he was too busy. Rumor has it that the ringleader of the mob is the son of his deputy. Nobody got hurt, but that was a miracle. The only person who seemed to exercise any authority in the whole thing was one of the Park guards who tried to stop the whites and finally came over to the Negroes and begged them to leave because he couldn't protect them. There were highway Patrol out there but they left just before the trouble started. The Justice Department was called and they came up with the same old crap - "there's nothing we can do" - and when the crackers hear that it just gives them license. The Negroes in Cordele are very very hot about all of this. They plan to go back and have another picnic today - and it should be a mess because all the crackers will be out there and drunk. No children are being taken along. The Movement had long arguments about non-violence but the official position now seems to be "you do whatever you think is right". Everyone knows the whites will be armed. One hardware store sold 25 pistols in one day. The Sheriff is really shook. He keeps insisting he doesn't have enough men to patrol the park. The highway patrol claims they don't have authority to go into the Park - tho they have no trouble arresting people where they lack authority in ~~any~~ other situations (and the Governor can order them anywhere in the state when there is the threat of disorder - but the Gov. "can't be reached"). There was supposed to be a meeting with the Park Commissioner from Atlanta and the police but that never came off.

I went down to Cordele on Saturday as they are having some trouble with public accommodations compliance. One restaurant owner will serve a Negroes ("law says I gotta serve the niggers but I don't gotta serve no god damn white whore") but not integrated groups. They went in the morning where she made that announcement, but when they came back in at night she had obviously spoken with her lawyer and now she told the whites that they were "nasty", "improperly dressed", etc. Drew Days, one of the law students will start working down there tomorrow so this will be one of the first things he will attend to - unless the Cordele picnic results in mass arrests and then the accommodations stuff has to wait.

But Baker County is where its really happening. Baker is the worst county in all of Georgia and is as bad as anything in Mississippi. It is a completely plantation county - absolutely no industry, with a population

owned - the Coca Cold family owns a huge plantation which they use as a private bird hunting preserve (it includes a cemetery for bird dogs) and also Eastern money controls large parts of the county. It is a completely feudal domain run by L. Warren Johnson, the Sheriff, and his two deputies (one a brother and the other a cousin). It is a notorious speed trap and even whites from other counties are hauled in and made to pay exorbitant fines on spurious traffic charges. But change has come to Baker County. I guess the last straw was the couple who were picked up by one of the deputies and told to fornicate in his presence or he'd put them in jail. People started getting together to talk about it, SNCC came into the county, and a Movement has been built. The three SNCC people in the county are Charles Sherrod, Fred Anderson (a native of Hattiesburg, Miss) and Bobbie Lee Jones from Americus. They have had mass meetings almost every night - generally numbering over 200 people. At first the crackers were so shook by what was happening that they just fell over, but now the resistance is starting to build and it's a matter of time before real violence starts down there. The Sheriff is in a kind of bind because he is really scared of another suit in Federal Court. He was the defendant in Ware v. Johnson (when he tried to murder Charlie Ware by shooting him through the neck three times) and tho he didn't get a verdict against him it was a very expensive and very painful experience. He was overheard telling someone that "when I had my court case no one would help me and I had to pay for it all myself. Now that they're here there's nothing I can do about it." He also took all the signs requiring segregation down from the court house. But they are as sophisticated as Albany with the formerly "white men only" toilet now marked "employees only" (the toilet for Negro men was outside and "only fit for rats and roaches" as someone said). They also have been going around to the gas stations in town to use the rest rooms (Newton Ga is so small that there is only one tiny cafe and that locks its doors as soon as a Negro approaches and goes out of business for the day). They went to one gas station rest room and a couple of people went around and used the white men's room. The manager came out, threw up his hands, said something about only a fool will argue with the law, and took down the signs. One station keeps its toilets locked and claims the white men's toilet is out of order but at a couple of others Negroes who have asked for the key have gotten it. Baker is a very strange county - there is a lot of dissention among the whites - it is really like two divided white communities - and so far they haven't gotten together about their new problem which they face together. The guy who ran for Sheriff against Johnson the last time only lost by a few votes. The Negro vote was split because the strong people voted against Johnson but he has a couple of fairly well off farmers who are terrible Toms in his pocket (one guy has the moonshine concession and Johnson protects him). Baker has a fairly large Negro vote. What happened was that SNCC was going to go into Baker in '63. One of the Justice Dept. people, a guy named Heilbrunn, instead came in and worked a deal with Johnson and the local structure. He told them that if they registered an arbitrary number of Negroes, I think it was about 400, then the JD wouldn't bring a suit and also SNCC could be convinced to stay out. So that's what happened. Most people don't even know they are on the books - it certainly wasn't any kind of meaningful educational experience or something they worked and fought for - so now they are just herded down to the polls by the Uncle Toms to vote for Sheriff Johnson. But as the Negro community begins to see its strength these things will change. The ~~whiss~~ wife of the guy who ran for Sheriff brought a cake to the house where the SNCC guys are staying the ~~star~~ other day - so as long as some whites hate the sheriff enough the violence might be kept down. Many of the Negroes who come to the mass meetings are still very



frightened. Like they will sing and shout encouragement but when it comes to forming a committee to go down town and protest to the Sheriff or ask some questions of the power structure, suddenly everyone is busy. But a few really brave people have been shaming people into standing up for what is right. At one meeting they wanted to get a committee to go to the Court House and get the list of jurors for the next term to see how many Negroes had been called. They ~~was~~ were having trouble getting volunteers and one g old farmer from way out in the County ~~jump~~ jumped up and said, "I dont need no committee to come with me to get a little old piece of paper" and went down by himself. He walked up to the Clerk and told him what he wanted. The Clerk was so shook he took the list, photostated it for him, didn't charge him for it. It was a great experience for this guy who for the first time in his life didnt approach one of the city officials with his cap in his hand, and when he tells the story at amass meeting it gives other people their balls back too.

There are several SCOPE projects set up in South Georgia. SCOPE is Martin L. King's SCLC summer program modeled on the COFO summer project of '64. The one in Albany has turned out very well despite alot of misgivings people had. There are 2 nuns and 6 white girls running a Freedom School - but its a damn good Freedom School. Roy did an excellent job of imbuing everyone with the SNCC philosophy and things are really happening over there. The best part is that nuns who go down town andhs hassle white merchants with Irish names for donated equipment. But in some of the other towns it isnt goigg so well. The agreement with SCLC was that where they put ~~per~~ people in a town where there was an established SNCC project the people would work under SNCC direction - and this is what has happened in Albany. But in Ocilla it is a real mess. They have two white girls and three white guys, all from Monterey area of California. Two of the guys arent had but are very fed up with the whole mess and just sit around the house drinking beer. One of the girls is excellent and goes off by herself just going door to door talking with people. But the guy who is in charge of the project is a kind of white woman protector - gets very intimidated when Negro guys start hanging around either of the chicks (one is his girl frined) and has had violent arguments with Randy about what they want to do there. They do really moronic stuff like announced to the sheriff that they arent going to do anything to get them arrested and want to make sure the sheriff understands that they are a group seáparate and aprt from SNCC, etc. The easy thing to do would be just to put them on a bus for California and since that is the agreement with SCLC it could be done very quickly, but Randy insists on handling it his own way, which is to isolate this guy and his girlfriend from the community and break him. Which means that most of the energy being expended in that town right now is the hassle between this imbecilic white kid and Randy. The white guy fancies himself something of a "Negro leader" - loves to make long eloquent speeches at mass meetings, parades around in cowboy boots, etc. They are given funds to hire local staff but he doesnt even know the names of the people he has hired. They have an office and a house but they stay in the house most of the day playing records and drinking beer - which I must admit is a lot of fun forthe summer but sure as hell doesnt justify the outlay of expenses~~er~~ nor all the friction the bastard is causing.

The other day the kids from the Freedom School in Albany wanted to go swimming. There is a plantation on the border between Dougherty and Baker counties and Roy knows one of the Negro guys who works on the plantation so he gave them permission to come on it and ~~use~~ swim in a pond that's on the land. So they kook about a dozen~~ks~~ ~~at~~ kids down

also Roy's girlfriend, and a white girl who is teaching in the Freedom School. They were just about to go into the water when a pickup truck came racing across the field, screeched to a stop, and two white guys jumped out with rifles. First they just saw Roy and asked him what the hell he was doing on the plantation. He apologized and said something about thinking it would be o.k. to do some swimming, but just then they saw the white chick. And they shit. One cracker said to her, who are you. And she just sat there with her mouth going up and down but no sounds coming out. Everyone was just kind of speechless and Roy took advantage of the ~~sta~~ situation to push everyone into the car and drive off. They had planned to go down there without Roy but its a damn luck thing he went along.

Dennis