

October 17, 1965

Dear Phil:

Reports here on the VDC very confused. From what Johnnie Reb Radio says there were a hell of a lot of people - I heard 7500 and then 10,000 on two different broadcasts - but that they only got to the Oakland City line, and were turned around by a whole lot of cops and went back to Berkeley.

Last night we went over to Slater's house. There was a SCEP convention at Koinonia for a few days and the Bradens, along with Ella Baker (SNCC's adult advisor) came by to see him. I learned a very interesting thing about Moses and it might partially explain his "organizing the ghetto around Vietnam" nonsense. He told Ella at one point that he was very impressed with the SDS Easter March on Washington and saw these large numbers of college students as natural allies to the Movement - as opposed to "Church and Labor" bullshit of the liberals. He also recognized that most of them have a very romanticized view of the South and all want to come and work there - and there isn't enough room for them. So he was looking for a way to get them really involved in their own communities doing work similar to that being done in the South. So even though "organizing the ghetto around Vietnam" is idiotic bullshit - what is the result. Some people who started to do this now see it is bullshit, but also are INTO the ghetto and able to see what the real problems there are and are staying on to work in these areas - and incidentally to talk about Viet Nam (your friends in Calif come to mind). So maybe Moses knows what he is doing. Meanwhile he is off to Africa either to attend the Bandung Conference or to write a book for Random House or do both, depending on who you hear the information from. His wife Donna is very interested in the idea of an Africa Bureau and is now doing a lot of work on that.

Here we just go on and on... Do you remember the case of John Wesley Thomas in ~~the~~ Moultrie back in about Feb or March. He was charged with Arson which grew out of the demonstrations in that town. Two kids charged with him made it to California and Gov Brown wouldn't extradite them. Well, the poor bastard has sat in jail since the beginning of March as he couldn't raise the bond - since he wasn't "officially with the Movement" but really a pool hall cat who was on the fringes, the "good folks" didn't trust him to go on his bond as they felt he would have just left town. We went down to try the case last week and they acquitted ~~in~~ him (they didn't try him for two terms in a row so they had to acquit based on our Motion). It was a great feeling because we kept telling him if he just sat tight he would go free, but if he listened to them and took a plea he would wind up doing ~~in~~ ten years on the chain gang. He's on his way to California.

Speaking of California, Randy is back in town but really dug Pacific Grove and is planning on going back there around Christmas, maybe for good this time.

John W. Thomas' case is interesting as it points up something very strange here. We have had dozens of cases, especially in the more remote and rural counties, where they have either nolle prosequed or just never called the case for trial once CB became involved in it. It's kind of a combination of not wanting to change their jury system and knowing that it would go up on appeal - which costs these little poor ass counties more than they can afford - and also having to face "that arrogant nigger" is more than many ~~persons~~ Solicitors and judges can stand - especially when there are white women witnesses who are subjected to his cross-examination. We went up to McRae, Ga (105 miles away) on the case of a young guy who slugged a white doctor who had started to beat him and was charged with assault with intent to murder. We checked out the jury system which is absurd, dividing the jurors in the jury book into "White Traverse Jurors" "White Grand Jurors" and "Colored" - so we would definitely get a reversal on appeal. But CB says he doubts strongly whether they will try the case. He has had 4 cases up there since 1960 and they have never called any of them to trial. One involved a Negro guy who shot a City Marshall and took a couple of shots at the Sheriff - so you can see just how painful CB's presence must be to these crackers.

Starting Oct. 25 we will be in Federal Court all week. We have an injunction coming on to be heard against the Sheriff of Baker County (more about Baker County later in the letter) and also the Midtown Bowling Alley case finally will be heard/

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The strangest acquittal we had happened a few days ago in Americus. About 50 kids were arrested for pick boycotting the Negro school, charged with disturbing a school session. About 40 were juveniles and let go in a couple of days, but the other 10 were held in jail for a week. We finally scheduled a commitment hearing with Southwell, the JP. This bastard hates CB with a passion - we sued him in the Americus election case and he is sitting only in an appointive capacity, but not as a result of the election and the case is still pending. The Negro principal testified at the commitment hearing that there was no noise and that they were on school property - but that he just wanted them away from near the campus as it was distracting for the kids in school. Then the Chief who hadn't been in the room came in to testify. He said he was standing next to the principal all during this - and that the kids were making a tremendous amount of noise and some of them were on the school property. I guess Southwell felt it would be a little too embarrassing for the Chief when CB got him up on the stand and started to cross-examine him with the Principal's testimony, so he dismissed all the cases. Of course the reason for the boycott was that SCLC wanted support for their little adventure in Crawfordsville so told the local SCLC staffers to march the kids out of school here - it was very unsuccessful because the kids had no idea why they were being pulled out of school and had no real gripes re the Americus school situation (I mean no gripes out of the ordinary). Then those SCLC bastards had a change of plans in Crawfordsville and there are a whole lot of political deals being made there. They now were no longer interested in closing the Americus schools in support, but wanted to stop the ~~xx~~ demonstrations completely. So the kids in jail in Americus were just a burden to them. Therefore, before the commitment hearing, word came down from Atinata to pull out the two SCLC staffers in jail, but not to bond out the 8 local kids. Fuck 'em, it's too much money. CB had a damn fit when he heard this. Judge Ford who is no bargain, but a damn sight better than that little swine Ben Van Clarke, raised hell with Dr. King ~~xx~~ and on the day we got them out of jail it had been agreed to bond out everyone including the local kids. SCLC is about to pull out of Americus. Meanwhile, SCLC is falling apart. Several people, the better ones, are leaving. Most of it is caused by Hosea Williams who has grown into a virtual dictator with his own little staff of hoods from the Savannah ghetto - and with crowds chanting "Hosea is our Leader" led by these punk cheerleaders. Dr. King is supposedly afraid of Hosea (maybe he knows too much) and isn't standing up to him. Rumor has it that perhaps in the next couple of years Hosea will try to depose him.

Meanwhile, all hell breaks loose in Baker County. On Oct 5th about 20 crackers came out to Mrs. Gracie Miller and started to burn railroad ties and shoot off guns. She came out on the porch with a shotgun and her daughter with a pistol, while the younger daughter was calling neighbors across the county. A couple of dozen Movement men showed up armed to the teeth and the crackers ran. But the Sheriff was furious that they were driven off and a couple of days later arrested Walter Miller's son (Walter is Gracie's brother-in-law and was one of the first people out there) on a fake speeding charge. When Walter went to bond his son out the sheriff attacked him with a cane and beat him badly.

One funny bit - the case in McRae of the guy who beat up the doctor is State v Robert Smith, Jr. When we were up there we talked to his father who is a real old, very poor tenant farmer, and extremely religious. CB and I both have bad colds and are kind of exhausted so he paid Randy to drive us up there. After we talked to the father a while and assured him that his son wouldn't be convicted he said, "I'll all came just right - just like I prayed for - God, the father, and the son". Randy, being the youngest must be the son, and since I don't look like his daddy, I guess I'm God.

Dennis